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Expanding and Improving Part-time
Higher Education

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Executive Summary

This report presents findings from research undertaken for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to explore whether part-time undergraduate study in England can be expanded as an alternative for young students (those aged 22 and under) to the full-time three- to four-year model of first degree undergraduate participation, and to better understand how undergraduate part-time students of all ages can be encouraged and supported with their studies.

The research involved a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches including advice and guidance from a panel of experts, a critical review of recent research literature, statistical analyses of national student (and graduate) data, surveys of young potential higher education (HE) students, and 18 in-depth case studies with institutions providing part-time undergraduate HE. The case studies involved discussions with staff, current students, local employers and advisers in local schools and colleges. The case study institutions represented a spread of geography, mission group, tradition of part-time delivery and size, and included institutions in the further education (FE) and private sectors.

The report draws together evidence captured from across these methodological strands to build a picture of the provision or supply of part-time HE and of the issues relating to the demand for part-time study set within a changing economic and policy context. It then considers the feasibility of expanding part-time provision and models of encouraging and supporting part-time study, and the policy implications for part-time study.

Key findings - supply

- Defining part-time is not straightforward; there is no single definition and there is a move in the HE sector towards using the term 'flexible provision'.
- One-third of undergraduates study part-time but they are not evenly spread across the HE sector, and the Open University (OU) has a large impact on the shape of provision. Not all part-time undergraduates are in the HE sector.
- Just as part-time students are heterogeneous, so too are providers, with large-scale providers, specialist providers, small-scale providers and limited providers.
- Institutions have differing orientations to the part-time market and there are a number of drivers that interact to explain an institution's engagement with the part-time market, including history and tradition, mission, sense of local and social responsibility and need to differentiate in a highly competitive market.
- The environment may be such that institutions see no reason to change their current orientation to the provision of part-time HE since demand is already high and institutions may already easily fill their places.

- There is no single model of part-time delivery. Instead there is a spectrum of provision which operates between two poles or key models: integrated or infill provision and free-standing provision or bespoke part-time delivery.
- Part-time delivery does not always take place on campus; it can involve delivery via FE partners or virtual delivery online (which is less common).
- Employer-led part-time provision is different to other part-time provision. Although almost exclusively part-time, it tends to entail 'closed' courses developed for specific employers or sectors, which are low-intensity module-based courses resulting in a university certificate (at sub-degree level) and university credits. This employer-led provision is valued by institutions but the demand for it is difficult to predict.
- The costs of part-time provision are unclear and there is a sense that part-time provision is (per student) more expensive, but perceptions of costs vary considerably between institutions with a history of part-time provision and those without such a history.
- Institutions are ambivalent about the (highly segmented) part-time market. Looking forward, some institutions are optimistic about being able to sustain or expand their current provision while others are pessimistic and identify falling demand driven by the changing policy and economic context.
- Institutions may be reluctant to extend or develop part-time provision due to concerns around the costs of adapting services and infrastructure, lower returns from part-time provision compared with full-time, challenges in changing staff contracts, and perceived risks to quality and reputation.
- Some institutions may see no reason to change their current orientation to part-time provision as demand for HE is high and most institutions can easily fill their places and are over-subscribed, although institutions are unsure of the potential effect of the HE policy changes on demand.

Key findings - demand

- Part-time students have a different profile to full-time students. They are in the main, older, more likely to be female, and less diverse than full-time students but are more likely to already have HE experience. They also tend to have other commitments, particularly careers (rather than jobs) and family responsibilities.
- The vast majority of part-time students study at other undergraduate level rather than first degree programmes and so have a different pattern of study to full-time students. Most have no set programme length, reflecting the flexible nature of part-time study. Key areas of study for part-time students are subjects allied to health (mostly nursing and social work), education, business and administrative studies, and social studies. Few study creative arts and design.

- Employers value part-time study as a good model to develop work-readiness in graduates and in providing existing employees with the skills and knowledge that can improve productivity and efficiency. However, employers may not be willing to fund it, and support for part-time study may not be accessible to all employees.
- Employers want (and get) a different model of part-time HE. They want flexible tailored programmes, delivered in the workplace or outside of normal working hours, that do not necessarily lead to a recognised qualification. They want programmes developed quickly that will deliver work-relevant skills and be delivered by credible professionals with industry experience and understanding.
- Part-time study is not felt to be for younger individuals and indeed there are relatively few young part-time students. In 2009/10 there were just under 75,000 young part-time students (those aged between 18 and 22). They make up only 14 per cent of the part-time undergraduate cohort registered with HEIs. Only seven per cent of young people on undergraduate courses are studying part-time. Young part-time students may have different requirements from HE to mature part-time students.
- Young part-time undergraduates have a similar profile to young full-time students. However, there are indications that young part-time students are more likely to come from a widening participation background, specifically from a low participation neighbourhood, compared with young full-time students.
- Marketing to potential part-time students, particularly young students, is challenging. Generally the messages provided about part-time study are patchy and inconsistent, provided by HE institutions rather than advisers in schools, colleges and other learning environments, and are too little too late.
- The part-time option is therefore largely hidden (or ignored) for young potential HE students. Young people may think they are aware of all their options for HE, including part-time study, but further probing reveals limited real awareness of part-time study and erroneous notions of what it entails.
- Part-time study is perceived to bring a range of benefits most commonly employment related. It is felt to offer flexibility to tailor the learning experience while building or at least maintaining employability, allowing individuals to keep a good (career) job.
- Although young people can see advantages in studying part-time, they do not tend to see it as appropriate for them at their stage in life. They are unconvinced that employers view part-time study positively and feel it could delay or damage career entry. They feel part-time study takes too long and provides a lesser experience than full-time study.
- Full-time study is the accepted and dominant model of HE participation. It is felt to offer the best option for young people, giving them a unique life experience (which they value) and offering them a headstart in their careers.

- Part-time study is not seen as a way to manage the costs of study. Instead it is viewed as changing the balance between study and work, and this may be a step too far for young students. Young students want to study full-time and may work part-time but they do not want to work full-time and study part-time.
- Only three per cent of young potential HE students planned to study part-time but more could be encouraged to consider it as an option. One in five (21 per cent) of young people surveyed might consider studying part-time rather than full-time at some point in the near future, and 78 per cent would consider studying part-time if it could deliver certain benefits. Feedback suggests that if they were made more aware of this option, particularly in the current economic climate (and with the planned changes to HE finances), they may become more interested.
- Promoting the employability of part-time study and making part-time study look like full-time study (as young students want something that is not too dissimilar to the full-time programme) might encourage greater take up among young students. Other factors that could encourage young people would be if part-time study was a cheaper option, if it were offered in subjects they were interested in, or if they were sponsored by an employer.
- Part-time students are largely satisfied with their HE experience, and appear to be more satisfied than full-time students. However, they appear less successful in their studies in terms of course completion or degree classification achieved, and these performance measures can affect institutions' willingness to engage with the part-time market (fearing reputational risk). A range of factors drive study outcomes, suggesting that these may not be the most appropriate measures to monitor and benchmark part-time student success. Part-time students, including young students, do achieve more favourable labour market outcomes at least in the first few months after graduating. This is contrary to the perceptions of potential HE students. However, there is no evidence that points to the sustainability of these better outcomes.
- Support for part-time students is improving. However, institutions could do more, not least to ensure that overall student support rather than that at a departmental level is appropriate and accessible to part-time students as well as those studying full-time.
- Part-time students have different support needs compared with full-time students. They need:
 - flexible learning delivery and so also flexible assessment
 - online support as they are less likely to be on campus
 - consistency and clear communication in order to fit study around their other commitments
 - educational guidance to build their study programmes

- peer support – a group of individuals to share their experiences with.

Conclusions

Influencing the scale and nature of part-time provision is challenging:

- There is a complex pattern of provision of part-time undergraduate HE. This means any intervention to influence the number of part-time students (however defined), or the way in which they study, needs to be carefully thought through to ensure it has the effect that is intended.
- There are over 600,000 part-time undergraduate HE students in the UK. Most are studying in higher education institutions (HEIs) other than the OU and nearly all of the rest attend the OU. The numbers in FE or private providers can be difficult to estimate¹ due to the different data collection arrangements but are probably relatively small. However, these two groups probably have most potential for expansion.
- Students and potential students interested in studying HE part-time can be segmented into four groups, in relation to why they want to study and the relationship between study and their career: *career enhancers, who are the largest group; career changers; non-career learners and career entrants*. Different groups require different approaches to increase their demand for part-time HE. To significantly increase part-time study across all groups will require a highly nuanced policy approach.
- Current provision is unevenly distributed. Providing more part-time HE opportunities in areas where provision is currently scarce could increase the number of part-time students and the overall size of the student population. However, it will need a big shift in strategy and approach for many more HEIs to become significant providers of part-time provision.
- The way HEIs organise part-time study varies, not just between institutions but also within institutions, along a spectrum with integrated provision at one end and bespoke provision at the other. It is difficult to define the form of part-time study. Hard and fast definitions could have the potentially unintended effect of restricting the flexibility of provision – one of the advantages that students identify with the part-time model.

A range of factors affect both demand for and supply of part-time provision:

- Factors mostly affecting the demand for part-time higher education include:

¹ Estimating the numbers of HE students in FE colleges is difficult due to the two different data recording systems in use. These students are covered in both HESA data and ILR data depending on the funding arrangements. Private provider data is very scarce. See Sections 2.2, 2.4 and 2.5

- the economic climate and the subdued labour market, which on balance may suppress demand by making it harder for people to earn and deter employers from sponsoring HE-level training
- financial support to part-time students, which could increase demand by helping them financially and have an additional effect of legitimising it as a form of study
- fee levels, which could increase demand if cheaper fees for part-time study make it more attractive than full-time
- occupational regulation – the more that regular skills and knowledge updating and continuous professional development is required, the greater the demand is likely to be for part-time HE among career enhancers. Occupational regulation is most likely to focus demand on certificated courses through which individuals can demonstrate that they have the required knowledge and skills
- negative attitudes to part-time study among young people, which mean that to increase interest in part-time study among most young people will require a significant shift in attitudes. This could be brought about with a significant investment in career education and advice targeted at young people but also aimed at teachers and parents.
- Factors affecting supply include:
 - control limits – the more restrictive the limits on full-time places (and not part-time places) the more likely that HEIs will develop part-time provision as an alternative
 - market regulation – expanding the number of institutions that can award degrees could increase the overall number of students in some areas, by allowing people who would not otherwise study to do so part-time, but may have little effect in other areas where one form of provision (in HEIs) is substituted for another (in FE colleges)
 - availability of higher vocational qualifications – such as through higher-level apprenticeships, often with FE providers. An expansion of this route could lead to greater numbers of younger people studying for higher-level qualifications while in work
 - state subsidies for part-time provision, which highlight the extent to which practice can be changed by targeted funding.

Institutions can be constrained in expanding their part-time provision:

- There are numerous factors or barriers affecting institutions' orientation to the part-time market and their reactions (or ability to react) to market and policy changes. These include:

- their history and tradition
 - their mission
 - strong demand for full-time study
 - the perceived costs of part-time provision
 - part-time completion and success rates.
- As part-time students tend to have lower completion and achievement rates than full-time students, some HEIs were concerned that increasing the former would deleteriously affect their performance data (and so their reputation), which is based on full-time provision.
 - The net effect of all these largely institutional barriers is that for many HEIs the perceived risks of increasing the number of part-time students outweigh the potential benefits. This risk/reward ratio needs to change before many HEIs are to make significantly more part-time provision available.

Good practice in supporting part-time students

Good practice varies by type of part-time study, but the evidence from our case studies suggests some or all of the following:

- Strategic commitment within the HEI – to ensure that part-time study is seen as a legitimate study pathway by the HEI and not considered as a residual or deficit form of learning.
- Flexible forms of delivery, including:
 - length of course – so students can build up their own programme
 - speed of progression through the course – so they can accelerate or decelerate
 - forms of assessment
 - entry points – so part-time students do not have to start at a particular point in the year that is designed to fit in with school leaving dates
 - exit points – so a part-timer can leave, albeit temporarily, before fully completing a course but with some credits when they feel they have achieved their learning aims or their circumstances change
 - onward progression opportunities – so they know they can move on if they want to.

- Flexible opening times for facilities such as the library, cafes, food shops, and IT services, to allow part-time students access out of 'normal hours'.
- Systems to track heterogeneous students through heterogeneous courses – e.g. to accommodate different start and end points and late starters and early finishers.
- Clearly articulated expectations and guidelines for part-time students about timetables and the timing and form of assessment, and how students can progress, for example from one course to another. Similarly, part-time students need consistent and early communications in the event of changes to timetables etc. as many have to make complicated arrangements in order to attend lectures or seminars etc.
- Ensuring that courses meet local market needs, so that they meet the expectations of employers, employees and other would-be part-time students.
- Peer support systems (particularly for young people) including systems and spaces for part-time students to network and form their own community.
- Part-time students could also benefit from opportunities to integrate with the rest of the student body. Indeed, this could benefit all students by increasing the diversity of their experience.

The prospects for expanding part-time higher education

Part-time provision provides opportunities for higher-level study for some people who would not otherwise have the opportunity. Further expansion of provision would increase choice and, potentially, access.

Currently part-time higher education for young people is not a mainstream option. Few are aware that studying part-time is a possibility and those that are, generally think it a second-best form of provision to the preferred full-time route. To attract more people into higher education at all through part-time provision, or to get people to switch from full to part-time study, will require significant action among a number of stakeholders. This could involve:

- **universities and colleges:** promoting part-time study as an option to young people more strongly including selling the benefits of being able to work in a career-entry job at the same time as studying, and ensuring that all their facilities are open to part-time students
- **government:** making part-time courses a priority for funding over full-time courses, to make it a more attractive option and maintaining or further tightening control limits on full-time places
- **Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS):** making a part-time option more visible and legitimate by allowing potential students to view the full

range of study options, and potentially to apply for a part-time course in the same way as full-time students

- **employers:** encouraging young people to join them on high-level apprenticeships and professional careerships that combine higher-level study with work
- **careers advisers:** encouraging young people to review all options when they first start thinking about higher education
- **Student Loans Company** making it easier for part-time students to apply for support.

Further occupational licensing and market de-regulation could result in older people looking to change or enhance their career by taking up part-time higher education.

More generally, greater flexibility and perhaps less of a divide between part-time and full-time provision are likely to increase demand for, and access to, higher education.

1 Introduction

This report presents findings from research undertaken for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to explore whether part-time undergraduate study in England can be expanded as an alternative for young students (those aged 22 and under) to the full-time three- to four-year model of first degree undergraduate participation, and to better understand how undergraduate part-time students of all ages can be encouraged and supported with their studies.

The research involved a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches including:

- a critical review of recent relevant literature
- a statistical analysis of secondary data covering higher education (undergraduate) students
- surveys of potential higher education students
- in-depth case studies with 18 institutions across the higher education (HE) sector. These case studies involved:
 - interviews with staff involved in the planning, marketing, delivery and support of part-time study
 - interviews and focus groups with current undergraduate students, both full- and part-time
 - discussions with 'linked-in'² employers
 - discussions with careers advisers in local 'feeder'³ institutions
 - collection of data on part-time student numbers.

The research also convened an expert panel and steering group of research and policy experts to advise on overall methodological issues, provide insight into the policy context and comment on emerging findings.

This report draws together evidence from all these methodological strands. It builds a picture of the provision or supply of part-time HE and of the issues relating to the support of part-time provision; and of the demand for part-time study. It then moves on to discuss

² Linked-in employers are those that the institution works with to develop and/or deliver programmes, and support their employees to study part-time at the institution. These tend to be based locally, but can be large national or multi-national organisations.

³ Feeder institutions are local institutions providing post-compulsory learning at level three, and can supply the case study institution with HE applicants and learners.

the feasibility of expanding part-time provision and models of encouraging and supporting part-time study, and the policy implications for part-time study.

1.1 Report structure

This chapter provides a context to the research (many of the themes are then explored in greater detail in the remainder of the report), then sets out the research aims and objectives, and provides an overview of the methodology employed.

Part One takes an institutional perspective of part-time undergraduate study, bringing together evidence collected in the research on the issues around the supply of part-time courses, the factors influencing institutional decision-making around provision, and how institutions view demand (now and in the future). In this part, the chapters explore:

- the scale of part-time provision (Chapter 2)
- models of delivery (Chapter 3)
- employer-led provision (Chapter 4)
- costs and challenges of providing part-time study (Chapter 5)
- institutional perceptions of the demand for part-time undergraduate study (Chapter 6).

Part Two takes a learner perspective of part-time undergraduate study, presenting evidence on the issues around demand for part-time courses, the factors influencing decisions about HE, and what might encourage individuals (particularly young individuals) to consider part-time study. In this part, the chapters explore:

- preference for part-time study (Chapter 7)
- employer demand for part-time HE (Chapter 8)
- awareness of part-time study (Chapter 9)
- attitudes to part-time study (Chapter 10)
- individual barriers to part-time study (Chapter 11)
- experiences and outcomes of part-time study (Chapter 12).

Part Three pulls together the institutional and individual perspective to discuss:

- the feasibility of expanding part-time provision, particularly to young people
- models of encouraging and supporting part-time study, identifying good and transferable practice

- policy implications for part-time study (Chapter 13).

1.2 Researching part-time study in a time of change

The research took place during a time of considerable change and uncertainty for the sector. The study started in March 2011 as plans were beginning to emerge from the Coalition Government for the future of HE, and finished in early 2012 some months after the publication of the HE white paper '*Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*' and publication of individual institutions' Access Agreements (which include details of tuition fee structures and student financial support arrangements). However, the research was completed prior to final outcomes of the HEFCE-led consultation (see below, section 1.2.2) on teaching grant priorities and student number controls and the final (second stage) publication of the admissions process review.

1.2.1 Researching part-time students

Part-time students represent a sizeable proportion of all HE students and part-time study plays a key role in widening participation in higher education and in ensuring diversity of provision. Yet this group of highly diverse individuals and this set of highly diverse provision have until recently been subject to relatively little research.

The complexity of part-time study

The literature and data available on part-time study illustrates that part-time students are quite different to the traditional image of a HE student. They tend to have vocational qualifications, are more likely to be female and tend to be older. The existing materials also highlight that there is no typical model of a part-time HE course. Part-time provision involves study with varying intensity (of time and credit) and expected length, and study towards a wide range of qualifications including first degrees, HNDs/HNCs, foundation degrees, certificates of higher education, professional qualifications and courses which offer institutional credits. A part-time course may be delivered alongside full-time provision, provided separately or as a mixture of the two. It may be delivered in partnership with another institution, often a further education (FE) college, at an employer's premises, or via distance learning. It may be delivered during normal university working hours (9 am to 5 pm), on weekday evenings or at weekends, or delivered in small blocks of intense study. This creates a complex mixture of provision, particularly at undergraduate level, which responds to a complex market(s).

The part-time market

Recent work for Universities UK found that the undergraduate part-time market has seen a slowing down in the growth of enrolments and marked geographical differences in provision across the UK. This distribution has been affected by individual university policy and strategy, local labour market conditions, competition between, and collaboration among, providers, and most significantly government policy which has until recently '*undermined some forms of part-time provision and directly contributed to its decline*' (p. 9, Callender et al., 2010). Central policies affecting part-time provision included the

arrangements for government funding of institutions such as the ELQ ruling⁴ and level of the part-time premium; tuition fees, importantly the requirement to charge fees up-front for part-time students; and financial support for students which provided only small targeted grants to those studying at least 50 per cent of an equivalent full-time course.

At present, demand for undergraduate part-time study appears to be limited (in the main) to older individuals, particularly working adults who primarily want to improve their employment and career prospects through studying at higher levels. These individuals are either unable to give up their job to study full-time or choose to study part-time since it offers greater flexibility, allowing them to fit study around existing commitments. These individuals, who are balancing work, life and study commitments, tend to have a preference for vocational courses delivered in the evenings and at weekends, and provided locally (Pollard et al., 2008). There appears to be low awareness of part-time study and little interest in it among young people, who instead favour a traditional university experience which involves studying full-time on a standard length course and living away from home (Bates et al., 2009). Among young people, part-time study is regarded as more appropriate for mature students and offers fewer opportunities for socialising (MORI, 2005).

Looking forward, there is a need to understand how the changing economic and policy context may affect supply and demand for part-time study as an alternative to the traditional model of HE delivery. Will the new funding and financial support arrangements in higher education encourage or discourage provision and demand for part-time study? In this new context can, and indeed should, institutions expand their part-time provision, and what will they need to do to provide part-time students with a good-quality experience? Furthermore, will individuals, including younger students, require (by choice or by necessity) a different type of higher education experience than the typical full-time three-year undergraduate programme?

1.2.2 The English policy context

Higher education is a key element of UK skills policy. Securing higher levels of educational attainment and skill acquisition at all ages improves productivity and contributes to economic growth enabling the UK to maintain and work to improve its global competitiveness. The focus on skills originally embodied in the Leitch Review (Leitch, 2006; DIUS, 2007), continues to drive government policy and thinking (although there has been a move away from targets) as indicated in ‘*Skills for Sustainable Growth*’ (BIS, 2010).

‘Skills are vital to our future and improving skills is essential to building sustainable growth and stronger communities. A skilled workforce is necessary to stimulate the private-sector growth that will bring new jobs and new prosperity for people all over this country.’

Foreword from Vince Cable and John Hayes

HE also has an important role in lifelong learning, facilitating social mobility and minimising social exclusion as highlighted in the HE White Paper ‘*Higher Education: Students at the*

⁴ ELQ is the ruling regarding equivalent or lower-level qualifications, which would attract no central funding.

Heart of the System'. It can transform the lives of individuals, bringing employment, health and wider social benefits. Increasing and widening participation have, therefore, been twin goals for HE. A range of initiatives have aimed to influence supply and demand including encouraging a broader range of routes into and through HE, encouraging and supporting non-traditional students to aim for HE, and providing targeted financial support to address financial barriers to participation. These have been focused on mature adults looking to return to education as well as young people emerging from post-16 education, to encompass the whole working-age population as potential entrants to HE.

The size and shape of the sector has been radically transformed over the last two decades. The number of HE students has increased and at almost 2.5 million⁵ is now higher than ever before. The range and backgrounds of participants has broadened (including a steady rise in the numbers of mature students), although those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and deprived areas remain under-represented, and participation across the sector is uneven. The nature of HE provision has also changed to work towards meeting the demands of both potential students and employers of graduate labour. There has been an increase in part-time, vocational and work-based learning; greater involvement of employers; and a greater diversity of providers of HE including further education institutions (FEIs) and private providers.

Further change is likely with the government's desire to achieve an even more diverse HE sector with a wider range of providers, course models and locally accessible HE, providing students with greater choice of what, where and how they study; and with less centralised control to ensure it is a sector that can respond to student demand (rather than government-set targets). These changes are likely to impact on the size and shape of part-time higher education in England⁶.

On 28 June 2011 the government launched its proposals for the reform of the HE system in England with the publication of the HE White Paper '*Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*' (BIS, 2011). This long-awaited document brings together various aspects of policy and thinking that the incoming administration had been developing since May 2010, and first announced as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review in autumn 2010. Some of these plans have been made in response to the Browne Review of Higher Education (a review set in motion by the former Labour administration, and published in October 2010), while others reflect election pledges and others still reflect and respond to concerns of the sector.

The Education Bill

The White Paper follows the Education Bill that was passed by the House of Lords in June 2011 and is now awaiting final approval by parliament. This bill introduced reforms to

⁵ The latest figure for all HE students is 2,493,420 (in 2009/10), this includes 1,713,310 UK-domiciled undergraduates. See <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2257/393/>

⁶ This report focuses on the English policy context. The devolved nations have different contexts. Cross-border differences are outside the scope of this research.

student fees and loans – namely, abolishing up-front fees for part-time students, raising the tuition fees cap for full-time courses and increasing the cap on the interest rates that can be charged to new student loans. Importantly for part-time students are a number of reforms including access to student loans, capping charges for part-time courses, and a four-year (or less) repayment rule.

The bill introduced, for the first time, access for part-time students to student loans for tuition fees from 2012/13 (replacing the means-tested fee grant and course grant). These loans will not be means tested but the amount an individual will be able to access will depend on the intensity of their study (between 25 and 75 per cent of a full-time course). Tuition loans will not be available to those studying less than 25 per cent of a full-time equivalent course, to those who already hold a qualification at an equivalent or higher level, or to post-graduate students. Student loans for living costs and/or other maintenance support will still not be available to part-time students, since those on part-time courses are expected to be able to combine study and work, and access other government benefits. Alongside the introduction of tuition fee loans for part-time students, some conditions will be imposed on institutions and individuals:

- The government proposes to limit the amount HEIs can charge for part-time courses (and that these limits will be pro rata to those for full-time students) so that they can be completely covered by the loan and the student will not be required to pay anything upfront. The government expects that the maximum charge for a part-time course should not exceed 75 per cent of a full-time course fee. The maximum loan available for a part-time student in 2012/13 will therefore be £6,750 (which is 75 per cent of the maximum full-time loan).
- Part-time students will become liable to repay their loan three years after starting their course if they are earning over £21,000, so many part-time students are likely to start repaying their loans while still studying. Part-time students will be subject to the same interest rates on their loans as full-time students. However, BIS subsequently announced (26 October 2011) that they will amend this aspect of the legislation so that part-time students will become eligible to start making repayments over four years after commencing their study, up from the three years that was planned⁷.

As noted on the BIS website, the government anticipates that 175,000 part-time students will be eligible for student loans; this represents 75 per cent of part-time students studying for the first time. Comparing this with the number of part-time students currently supported through fees and grants (approximately 60,000), this is an almost three-fold increase⁸.

⁷ If approved, repayments will now be due from the April which falls four years after the start date of the course if the student is earning over £ 21,000.

⁸ An alternative view of the potential impact of extending fee loans to part-time students is that set out in the Department's Impact Equality Assessment. Here it is estimated that currently 15 per cent of all part-time students receive a grant and under the proposed system (when eligibility was set at 33 per cent FTE) 30 per cent of all part-time students would be entitled to a loan. See Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2010b) *Interim equality impact assessment: urgent reforms to higher education funding and student finance*.

The 2011 HE White Paper

The HE White Paper '*Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*' provides further detail about the plans for student finance, which the government asserts will put HE on a sustainable footing in an environment where public funding has to be reduced, but without reducing the supply of places or quality of provision. The White Paper also provides details about wider reforms for the sector that aim to deliver a better student experience and positively influence social mobility, to ensure that those from low-income families without a history of going to university have a fair opportunity to do so. The key thrust of these reforms is to create a more diverse and flexible sector, freer from central controls, which will provide students with real choice. Such a sector will, in responding to student demand rather than government funding, provide innovative and high-quality teaching and learning to individuals from all backgrounds – essentially placing students at the heart of the system.

Part-time provision is emphasised in the paper as an alternative form of engaging with HE – allowing individuals to access HE throughout their lives – and as such appears to be central to plans for a diverse and responsive sector: '*We want a diverse, competitive system that can offer different types of higher education so students can choose freely between a wide range of providers*' (p. 47, BIS, 2011). The government recognises that not all individuals want, or are able, to participate in HE in the traditional manner: '*For many people, entry to higher education does not follow the traditional and well-established route of A-levels followed by a full-time, residential, three-year degree*' (p46), and suggests that the sector needs new/different models of higher education. Diversity is expressed in terms of mode of study, and in terms of length of study (for example two-year accelerated honours degrees, but also taking breaks from study). Diversity is also expressed in terms of type of qualification (including more vocationally focused qualifications), and place of study (including HE in FE settings, with private providers, and in virtual settings through distance and online learning)⁹. The White Paper makes specific reference to non-prescribed HE provision, which is predominantly studied part-time by people over 25 in employment, and recognised to be flexible in nature, allowing students to fit study around their working and family responsibilities.

To support and promote diversity, including part-time study, the White Paper introduces a number of reforms which aim to achieve the following:

- First-time undergraduates studying part-time will be able to access student loans to pay for their tuition fees (as set out in the Education Bill), as long as they are studying at an intensity of at least 25 per cent of a full-time course. This levels the playing field for part-time students, at least in terms of fee support, and marks a radical change in policy towards part-time students: '*this is a major step in terms of*

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/i/10-1310-interim-equality-impact-assessment-he-funding-and-student-finance.pdf>, p18

⁹ Higher Education in Further Education, and Private Provision of Higher Education are both subject to separate and ongoing research that has been commissioned by BIS.

opening up access to higher education, and remedies a long-standing injustice in support for adult learners' (p61). For the first time, students studying part-time are no longer to be penalised in financial terms – they will no longer have to pay their fees up-front and they will have access to student loans to pay for their fees. However, part-time students will not be able to access student loans for living costs, or to access the enhanced Maintenance Grants. They may be eligible for (pro-rata) support via the new National Scholarship Programme (NSP), although individual institutions will determine eligibility criteria. The NSP will provide individual financial support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds through fee waivers or discounts, provision of a free foundation year, discounted rates for accommodation or other institutional services, and/or cash awards/bursary (capped at £1,000) – essentially reducing the costs of, and potential disincentives to, HE study.

- A renewed focus will be placed on employer involvement in HE, encouraging universities to review how they work with business in order to promote better teaching, sponsorship, innovation and enterprise. Involvement and collaboration may include setting standards for course content to provide the skills and knowledge that employers want and to meet criteria for specific professions. However, it is hoped that it will also involve employer sponsorship of students and courses, renewing interest and support for work experience while studying. This could in turn encourage part-time study:

'The new funding arrangements for higher education offer the chance of a new partnership between employer, student and institution. Employers may help to meet a student's tuition costs in return for a commitment from the student to work whilst studying, and a commitment from the institution to align the course content to their specific needs.' (p41)

These aspects will be externally reviewed by Professor Sir Tim Wilson and will feed into the research and innovation strategy¹⁰.

- It will be simpler for different types of higher education provider to enter and compete in the sector in order to open up the higher education market and allow for greater diversity of provision. The White Paper recognises that different providers may cater for a variety in student demand, and that FE colleges in particular have an important role in attracting part-time learners, since they offer vocational skills, professional qualifications and awards that can be studied part-time on a very flexible basis while in employment. From 2013/14, the government proposes to level the playing field for all types of higher education providers in terms of controls over student numbers and taught degree-awarding powers, and access to student support (subject to quality assurances administered by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and other requirements regulated by HEFCE). The proposals for changing the criteria and process for granting and renewing undergraduate degree awarding powers will be subject to a separate consultation. This will be led by BIS

¹⁰ The strategy can be found at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/innovation/docs/i/11-1387-innovation-and-research-strategy-for-growth.pdf>

and take place in 2011/12. It will also consult on changes to the criteria for eligibility for the university title. At present, institutions have to have at least 4,000 full-time students before they may apply for the title of university.

- It will promote greater availability of information to support student choice. Each institution is required by September 2012 to bring together a standard set of information for each of its courses (the Key Information Set). This will be made available on its website, on the Unistats website, and to other organisations who can present the data in more imaginative ways. The information will cover student satisfaction with the course, costs, employment outcomes and impact of the student union. The requirements cover part-time undergraduate courses, as well as courses provided by private institutions covered by the QAA, and further education colleges. This should enable greater visibility of part-time study to potential students, parents, careers advisers and teachers.
- A single application portal and integrated application process will be considered. The White Paper focuses on bringing together the processes for applying for a student place with applying for student support. Also under consideration is the role of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in part-time applications. The Admissions Process Review is being undertaken by UCAS, and one of its aims is to *'develop a flexible, responsive and cost effective system that can accommodate a wide range of admissions models' with the aim of delivering an admissions model that 'can cope with different modes of delivery e.g. part-time and different intensities of study'*. The review is therefore considering part-time undergraduate admissions processes as well as employer engagement, private institutions (both profit and not-for-profit), and FE institutions delivering HE. It is argued that if some or all of part-time undergraduate study is brought within the sphere of UCAS (though not necessarily within the mainstream application process), it could increase awareness and potentially increase its 'value' as an option for higher education study.

The first report of the comprehensive review of the HE admissions process was published this October (2011). It concludes that there are aspects of the current system operated by UCAS that could be improved, as it is complex and difficult to navigate, the technology needs updating, and the number and profile of applicants has changed significantly over time and will change further with the funding and policy changes (noted above). The authors propose radical changes to the national system for 2016 onwards. This involves changes to the exam timetable, (potential) changes to HEI start dates for first-year students, and three distinct application windows depending on the circumstances of the individual (with applications submitted only once the applicant has met the entry requirements for their favoured course).

This first report acknowledges that the scope of the review initially focused on full-time undergraduate admissions to higher education, but there has been some work undertaken to consider whether UCAS could better support admissions to part-time undergraduate study (as well as postgraduate taught courses). This will continue and will be the subject of a second report in 2012. However, a key finding in this first report is that *'the current "one-size-fits-all" system does not optimise the process for non-traditional applicants such as international, part-time, and mature applicants; it is not easily configurable for different*

start dates and different intensities of study [key finding 8]. The primary research undertaken in the review finds that:

- mature students who want to enrol at their local HEI are bemused by having to engage with the UCAS system when their target admissions office is on their doorstep
- students wishing to progress from a further education course to a higher education course at the same HEI see the UCAS system as an unnecessary barrier
- critically, UCAS is not currently able to support part-time admissions, which would clearly benefit from a much lighter touch system and data capture.

One of the conclusions is therefore that UCAS needs to develop flexible services which meet the needs of all its customers and a wider range of applicants (UCAS, 2011).

- A new careers service will be established in England by April 2012 to provide high-quality advice and guidance for young people and adults that will enable potential students to make ‘informed choices’ about higher education and which route to take. The aim is that this service will provide comprehensive information, advice and guidance on all options – this should therefore include part-time study in higher education. Young people in compulsory education in Years 9 to 11 will have information, advice and guidance provided through their schools.

Consulting on funding support and number controls

In addition, the White Paper establishes a two-stage consultation to be led by HEFCE in 2011/12 on teaching grant priorities and student number controls. This may have some impact on part-time provision as it proposes to:

- reduce for 2012/13 the part of the teaching grant that is aimed at supporting institutions with the additional costs associated with part-time students (the part-time undergraduate targeted allocation), and to review this for 2013/14 onwards
- phase out the part of the grant relating to co-funded employer engagement (much of which involves part-time study)
- extend student number controls to at least some part-time students from 2013/14 (at present controls on student numbers apply to full-time undergraduate and PGCE entrants).

Corresponding FE sector reform

The FE sector plays a significant role in the provision of higher education – both prescribed HE programmes that have been funded by HEFCE (such as foundation degrees and higher national diplomas) and non-prescribed HE programmes that can be funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). Non-prescribed HE includes study at level 4 and above towards professional awards provided by national awarding bodies such as

Edexcel, City and Guilds and The Association of Accounting Technicians, and higher-level National Vocational Qualifications. In some professions these qualifications are an accepted alternative to the graduate qualification route. Research in 2002 (Clark) focusing on non-prescribed HE noted the importance of this form of HE within the FE sector to government policies for widening participation and up-skilling the workforce, policies that remain a priority.

In *New Challenges, New Chances*¹¹, the government set out plans to reform the FE and skills system for adults aged 19 and over in England. They will continue to invest in the sector and work towards the principles of fairness and shared responsibility while encouraging businesses to invest in the training and skills of their workforce. It is acknowledged that level 4 technical and professional qualifications is a policy area that has been neglected for some time, particularly around non-prescribed higher education. They will therefore work on promoting the concept and value of 'Higher Vocational Education', on broadening the base of higher-level provision, and on progression routes into levels 4, 5 and 6. Income contingent FE loans will also be introduced for 2013/14 to allow adults (those over 24) to learn at these advanced and higher levels. These FE loans will have similar features to student loans in HE, and aim to provide a more coherent offer for learners. In addition, there is a priority to significantly extend higher apprenticeship provision with funding to develop 28 Higher Apprenticeship Frameworks and approximately 19,000 higher apprenticeship places¹².

It is therefore important to recognise that the Education Bill and HE White Paper, along with plans for the FE sector, enshrine significant changes within the HE policy environment that will affect the provision and take-up of part-time higher education.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

The overarching aim of the research was two-fold: first, to collect information and data on how English institutions are encouraging and supporting part-time study for undergraduate students of all ages; second, to collect evidence to help determine whether it is feasible for government to introduce policies in England to increase the numbers of young people who study undergraduate part-time courses, and to identify likely barriers to increasing numbers and the changes/incentives that may be required. In meeting these aims, the research will assist policy officials to assess the potential for expanding cost-effective part-time courses at an undergraduate level in HE targeted towards younger students, and more widely inform policy on a shift of provision towards alternative modes of delivery such as part-time study. It should be noted that the focus of the research was English HEIs and

¹¹ BIS (2011) *New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World-class Skills System*

¹² See <http://www.bis.gov.uk/skills>, and BIS Press Release 'Government Funding for 19,000 degree-level apprenticeships, 1 December 2011, <http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/topstories/2011/Dec/19000-new-higher-apprenticeships-to-deliver-skills-for-growth>

those studying in English HEIs, but where appropriate we have also drawn upon evidence from the devolved nations and across the UK as a whole.

More specifically the research aimed to understand **supply issues**, including:

- the institutional part-time offer, how this has developed over time and may change in the future, particularly looking at different models of delivery
- institutional decision-making and the processes involved in developing part-time provision, and influencing factors including the nature of the local student market and engagement with local employers
- the nature and scale of costs to institutions of providing part-time study compared with the traditional full-time three-year model of undergraduate provision.

Also, it aimed to understand **demand issues**, including:

- the nature of employers' engagement in part-time HE study and their motivations towards, and their experiences of, part-time study
- the size/scale and shape/profile of the current part-time student population: the different types of students currently engaging in part-time undergraduate study; how, where, what they study; and how this may have changed over time at UK, English and institutional levels
- the number of young people (18 to 22-year-olds) in HE studying part-time by routes/pathways to HE, subjects studied, institutions attended, and outcomes of study including achievement
- the perceptions, motivations, opinions and decision-making of students who are approaching university entrance to part-time study (i.e. those aged 16 to 22)
- the student experience of part-time HE study against that of full-time HE study.

In addition, the research aimed to identify:

- the range of actions institutions take to encourage part-time study, particularly recruitment and outreach activity, the key challenges to recruiting part-time students and how these can be overcome
- the range of actions institutions take to support part-time students including initiatives aimed at induction, retention, achievement (including institutional views of success for their part-time students), and enhancing the part-time student experience and student satisfaction
- the key elements in encouraging and supporting part-time study and part-time students (essentially the good practice in institutions) to tease out what works well, for whom and in what context and, critically, how this learning could be transferred to/replicated in other institutions.

1.4 Overview of methodology

As noted above, the research involved a range of research activities. Each of these methodological strands is described below. For further details please see the technical appendix to this report.

1.4.1 Expert panel

To support the study, a panel of experts was convened and meetings between the panel and the research team were held regularly throughout the research process. Our experts were Professor Claire Callender (Birkbeck College and Institute of Education, University of London), Pam Coare (Centre for Community Engagement, University of Sussex), Helen Connor (formerly Associate Principal Fellow, Council for Industry and Higher Education), Brenda Little (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, Open University) and Ruth Williams (also Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, Open University). The research team were able to draw on their combined research expertise covering the diversity of part-time provision and institutional approaches to part-time provision (including specialist part-time provision, employer engagement and work-based learning, and adult and community learning), good practice in the HE sector, and the choices and experiences of part-time students.

With their expertise and knowledge of part-time HE, the panel helped to develop the research study, materials and analysis framework, and helped to validate the emerging findings and to draw appropriate conclusions and policy recommendations taking account of the changing policy context.

1.4.2 Literature review

The critical literature review was undertaken to understand the scale, coverage and focus of recent research on part-time HE study, part-time HE students, employer interaction with HE, and institutional practice in encouraging and supporting part-time HE study. It identified relevant factors to feed into the design of research materials (including discussion guides and surveys), case study selection and data analyses. It also provides contextualisation to findings from the qualitative case study work with institutions and to the analysis of student data, and ensures that the research capitalises on existing evidence.

In undertaking the review, a range of sources were used including bibliographic databases; the websites of research organisations, government agencies and HE bodies; literature collected by IES and the expert panel; and reports recommended by BIS and the Steering Group. Approximately 40 papers, reports and publications were reviewed (see Bibliography). Further details of the search methodology are provided in the separate technical appendix to this report.

The review identified that recent research has started to fill the gap in understanding about the choices and experiences of part-time students in HE. However, there is still very little on the experiences and choices of young people (aged 18 to 22) in part-time HE and about the decision-making of young people choosing part-time HE options. In contrast, the motivations to study, reasons for studying part-time and experiences of part-time study among mature students – who form the vast majority of the part-time student body – have been relatively well explored. There is also comparatively little research from an

institutional perspective regarding the policies, plans and behaviours of institutions towards part-time students and part-time provision. That which does exist tends to cover delivery models and the costs of providing part-time courses rather than the most effective ways to recruit part-time students and how best to support them.

The findings from the review are presented throughout the report.

1.4.3 Secondary data analysis

Analysis of national student data was undertaken for two key reasons: to inform selection of case studies for primary data collection; and to understand and map the size and shape of the part-time undergraduate market, and understand the experiences and outcomes of part-time students (compared with full-time students).

A range of data was interrogated including:

- student data collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). All UK HE institutions¹³ provide HESA with uniform data on their registered student populations, at an individual level. This data is captured throughout the year and is presented annually. Data for the academic years 2007/08 and 2009/10 were analysed.
- student data in the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) collected by the Data Service for the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and BIS. This captures data on individuals studying at undergraduate level registered with further education institutions¹⁴ (FEIs) rather than in HEIs, and covers HE students in England directly funded through FEIs. Data for the academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10 were analysed.
- destinations data collected by HESA. This captures data on the outcomes or destinations of all UK- and other EU-domiciled students who qualified from a UK HE institution, at a point approximately six months after completion. It provides data on employment and further study or training. This census survey is undertaken every year. Data for students graduating in the academic year 2008/09 were analysed.
- National Student Survey (NSS) data administered by IPSOS-MORI on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). This provides feedback from all students (including part-time students) in their final year of HE study on the perceived quality of teaching, academic support, learning resources and personal development. Data for final-year students in the academic year 2008/09 were analysed.

¹³ With the exception of London Metropolitan University.

¹⁴ This excludes students in school sixth forms and sixth form colleges (which are governed by a different set of regulations), and private provision which has no duty to report data on student numbers.

- Data from the Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England (LSYPE), currently administered by a consortium led by BMRB, a research agency, on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE). This has gathered evidence about the transitions of young people from secondary and tertiary education or training to economic roles in early adulthood. It has followed a cohort of young people, every year, from Year 9 (when they were 13-14 years old), to see what they have been doing and if any of their plans for the future have changed. The study is intended to continue to track the young people until they are aged 25. Data for wave 5 (survey took place in 2008 when sampled young people were aged 17-18) and wave 6 (survey took place in 2009, when young people were aged 18-19) were analysed.

Selecting case studies

HESA student data were used to select case study institutions. A descriptive analysis of the numbers and characteristics of part-time undergraduate students by institution was undertaken, to identify institutions with (absolute) large numbers of part-time students, and institutions with a relatively high proportion of part-time students in their student body, and also institutions with limited part-time provision. The analysis also explored at institutional level the change in the size of the part-time cohort over time, the age of part-time students (in order to identify the number of young part-time students, who are of particular interest to this research), the level of study of part-time students (whether first degree or other undergraduate), and the subjects studied by part-time students.

Mapping the part-time market

The analysis aimed to explore how, where and what part-time students are studying and show how this may have changed over time in the UK, in England and in individual institutions, and the extent of part-time HE study in different subject areas and different geographical areas. It also explored characteristics associated with a propensity to part-time study or willingness to consider part-time study. Further analysis also explored differences in the experiences and outcomes of part-time and full-time students. Further details of the data sources, analysis methods and key variables explored are provided in the technical appendix to this report.

The findings from the analysis of secondary data are presented throughout the report. Where possible the analysis and reported data have been restricted to UK-domiciled students studying at undergraduate level.

1.4.4 In-depth case studies

A key element of the research was 18 in-depth qualitative case studies with institutions delivering part-time undergraduate courses across the UK. These provide a rich picture of the institutional issues surrounding the provision of and support for part-time undergraduate studies, and the issues affecting (both negatively and positively) demand for part-time study from individuals and employers within a local context. An understanding of the local context is particularly important when investigating issues of part-time learners since a large proportion of part-time learners live and study in the same local area, and local contextual factors are known to have a significant impact on demand and supply of part-time HE.

Institutions were selected as case studies based on the size of their part-time student body and the nature of their part-time provision (level of study and spread of subjects). Geographical location and type of institution (mission group and quality rating) were also considered to ensure a spread of institutions.

In each case study, perspectives were gathered from a range of key stakeholders. The research involved two models of case study: an expanded model (with more extensive fieldwork) and a slim model (with more limited fieldwork largely focused on exploring good practice in supporting and encouraging part-time students) (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

- A total of 12¹⁵ institutions were recruited as **expanded case studies** (limited to institutions in England only): 10 were recruited as (relatively) large providers of part-time undergraduate study¹⁶, including one FEC offering HE study (HE in FE), and two were recruited to provide a contrast since they have only limited provision. The institutions participating in the case studies cover a range of regions, sizes and mission groups (including Russell Group and 1994 Group institutions). These case studies involved interviews with staff at different levels and functions within the institution (strategic, teaching and support roles); interviews with 'linked in'¹⁷ local employers, and focus groups with existing HE students (both full- and part-time) (see Figure 1.1 overleaf). They also involved a survey of potential students (in local 'feeder' institutions, see below), interviews with careers staff with responsibility for advising potential students in local 'feeder' institutions, and analysis of Management Information (MI) and relevant documents. Fieldwork started in May and continued through to October 2011.
- A total of six institutions were recruited as **slim case studies**. These additional case studies broadened the scope of the research to include universities and colleges in the devolved administrations, specialist providers of part-time study, and private providers of HE. These case studies were smaller in scale, involving staff interviews and a focus group or interviews with current part-time students and analysis of Management Information (MI) (see Figure 1.2 overleaf).

Across all the case studies the views of a great number of individuals were captured including: 172 staff; 179 current HE students (including 79 studying part-time), and 17 'linked in' employers. In addition, surveys were conducted in 18 feeder institutions and responses were gathered from over 850 potential students.

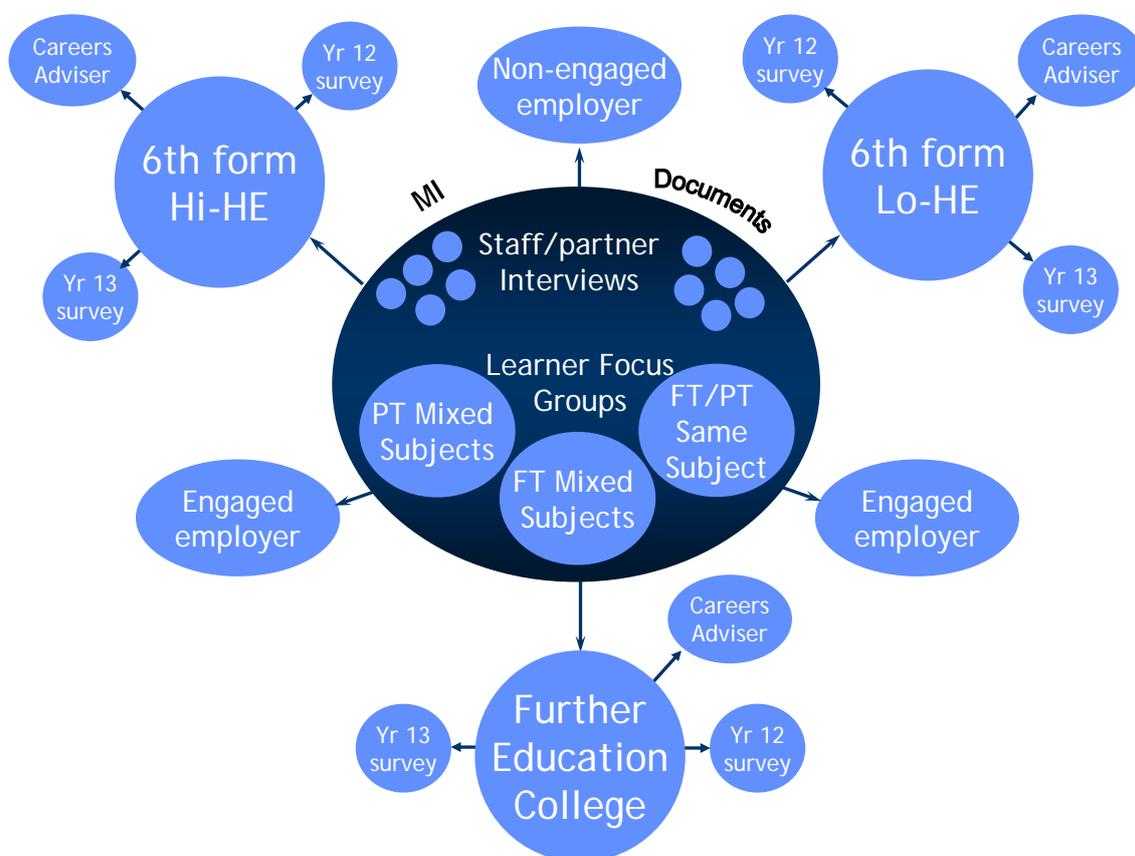
¹⁵ The majority of institutions invited to take part in the research were quick to respond and provided enthusiastic support to the research. However, a small number of institutions that were initially approached felt unable to support the study due either to resourcing difficulties or because they felt the focus of the research (part-time study) meant they would have little to contribute. These were replaced by institutions with a similar profile.

¹⁶ Eight of these institutions had at least 7,000 part-time undergraduate students (accounting for at least one-third of their undergraduate student body). Two were smaller institutions but with at least 2,000 part-time students.

¹⁷ Employers who have an ongoing relationship with the case study institution or have had some relationship with it in the past.

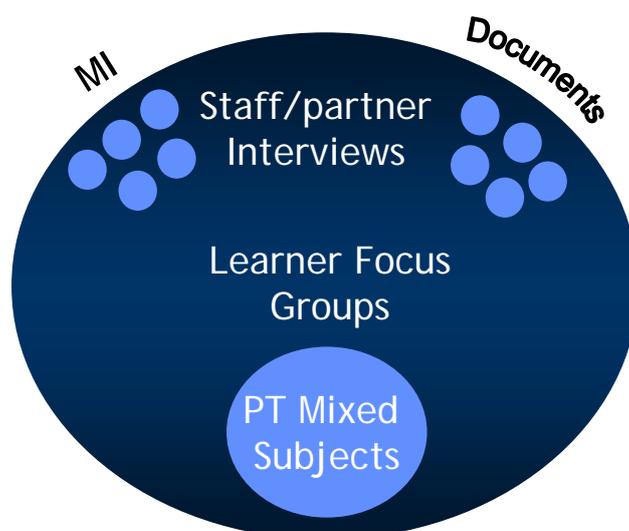
Findings from the case studies are presented throughout the report. However, no individuals or individual institutions have been identified. Instead we created a typology of institutions taking account of the relative size of their part-time student body in relation to their overall student numbers and also their presence across the institution and in different subject areas¹⁸, and have used this typology when drawing out similarities and differences in our case studies. We have four types of case study institutions: those with a large and diverse part-time student population ('large-scale providers', nine case study institutions); those with a large but concentrated part-time student population ('specialist providers', two case studies); those with a small yet diverse part-time student body ('small-scale providers', five case studies); and finally those with a small and concentrated part-time student body ('limited providers', two case studies) (see Chapter 2).

Figure 1.1: Expanded case study model (x12)



Source: IES 2011

¹⁸ Thirty per cent or more of the student body is studying part-time = large; more than 10 part-time students in 10 or more Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) subject groups = spread.

Figure 1.2 1: Slim case study model (x6)

Source: IES 2011

1.4.5 Student surveys

Primary research via a survey questionnaire was also undertaken with potential HE students to explore their awareness of, views on and decisions about part-time study. The surveys targeted learners in post-16 education (studying in England) at a time when they are making decisions about higher education – whether or not to go, and where, what and how to study.

Potential students were drawn from two different sources. The first sample of students was gathered from ‘feeder¹⁹’ institutions close to our case study institutions (and identified by our case study institutions). Each feeder institution was asked to target a sample of 60 Year 12 students²⁰ or their equivalent (or Year 13 if surveyed in the 2011/12 academic year) – students who would be making decisions about HE under the new fee regime. The survey (paper-based) was administered in a classroom setting by staff at the feeder institution, with support and all the survey materials provided by the research team. A small number of institutions chose to also use the online survey option, distributing the survey to selected students via email but only three per cent of responses were made online. In total, 18 feeder institutions supported the study (linked to nine of the case studies), and responses were received from over 850 individuals. The group of respondents differed to those drawn from the learner panels (see below) in that they tended to be younger and earlier on in their HE decision-making process. Further details of the profile of respondents are provided in the technical appendix.

¹⁹ A feeder institution is a local tertiary education provider involved in the delivery of 16-19 education, eg school sixth form, Sixth Form College or Further Education College.

²⁰ It was initially planned to survey Year 13 students in the 2010/11 academic year along with Year 12 students, but Year 13 students were either on exam leave or had already left their institution by the time the institutions had been identified and the survey process had been agreed with them. This sample was therefore re-focused to concentrate on Year 12 students.

The second sample was a wider group of students who are members of a national learner panel (the Learner Panel²¹ and the Future Panel²²) administered by Opinion Panel. These potential students were spread across England rather than concentrated in particular localities, were learning in a wider range of environments (including private training providers and learning in the workplace) and included both Year 12 and Year 13 students (or equivalent) and so would be affected by the incoming and outgoing fee regimes. The survey was targeted at learners aged between 16 and 22 (inclusive), studying at level 3²³ (or had just completed their level 3 studies) in England, excluding those in Adult and Community Learning. The survey was administered online by Opinion Panel, with quotas set to ensure a sufficient sample of Year 13 students, and support and all the survey materials were provided by the research team. In total, 602 responses were received from Learner Panel members and 612 responses from Future Panel members. A response rate cannot be calculated. Further detail of the profile of respondents and of how the samples were recruited are provided in the technical appendix.

The survey questionnaire was available as a paper-based survey form and a web-based online survey and consisted mainly of tick box questions; it took 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The survey questions were largely the same for both sampled groups. The survey explored information gathered about HE and perceived awareness of HE options (and those available locally); motivations to enter HE, decisions made about HE and study preferences; awareness of and concerns about the financial aspects of HE study; and awareness of and attitudes towards part-time study including perceived benefits and drawbacks, and factors that could encourage or inhibit part-time study. The survey also captured demographic information to allow for an exploration of the influence of background characteristics and prior education on attitudes and preferences. The survey took place between May and October²⁴.

Follow-up interviews

A sub-sample of 30 survey respondents were interviewed in October 2011 to gather a more detailed qualitative perspective about the decision-making process for HE and part-time study. The interviews covered:

- previous educational experiences and decisions

²¹ The Learner Panel was established to help organisations in the FE sector to access learners for conducting quantitative and qualitative research. Panellists are aged 14+ and studying in FE at all levels. Learners are recruited through various means including social networking sites, college and school websites, direct contact and NUS campaigns. The panel has approximately 10,000 members.

²² The Future Panel was set up to provide access to young people before they commence university study. It is considerably larger than the Learner Panel and panellists are either university applicants (typically Year 13) or pre-applicants (normally Year 12). They are recruited via UCAS, so they are known to be considering full-time university study.

²³ Level 3 in the National Qualifications Framework, for example AS/A2 level, International Baccalaureate, and Advanced Apprenticeships.

²⁴ The survey with Learner Panel and Future Panel members took place in August 2011.

- information gathered and decisions made around applying for HE
- understanding of costs and support available for students
- views, awareness and preferences for part-time, particularly how these views and preferences are established, and how fixed these are.

The sub-sample was spread across the learner panel respondents, the future panel respondents and the Feeder Institution Survey respondents. They also included a mix of male and female students, those from different learning providers (school, sixth form college, FE college) and learning cohorts (Year 12 and Year 13), and included individuals from less advantaged backgrounds (identified via receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowance, no family history of HE and/or parental occupation). Twenty students who had expressed a preference or strong interest in part-time study were interviewed along with a further 10 students who would consider part-time study now or in the future.

Findings from the student surveys (panel surveys and Feeder Institution Survey) and follow-up interviews are presented throughout the report, but no individuals have been identified. The findings from the panel surveys and the Feeder Institution Survey are presented separately; however, as noted in the report, similar patterns are found in these data. Further details of the survey respondent profiles are provided in the separate technical appendix to this report, along with more information about the panels, the sampling criteria and quotas. A copy of the survey questionnaire is also included in the separate technical appendix.

Part One: The Supply of Part-time HE

In this part of the report into part-time HE, we draw together the evidence on supply to provide an understanding of the scope and coverage of part-time undergraduate study, and the issues that affect what is delivered by institutions and how. We map the size and shape of part-time undergraduate provision, explore delivery models, and identify the costs and challenges to institutions of delivery. More specifically we examine:

- how part-time study is defined and measured, and the scale of part-time provision across the UK, and in different institutions (and institutional groupings) (Chapter 2)
- different models of part-time delivery to understand the institutional part-time offer, factors influencing delivery and how provision has developed over time (Chapter 3)
- the size and nature of part-time provision targeted at employers, and how this aspect of part-time provision has been developed by institutions for and in partnership with employers (Chapter 4)
- the nature and scale of costs to institutions of providing part-time study compared with the traditional full-time three-year model of undergraduate provision, and the additional challenges institutions face (Chapter 5)
- institutions' perceptions of current demand and how this may change in the future, and institutional decision-making, processes involved and barriers faced in developing part-time provision to meet this demand (Chapter 6).

This part draws on a number of evidence sources including information from our review of the existing literature, analysis of relevant secondary data-sets, namely HESA and ILR data on students, and our primary research with staff and partners in the case studies institutions to bring an institutional perspective to part-time HE.

2 What is Part-time HE and where is it Available?

Key points

- There is no single definition of part-time higher education and it is generally defined, at least in official statistics, by provision that is not full-time.
- Most case study institutions used credit-based or hours-based formal definitions of part-time for reporting purposes. A credit-based definition of part-time provided a clear proportional measure of full-time study and was beneficial for calculating fees. Use of hours-based definitions was felt to be problematic in explaining different types of study time that would be required and consequently for students' understanding of fee calculations.
- Less 'formal' definitions were more capable of recognising the diversity of part-time provision and overcame the implication that part-time is a deficit form of full-time HE study.
- In those specialising in part-time provision – and in some other institutions – the term part-time was felt to limit understanding of the possibilities of different forms of learning. Flexible provision as a way to both describe and define provision was felt to be growing in importance.
- Detailed analysis shows that in 2009/10 there were approximately 547,000 undergraduate part-time students in the higher education sector across the UK and 485,000 in England (including the Open University).
- In the last 10 years the numbers of UK-domiciled part-time students registered with HEIs have been growing but at a slower rate than found for full-time students. From 2000/01 to 2009/10 the number of part-time students increased by 13 per cent compared with a 24 per cent growth among full-time students across the same period.
- The fastest growth among the part-time population has been among young students (under 21 on entry), with new entrants doubling in less than 10 years from 13,385 in 2000/01 to 27,180 in 2008/09.
- In 2009/10 over 140 institutions provided part-time HE courses, but one-third of the total number of students were studying with the Open University (OU). Over the past 10 years there has been considerable change in the numbers of part-time undergraduate students at individual institutions. Some institutions have seen their numbers decrease (often substantially), whereas others, including the OU, have greatly increased their part-time undergraduate provision.

- While most OU part-time students are studying for a first degree, most part-time provision at other HEIs is for other undergraduate courses (including foundation degrees and Diplomas and Certificates of Higher Education) in subjects allied to medicine, education, and business and administrative studies.
- Overall, there is less part-time provision in research-focused universities and, outside the OU, provision tends to be concentrated on institutions in the Million+ mission group.
- Part-time HE provision is unevenly spread around the country. Excluding the OU, the areas with the most provision are London and North West England. Part-time rates are higher in England than in the other UK nations.
- The scale of provision varies not just between HEIs but also within them (i.e. across subject areas). There are broadly four types of part-time undergraduate HE provider:
 - large-scale providers – with relatively high numbers of part-time students across a wide range of subject areas. Around 15 per cent of part-time HE providers matched this type
 - specialist providers – with high shares of part-time students across relatively few subject areas. Only a few – six per cent – of providers were in this category
 - small-scale providers – with relatively low numbers of part-time rates across a number of subject areas – around 29 per cent of providers
 - limited providers – with a few part-time students in a limited range of subjects – a half (50 per cent) of providers were in this category.
- In 2009/10 there were also just under 60,000 individuals studying part-time at HE undergraduate level in the FE sector – this includes students on non-prescribed HE courses funded via the Skills Funding Agency (SFA²⁵). Overall 52 per cent of all undergraduate students in FE institutions study part-time, and part-time study is considerably more common at undergraduate level here than in the HE sector.
- The North West, Yorkshire and Humberside, West Midlands and the South East regions account for the largest number of part-time undergraduate HE students in the FE sector. The East of England, North East and Greater London have smaller proportions of part-time students, and there is a much lower concentration of part-time HE students in the FE sector studying in London (compared with those in the HE sector).

²⁵ These learners have been identified as receiving SFA funding through the Adult Learner Responsive stream

- Almost all of those part-time undergraduate HE learners in the FE sector were studying in FE colleges (95 per cent). The largest providers of part-time HE in FE were Blackburn College, The Manchester College, Loughborough College, Bradford College, South Staffordshire College and New College, Durham.
- Research by HESA suggests that the number of part-time students studying in private and for-profit institutions is small. In 2009/10 there were less than 250 individuals of UK domicile studying part-time at undergraduate level in private institutions.

We commence this section of the report by examining how part-time is defined both formally – in official terms – and in practice by institutions. This highlights different concepts that should be kept in mind when exploring part-time higher education study. The chapter then turns to assess the scale of part-time delivery – both in higher education providers and in the FE sector – based on the analysis of HESA and ILR data sets. The data suggest a typology of institutions within the part-time HE segment which includes large- and small-scale, specialist, and limited providers of part-time HE.

2.1 Defining part-time study

The term ‘part-time’ covers a wide range of higher education provision and learning opportunities and there is no single definition of part-time higher education in the UK (Universities UK, 2006). While some institutions apply minimum or maximum criteria in terms of credits per year or hours of study, ‘part-time’ is generally used to describe a residual form of provision where students are not studying full-time.

2.1.1 Official definitions

The most common definition used in the **research literature** (e.g. Callender and Wilkinson, 2011) and in the data is the one used by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). In these cases, part-time students are defined as those who do not fit the criteria for full-time students and therefore are studying on average less than 21 hours per week or studying full-time but on courses lasting less than 24 weeks. Students on sandwich courses or on a year out from their degree course are not defined as part-time. However, there are other definitions used by different sectors²⁶ and government departments (and benefit systems). For example, the HESA definition conflicts with the

²⁶ Another example is that used by the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA), the agency responsible for funding the delivery of training and education to all 16 to 19-year-olds in England. YPLA defines a part-time learner as an individual who is engaged in a programme that has fewer than 450 guided learning hours in any 12-month period. See http://readingroom.ypla.gov.uk/ypla/ypla_funding_regulations_version_14-june_2010.pdf. Similarly, the Skills Funding Agency, responsible for the funding and regulation of adult education (19 plus) further education and skills training, defines full-time as an aim or programme of aims which is delivered in 450 guided learning hours or more within one funding year or involves 16 guided learning hours or more per week. Part-time would therefore fall below this threshold. See http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/Learner_Eligibility_and_Contribution_Rules_-_V2_-_July_2011.pdf

thresholds for part-time study set by Jobcentre Plus. This allows claimants to study for up to 16 hours a week and still be eligible to claim Jobseekers Allowance.

A recent guidance and good practice statement on part-time admissions noted that some institutions felt strongly that the term 'part-time' is unhelpful as it creates an unnecessary distinction between different types of students (Supporting Professionalism in Admissions programme, SPA, 2010). By contrast, other institutions felt it reflected programmes that have been designed to meet the needs of students who wish to integrate study with other commitments (SPA, 2010). Despite different levels of support for the language used to define part-time students, SPA guidance recommends that because the term part-time is widely understood by potential students and employers, institutions should use it to advertise their offer to the potential part-time market (SPA, 2010). Other research notes that the category of part-time student is, however, a creation of institutional practices and policies, rather than a clear-cut way of participating in learning; and may become an increasingly irrelevant distinction if there is increasing flexibility in how all students study and build up credits and modules to form qualifications (St. Clair, 2006).

Based on a review of the literature of part-time undergraduates in higher education, Callender and Feldman (2009) observed that the term 'part-time' is often added to descriptions of diverse groups of students including those that are non-traditional, working-class, mature or have low entry qualifications. This has the effect of seeing part-time students as just another disadvantaged group within the literature on widening participation, with part-time ceasing to be seen as a mode of study, instead becoming an attribute of students (Callender and Feldman, 2009).

2.1.2 Defining part-time HE in practice

The **case studies** demonstrated varied interpretations of part-time and explored their implications. The most frequent definition among the case study institutions – and the most straightforward – was in terms of the number of credits taken each year as a proportional measure of full-time study. The actual number of credits within the definition varied between institutions for example, from 100 credits to 180 credits, with others measuring from a baseline of 120 credits (across large-scale and small-scale providers). A flexible specialist provider recommended that students study no more than 120 credits in any year. A benefit of the credit model was in calculating the fee for part-time study since part-time (and full-time) courses could be costed by module.

A second definition focuses on the hours of study, which reflects the definition used by HESA. This appeared more contentious, and staff identified challenges of this definition in explaining part-time study. These surrounded which types of study time are counted within the definition, i.e. contact time as well as, or opposed to, independent study time. Depending on the subject, the number of hours necessary for full-time and part-time study might not appear so very different unless the full extent of independent study time is taken into account.

'For some courses, contact is much more than others... contact hours can be really small but the student can be full-time... the rules of engagement need to be clarified.'

[Staff, small-scale provider]

Complicating any explanation is the variable number of contact, laboratory and independent study hours expected for different subjects, such that science, technology and engineering studies, for example, can involve significant time spent within laboratories, whereas lengthier periods of independent study within the humanities and some arts subjects is more common. Considering the implications of the hours-based definition, some staff were concerned over changes of expectation that might result from the incoming fee regime since students might raise more questions about the contact hours made available for different subjects.

Some respondents in the case studies highlighted the difference in the hours-based definition used by HEFCE and Jobcentre Plus and said that this complicated explanations of part-time. In one case (a large-scale provider), a student who had worked full-time alongside full-time study (enabled by the flexible model deployed by the institution and a supportive employer) was not allowed to continue in full-time mode once made redundant, despite study not impacting on their availability to work. Overall, staff were concerned that hours-based definitions were insufficient since there is much more to higher education than what takes place in the classroom. Using a definition of part-time as 'reduced' full-time study was felt by staff in the case studies to imply a deficit rather than reflecting an alternative and, often, distinct learning experience.

2.1.3 Different definitions lead to different numbers

It was apparent in some of the case studies that there was a mismatch between the number of part-time students that institutions recognised that they had and the number reported in HESA student statistics. The differences were attributed to a number of factors including students changing their mode of study, albeit temporarily, and how international students were recorded.

In some of our case studies full-time students who were repeating failed modules were registered part-time for the period of repeating the module. While perhaps technically these students were part-time, informally they were understood to be full-time since they had initially registered as full-time and would continue as a full-time student once the repeat module was achieved. Similarly, a part-time student involved in an intensive (equivalent to full-time) period of study could be recorded as full-time for that period, although be understood by the institution to be part-time.

A second explanation for a difference between locally and HESA-recorded part-time numbers was the registration of incoming international exchange students as part-time (noted by a limited provider). A further explanation was offered by those institutions involved in delivering part-time HE through partner colleges and this could have implications for which institution these students were registered with.

2.1.4 Flexible learning rather than part-time learning

When concepts of part-time were elaborated, some staff indicated the lack of utility of part-time as a term, preferring instead to consider a mode which offered greater flexibility. Indeed, among some large-scale providers, there was significant consideration of the degree to which the pace of study could be flexed at any point to meet the aspirations, and personal and work circumstances of individual students and whether this was the future model that should be worked towards.

'If we're thinking about the definition of part-time it is simply something that is less than 100 per cent of full-time but there's more to it and a different language and terminology is needed. Flexible learning provision is nearer to it. But in HEFCE's funding model it is defined by full-time and not as a different form. But the empirical experience is that students see themselves as full-time but learning takes part of their time.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

2.2 Scale of part-time provision

Analysis of national student data was undertaken to understand and map the size and shape of the part-time undergraduate market. Two key sources of data were interrogated to provide this analysis.

- One source was student data collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). All UK HE institutions provide HESA with uniform data on their registered student populations, at an individual level. This data covers students registered with an institution at any point during the reporting period of 1 August to 31 July, and is presented annually. This covers individuals who study with their registering institution and also those who may be taught in another 'franchised' institution (eg a further education college). Data for the academic years 2007/08 and 2009/10 were analysed, and only students registered with HE institutions are included in the analysis²⁷.
- The second source was student data in the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) collected by the Data Service for the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and BIS. This captures information about individuals studying at undergraduate level registered with FEIs rather than with HEIs, and covers HE students in England directly funded through FEIs (and those funded via other means eg SFA formerly the Learning and Skills Council, self-funded or employer-funded). The ILR analysis includes students on vocational higher-level courses known as 'non-prescribed HE' (see Chapter 1). These encompass vocational qualifications at level 4 and above and can be about confirming occupational competence, or preparing an individual for further development, learning or training²⁸. Recent data shows there were approximately

²⁷ Students who leave within two weeks of starting the year are excluded as are dormant students (those who have ceased studying but have not formally de-registered), incoming visiting and exchange students, postdoctoral students, those primarily or wholly studying outside the UK, students on sabbatical or writing up, and some TDA students (those on the Student Associates Scheme or Subject Knowledge Enhancement). Although all institutions provide data, not all institutions provide individual level data for detailed analysis. These institutions are therefore excluded by HESA from the population available for exploration. The institutions excluded are: London Metropolitan University; University College Birmingham, and Liverpool Hope University.

²⁸ See http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/Learner_Eligibility_and_Contribution_Rules_-_V2_-_July_2011.pdf. Prescribed-HE, on the other hand, refers to the courses that HEFCE can directly fund at FE, and include: higher degrees (such as masters), postgraduate diplomas, postgraduate certificates of education, first degrees, foundation degrees, foundation degree bridging courses, higher national diplomas and certificates, diplomas in higher education, certificates in education, and diplomas in teaching in the lifelong learning sector. See <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/faq/heinfec.htm#gen6>

50,700 students on SFA funded HE level courses in FE colleges in 2009/10. These courses may be of interest for policy as an alternative form of HE. They have not been subject to separate in-depth analysis although our calculations indicate they could represent approximately 40 per cent of part-time HE study recorded in the ILR²⁹. ILR data for the academic years 2008/09 and 2009/10 were analysed.

These two data sources have the potential to overlap, particularly when focusing on the part-time undergraduate population. Guidance from the Information Authority for the collection of ILR data³⁰ states that learners who are subcontracted-in to a FE college from a HEI for provision at level 4 or above must not be included on the ILR ie those are not enrolled at the provider but are studying on provision delivered by the provider on behalf of another provider. Duplication can occur when an institution erroneously submits data to the ILR on students franchised to them from a partner HEI. Analysis undertaken by HEFCE for this research, suggests that a conservative estimate for the amount of duplication in the 2009/10 population was approximately 2,500 individuals (for UK-domiciled part-time students at English institutions).

In the following sections we first explore the part-time market from the perspective of HEIs based on the analysis of HESA data. We then turn to the part-time market where it is located in the FE sector, based on the analysis of the ILR. Where possible the data are limited to UK-domiciled students, to explore domestic provision. Further analysis covering the nature and profile of part-time students, rather than part-time provision, is provided in Chapter 7. This includes study aims such as subject and, of particular importance to this research, level of study (whether studying at first degree or other undergraduate level).

2.3 Part-time provision located in HEIs

2.3.1 Part-time undergraduate trends

The number of part-time undergraduates has grown in the past 10 years. At the start of the decade (2000/2001) there were 488,165 UK-domiciled undergraduates studying part-time in HEIs across the UK. One in five of these were studying at first degree level, but the majority were studying at other undergraduate level. Other undergraduate level includes study towards foundation degrees, diplomas in HE, Higher National Diplomas, Higher National Certificates, Diplomas of HE, Certificates of HE, foundation courses at HE level, vocational qualifications at levels 4 and 5, professional qualifications at undergraduate level, and institutional undergraduate credits. By the end of the decade in 2009/10, part-time numbers had grown to 552,440, an increase of 13 per cent (see Table 2.1). Over the

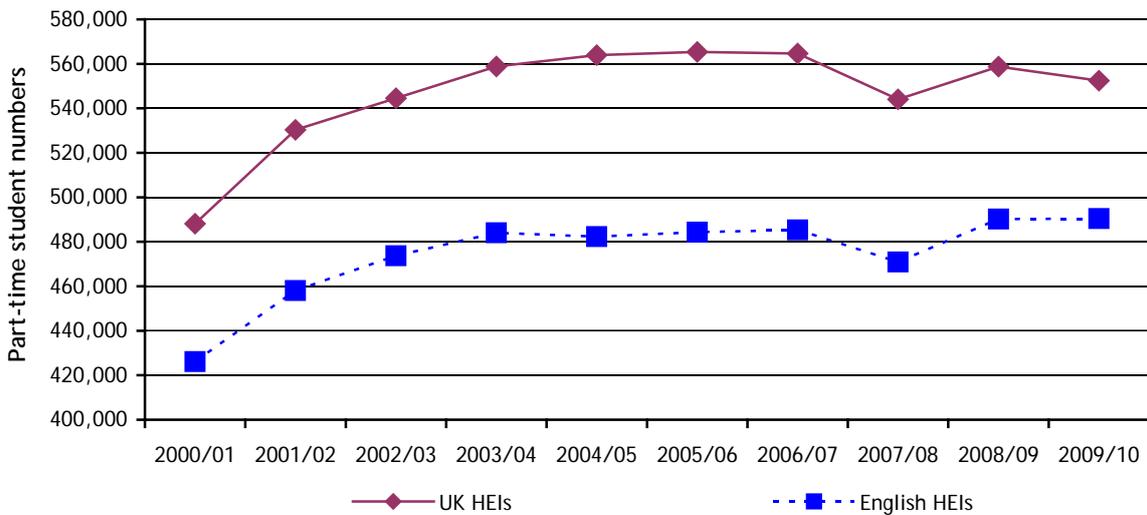
²⁹ This has been calculated from the 2008/09 ILR learning aims dataset, with receipt of LSC Adult Learner Responsive Funding (variable A10 which identifies monies received for providing a place for a learner) acting as a proxy for non-prescribed HE.

³⁰ See the Individualised Learner Record 2009/10: learner Responsive Provider Support Manual Version 1 – May 2009, The Information Authority; and Individualised Learner Record 2011/12: Provider Support Manual 2011/12, Version 1 – June 2011, The Information Authority

same time period the numbers of full-time undergraduate students rose from 934,255 to over one million at 1,160,865, a growth of 24 per cent (see Figure 2.2).

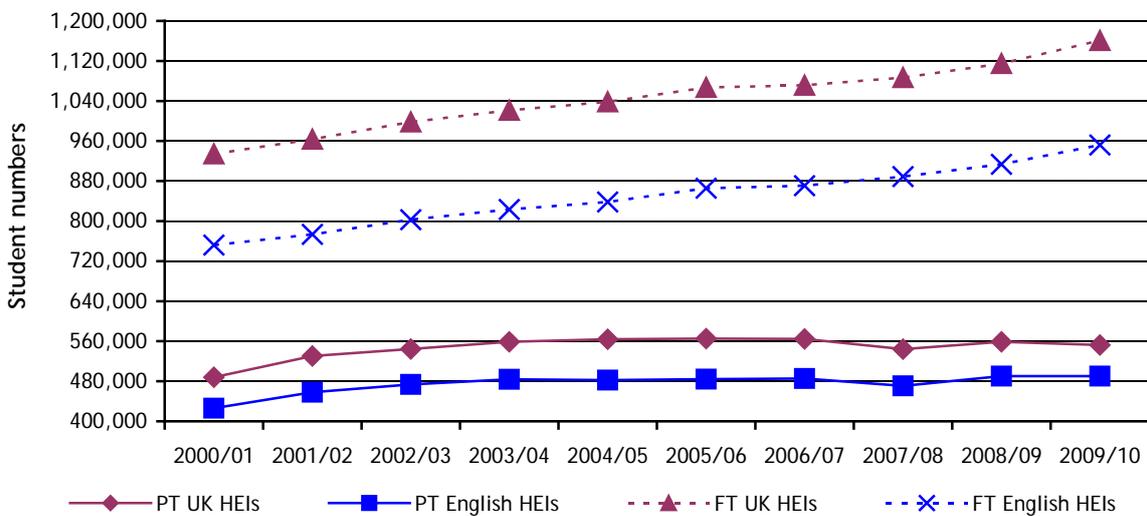
The growth in part-time students has not been a steady one, however, and some years saw a decrease in part-time student numbers (see Figure 2.1). There has also been a shift in the nature of part-time undergraduate study over the decade, with a larger number of part-time students now recorded as studying at first degree level. By 2009/10 over one-third (37 per cent) of all part-time students were recorded as studying at first degree level.

Figure 2.1 1: Change in part-time student numbers over time (UK-domiciled only)



Source: Taken from HESA Students in Higher Education Institutions, Tables 1a& 1e, IES analysis 2011

Figure 2.2 1: Change in full- and part-time student numbers over time (UK-domiciled only)



Source: Taken from HESA Students in Higher Education Institutions, Tables 1a & 1e, IES analysis 2011

Upon closer inspection these changes are heavily influenced by the OU, and are largely due to changes in the way OU students are recorded. From 2003/04 onwards, following HEFCE requirements, the OU provided a split between part-time first degree and part-time other undergraduate based on students' award intention (though students do not have to declare an award intention). Previously all OU students were recorded as studying at other undergraduate level or other postgraduate level. Over the 10 years, the OU saw their part-time undergraduate numbers increase by 54 per cent. Indeed, excluding OU students from the figures shows that part-time student numbers overall have changed very little over the decade (see Table 2.1). However, this still hides considerable variety in the patterns of part-time provision. Exploring the change in part-time undergraduate numbers at an institutional level between the years of 2000/01 and 2009/10 shows that while approximately half of all the HEIs in England increased their part-time undergraduate numbers (in some cases more than doubling their provision), the other half saw their part-time provision decrease. However, no institutions appeared to take up part-time study or indeed drop part-time provision between the two time points.

Table 2.1 1: Numbers of part-time students in UK HEIs over time by level of study (UK-domiciled only, across all years of study)

	First degree	Other UG	All UG
All part-time UG students			
2000/01	96,610	391,560	488,165
2001/02	103,195	427,115	530,310
2002/03	103,545	441,020	544,565
2003/04*	188,360	370,480	558,840
2004/05	190,065	373,870	563,935
2005/06	196,120	369,245	565,365
2006/07	191,395	373,260	564,655
2007/08	188,550	355,475	544,020
2008/09	196,395	362,400	558,790
2009/10	203,665	348,775	552,440
% change (2000/01 to 2009/10)	110.81	-10.93	13.17
Excluding OU students			
2000/01	96,610	264,745	361,355
2009/10	98,275	259,000	357,275
% change (2000/01 to 2009/10)	1.72	-2.17	-1.13

Note*: Change in data series at 2003/04 due to changes in the way OU students are recorded.

Source: Taken from HESA Students in Higher Education Institutions, Tables 1a & 1e, IES analysis 2011

It is interesting to note that the fastest growth among the part-time undergraduate population has been among young students (under 21 on entry). The number of young new entrants has doubled in less than 10 years from 13,385 in 2000/01 to 27,180 in 2008/09. Putting this growth aside, the majority of part-time undergraduate students are

still older individuals (aged at least 30 years on entry to their course), accounting for 64 per cent of all new entrants in 2008/09.

Table 2.2: Part-time new entrants (first years) to UK HEIs over time by age (UK-domiciled only)

	Under 21	21-24	25-29	30 & over	ALL
2000/01	13,385	26,560	38,500	168,800	256,320
2001/02	15,555	30,720	41,005	193,450	292,005
2002/03	15,645	32,400	40,890	189,975	291,155
2003/04	16,750	34,225	42,670	201,710	303,665
2004/05	19,520	33,815	42,595	196,810	299,770
2005/06	21,480	35,930	46,630	208,925	318,030
2006/07	25,215	37,160	48,395	205,490	320,095
2007/08	25,500	35,985	48,080	199,800	311,395
2008/09	27,180	37,290	50,740	207,385	324,260
% change (2000/01 to 2008/09)	103.06	40.40	31.79	22.86	26.51

Source: Taken from HESA Students in Higher Education Institutions, Tables 1b & 1f, IES analysis 2011; not available from 2009/10 onwards

2.3.2 The size and shape of the part-time undergraduate market

Analysis of individual-level HESA data (of students registered with higher education institutions³¹) shows that approximately one-third of the UK-domiciled undergraduate student population of 1.69 million students were recorded as studying part-time. In the academic year 2009/10, there were a total number of 547,175 part-time students, an increase of two per cent on the total in 2007/08 of 536,495. Over the same period, full-time student numbers increased by seven per cent. Following the trends indicated above, part-time numbers are growing but at a much slower rate than found for full-time students (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Total undergraduate students in the United Kingdom by mode of qualification (2007/08 and 2009/10)

Year	Full-time		Part-time		Total undergraduates
	Number (N)	%	Number (N)	%	Number (N)
2007/08	1,072,230	67	536,495	33	1,608,725
2009/10	1,145,960	68	547,175	32	1,693,140

Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

³¹ Excluding students at London Metropolitan University, University College Birmingham and Liverpool Hope University.

In 2009/10 165 HEIs across the UK were recorded by HESA as having undergraduate students registered with them, and 145 of these had part-time students^{32 33}.

The size of the undergraduate part-time population varied considerably by institution. The institution with the largest number of undergraduate part-time students was the OU with 195,165, accounting for more than one-third (36 per cent) of all UK-domiciled undergraduate part-time students (see Table 2.4). Other English HEIs³⁴ with large numbers of part-time undergraduate students were Teesside University, Birkbeck College (University of London), University of Central Lancashire, London South Bank University, University of Plymouth and University of Hull. Each of these HEIs had more than 7,000 part-time students studying at undergraduate level.

Others in the top 25 largest providers of part-time undergraduate study in England were: Anglia Ruskin University, Staffordshire University, University of Northumbria, University West of Scotland, University of Greenwich, University of Sunderland, University of Warwick, Edge Hill University, University of Huddersfield, University of Wolverhampton, University West of England, Thames Valley University, Leeds Metropolitan, Coventry University, Sheffield Hallam University, Birmingham City University, Canterbury Christ Church University and University of East London (see Figure 2.4).

2.3.3 The influence of the Open University

HESA data for the academic year 2009/10 show that 36 per cent of all undergraduate part-time students are enrolled at the OU (195,165). Table 2.4 shows a breakdown of the mode of study of students at the OU and the other HEIs covered in HESA data. Virtually all (99.9) per cent of OU students were studying part-time. In other HEIs, less than a quarter of all undergraduates are part-time students (24 per cent). As the largest single provider of part-time undergraduate studies, and the largest specialist provider of part-time study, it is important to explore how this institution influences the nature and profile of part-time provision and part-time students.

³² At least 10 part-time students.

³³ Students registered with an institution may not be taught by that institution. Some HEIs have partnership/franchise arrangements with other HEIs or, more commonly, with FEIs. The data does not identify whether students are subject to these franchise arrangements.

³⁴ Please note that some institutions may have changed their names; the names quoted here were correct in 2009/10.

Table 2.4: Full-time and part-time students enrolled at the Open University or other HEIs (2009/10)

	Open University		Other HEIs	
	Number	%	Number	%
Full-time	15	0.0	1,145,950	76.5
Part-time	195,165	100.0	352,010	23.5
Base (N)	195,180	100.0	1,497,960	100.0

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Analysis across all institutions shows that the level of study and types of undergraduate qualifications that full- and part-time students study towards differ considerably and so full- and part-time study can be very different. Most notable is that the majority of part-time students are aiming for other undergraduate qualifications. The opposite is the case for full-time students, where the majority are working towards a first degree (i.e. bachelors' degree). This is explored in much greater detail in Chapter 7, when we examine demand for part-time study.

Focusing on the OU provision, Table 2.5 provides a breakdown of students of the OU and other HEIs by their level of studies, and shows that the share of students enrolled in a first degree programme is twice as high at the OU (54 per cent) than at other HEIs (27 per cent); 73 per cent of all part-time students at other HEIs are enrolled in 'other undergraduate' programmes³⁵.

Table 2.5: Level of studies of students enrolled at the Open University or other HEIs (2009/10) (per cent)

	Open University		Other HEIs		Total
	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Total	
First degree	54.0	90.2	27.0	75.4	
Other undergraduate	46.0	9.7	72.7	24.5	
Base (N)	195,165	1,145,950	352,010	1,497,960	

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Table 2.6 describes the subjects studied by full-time and part-time students at the OU and other HEIs. This table shows that there are some subject areas not covered by undergraduate programmes of the OU, in particular medicine/dentistry, veterinary sciences/agriculture, architecture/building and planning, mass communication and non-European languages.

³⁵ These include qualification aims below degree level such as foundation degrees, diplomas in HE with eligibility to register to practice with a Health or Social Care regulatory body, Higher National Diploma (HND), Higher National Certificate (HNC), Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE), Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE), foundation courses at HE level, NVQ/SVQ levels 4 and 5, post-degree diplomas and certificates at undergraduate level, professional qualifications at undergraduate level, other undergraduate diplomas and certificates including post-registration health and social care courses, other formal HE qualifications of less than degree standard, institutional undergraduate credits and no formal undergraduate qualifications.

The relative size of many other subject areas studied by students of the OU is similar to the share of full-time students in other HEIs, in particular in the natural sciences, social studies and languages. The share of part-time students at the OU in engineering (two per cent) is smaller than the corresponding share of full-time studies at other HEIs (five per cent), and similarly, there are relatively fewer students in business studies (seven per cent compared with 11 per cent) and law (two per cent compared with four per cent).

The most obvious difference between part-time students of the OU and other HEIs is the much higher share of students enrolled in combinations of subjects or programmes with an unspecified subject³⁶. This group represents 40 per cent of the OU's student body, but only 0.3 per cent of the full-time and seven per cent of the part-time students in other HEIs.

The other important difference is the dominance of two subjects, education and subjects allied to medicine, in the other HEIs. More than 50 per cent of the part-time students study these subjects, compared with only five per cent at the OU. Obviously, the OU covers a wide range of subject specific programmes in their part-time provision, while the offer in most of the other universities is restricted to selective subjects. See also below 'Subject coverage of part-time students and part-time shares at HEI level'.

Table 2.6: Subjects studied by students enrolled at the Open University or other HEIs (2009/10)(per cent)

	Open University		Other HEIs	
	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Medicine/Dentistry	-	3.6	0.1	2.8
Subjects Allied to Medicine	1.1	12.1	27.6	15.7
Biological Sciences	9.1	9.8	2.9	8.2
Veterinary Sciences/Agriculture	-	1.2	1.3	1.2
Physical Sciences	5.1	4.6	1.2	3.8
Mathematical/Computer Sciences	7.5	6.2	2.7	5.4
Engineering	1.9	4.9	4.3	4.7
Technologies	0.7	0.9	0.4	0.8
Architecture/Building and Planning	-	2.6	4.1	2.9
Social Studies	9.8	9.2	6.8	8.6
Law	2.3	4.2	2.4	3.8
Business and Administrative Studies	6.6	11.1	11.0	11.0
Mass Comm./Documentation	-	3.0	0.8	2.5
Linguistics/Classics	3.9	3.9	1.2	3.3
European Languages/Literature	2.3	1.9	3.7	2.3
Other Languages		0.5	0.5	0.5
Historical and Philosophical Studies	5.7	4.4	3.7	4.3

³⁶ Programmes of study are coded into subject areas and disciplines using the Joint Academic Coding System or JACS. Where there is no programme code, they are recorded as unspecified.

	Open University		Other HEIs	
	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Creative Arts and Design	0.5	11.0	3.0	9.1
Education	4.4	4.8	14.9	7.2
Combined/Unspecified	39.1	0.3	7.4	2.0
Base (N)	195,165	1,145,950	352,010	1,497,960

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

2.3.4 Differences in provision by geography and by type of institution

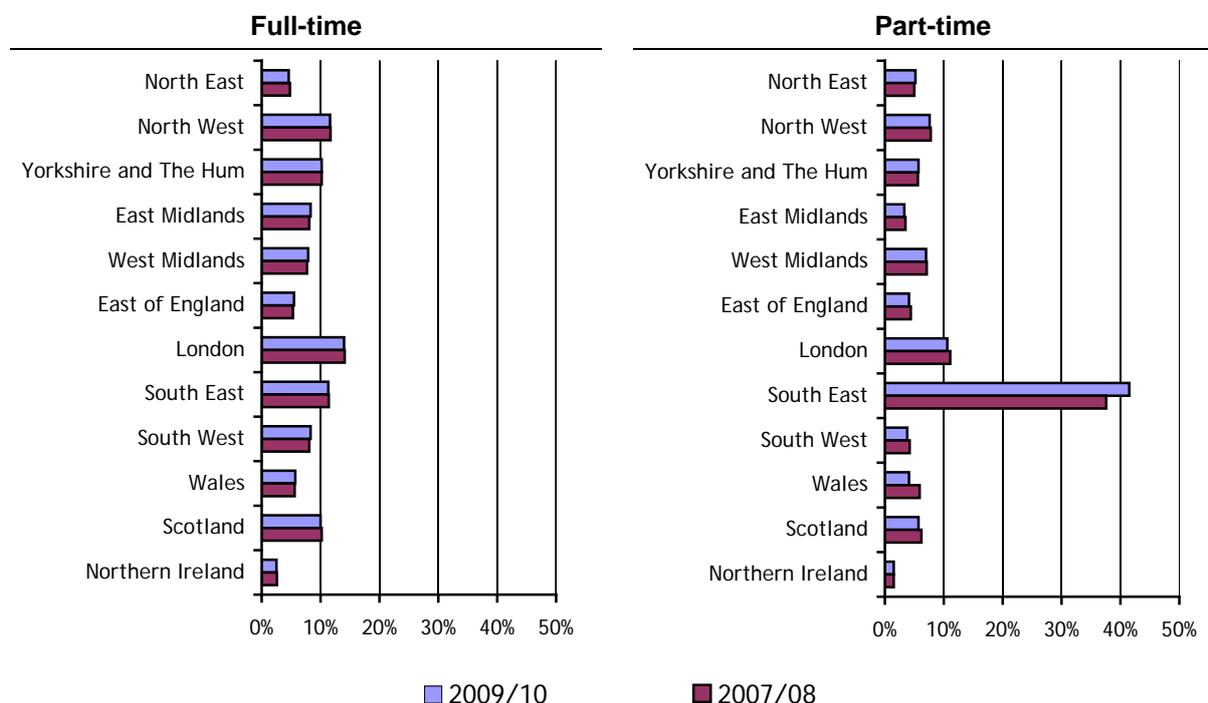
Region

The data indicates that the largest proportion of part-time students is found in the South East (41 per cent in 2009/10). This can largely be explained by the location of the OU, which has its administrative base in Milton Keynes in the South East. Other key areas/concentrations of part-time students include: London (11 per cent) and the North West (eight per cent). Generally the pattern of geographical distribution of part-time students mirrors that of full-time students, and there has been very little change over the last few years (see Figure 2.3).

If we look at the regional distribution separately for OU students and those enrolled at other HEIs in the UK, all OU students are indeed 'recorded' as studying in the South East. However, this is an artefact of the data. The OU is a national university. It has 13 regions covering the UK that are responsible for supporting students, and students live and study across the whole of the UK. Indeed, using postcode data of students' home address, only 16 per cent of OU students live in the South East.

The regions with the largest proportions of other part-time students are still London (accounting for 16 per cent of non-OU part-time students) and the North West (12 per cent) and also the West Midlands (11 per cent). The regions with the smallest numbers and proportion of part-time students (non-OU) are Northern Ireland (two per cent), the East Midlands (five per cent) and the South West (six per cent). Again the pattern for other HEIs generally mirrors that of full-time students but it is interesting to note the relative over-representation of part-time students in the North East, and under-representation (when compared with full-time students) in the East Midlands (see Table 2.7).

Figure 2.3: Region of study of UK undergraduate students by mode (for 2007/08 and 2009/10) (per cent)



Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Table 2.7: Region of study of UK undergraduate students for those enrolled at the Open University or other HEIs (for 2009/10) (per cent)

	Open University		Other HEIs		Total
	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	
North East	0.0	4.6	8.0		5.2
North West	0.0	11.6	11.8		7.6
Yorkshire and The Humber	0.0	10.2	8.9		5.7
East Midlands	0.0	8.3	5.1		3.3
West Midlands	0.0	7.9	10.8		7.0
East of England	0.0	5.5	6.3		4.1
London	0.0	14.0	16.4		10.6
South East	100.0	11.3	9.0		41.5
South West	0.0	8.3	5.9		3.8
Wales	0.0	5.7	6.4		4.1
Scotland	0.0	10.0	8.9		5.7
Northern Ireland	0.0	2.5	2.3		1.5
Base (N)	195,165	1,145,950	352,010		547,175

Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

HEIs with very high (and very low) shares of part-time students

Based on the HESA data for the academic year 2009/10, there were 33 HEIs in the UK reporting that more than 30 per cent of their undergraduate students were part-time

students. These institutions were spread geographically across most of the regions and countries of the UK, with the exception of Northern Ireland, the East Midlands and the South West.

In these three areas, Queens University Belfast (23 per cent, around 3,800 of its 17,000 undergraduate students), the University of Northampton (30 per cent, 3,160 part-time undergraduate students) and the University of Plymouth (29 per cent) have the highest share of part-time students. Further, although the share of part-time students at the University of Plymouth is slightly lower than 30 per cent, the total number of students enrolled in part-time programmes is the sixth highest of any UK HEI (about 7,600). Only the OU (c.195,000 part-time undergraduate students), Teesside University (c.15,000 part-time undergraduate), Birkbeck College (c.13,400 part-time undergraduate), University of Central Lancashire (c.9,180 part-time undergraduate) and London South Bank University (c.7,800 part-time undergraduate) report more students enrolled in part-time mode.

In addition to the OU and Birkbeck College with 100 per cent part-time provision, English institutions³⁷ with a relatively large percentage of undergraduate part-time students within their student body are Teesside University (65 per cent), University of Bolton (49 per cent), University of Sunderland (48 per cent), Thames Valley University (47 per cent), London South Bank University (45 per cent), Edge Hill University (43 per cent), University of Warwick (42 per cent), University of Cumbria (42 per cent), Anglia Ruskin University (42 per cent), Staffordshire University (42 per cent), University of Hull (40 per cent) and Buckinghamshire New University (40 per cent).

In each of these institutions, part-time students accounted for at least 40 per cent of all undergraduates. Several other institutions also have a relatively large part-time student body (compared with their full-time student numbers) but these either have a small student body overall at undergraduate level, such as the Institute of Education (only 665 undergraduates), or are specialist providers of HE such as Harper Adams University College (specialising in farming and agricultural studies) or St George's Hospital Medical School (now St George's, University of London, specialising in health sciences).

Institutions in the other nations of the UK with a high proportion of part-time students are University of Wales, Newport (54 per cent of their undergraduate student body), University of the West of Scotland (45 per cent), Glyndwr University (44 per cent), University of Wales, Lampeter (42 per cent), Trinity University College, Wales (50 per cent) and UHI Millennium Institute, Scotland (54 per cent).

A map of the UK shows the geographical distribution of the HEIs with more than 30 per cent of their undergraduate students studying in part-time mode (Figure 2.4 below).

Nine institutions in England and one in Scotland were reported to have no part-time students enrolled at undergraduate level. With the exception of the Imperial College of Science and Technology (5,500 undergraduate students), all HEIs without part-time

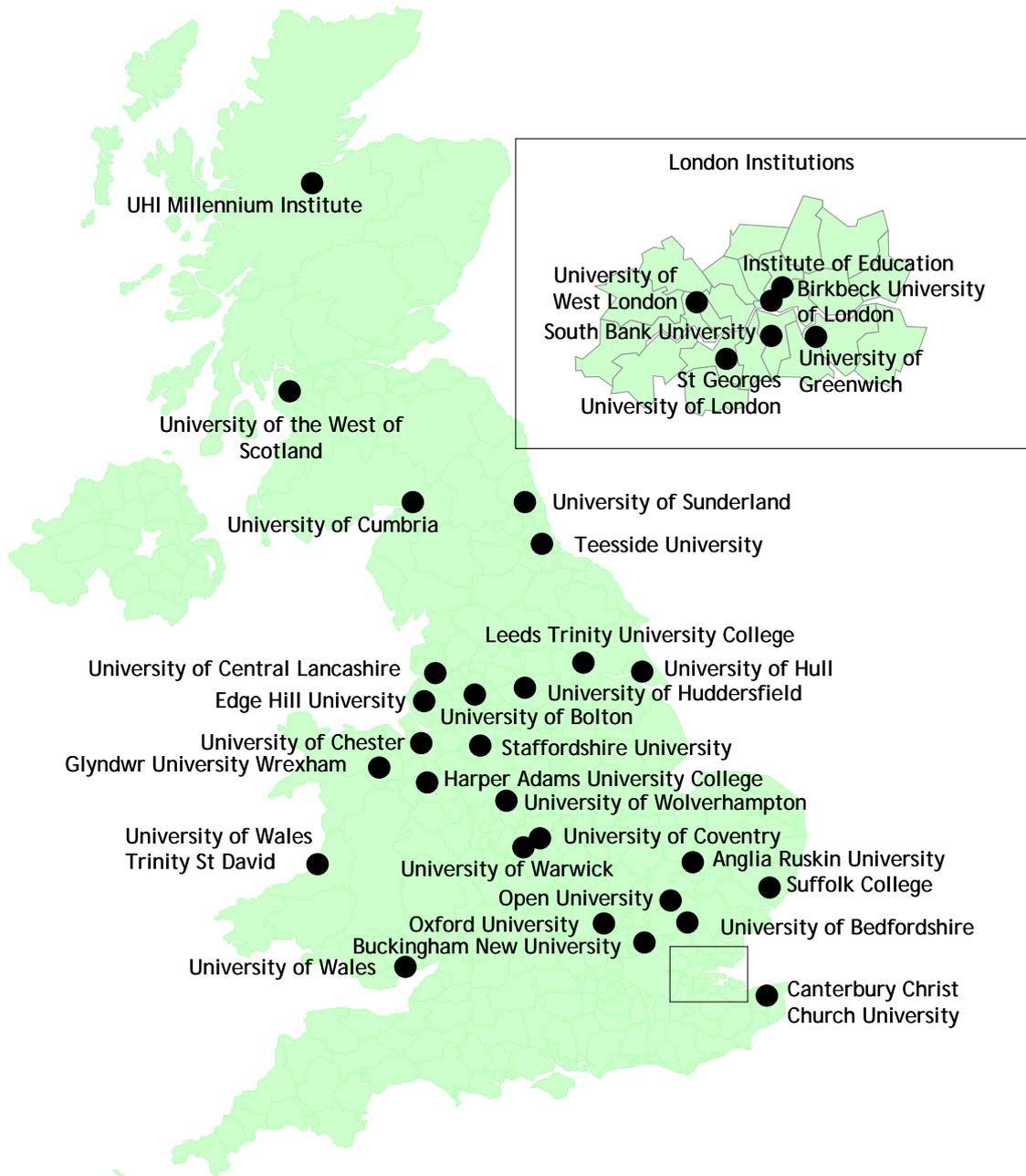
³⁷ Please note that some institutions may have changed their names; the names quoted here were correct in 2009/10.

students are small specialist creative and performing arts institutions (generally with fewer than 500 undergraduate students).

Some 35 HEIs report a share of part-time students of below five per cent. The largest of these in terms of their overall undergraduate student body are:

- University for the Creative Arts (4,880 undergraduate students)
- University of the Arts London (8,575 undergraduate students)
- Loughborough University (10,565 undergraduate students)
- University of Edinburgh (14,800 undergraduate students)
- University College London (8,725 undergraduate students)
- University of Durham (10,315 undergraduate students)
- University of Exeter (10,450 undergraduate students)
- University of Newcastle (12,495 undergraduate students)
- Queen Mary and Westfield College (9,120 undergraduate students)
- Imperial College (5,550 undergraduate students).

Figure 2.4: UK HEIs with high shares of UK part-time students (> 30 per cent)(2009)



Notes: A) Map Bruce Jones Design (reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey, Crown Copyright NC/2005/3257), B) University headquarters only for multi-site HEIs, C) Part-time rates for all undergraduate students at HEI level (in full-person equivalents, 2009/10) based on HESA data (not available for University College Birmingham, London Metropolitan University and Liverpool Hope University).

The wider research literature indicates that some city regions are found to have no part-time undergraduates at all (Callender et al., 2010). Given that it is common for part-time students to study at an institution near to where they live rather than to relocate in order to study (80 per cent of part-time students study in the region where they live; Boorman et al., 2006), this analysis could indicate some supply constraints in part-time provision. A recent National Audit Office (NAO) study into widening participation noted that there are some

geographic areas with little or no part-time HE provision, and concluded that more needed to be done to expand the local and regional HE offer (NAO, 2008).

Subject coverage of part-time students and part-time shares at HEI level

Using **national student data**, Figure 2.5 depicts the share of part-time students as a percentage of all undergraduate students at the level of the HEI and at the same time the number of major subject groups (JACS codes³⁸) with a minimum of 10 part-time students enrolled. The graph shows two important dimensions of part-time provision:

- whether the HEI is a specific provider of part-time studies, expressed by a high share of part-time students within their overall undergraduate student body
- whether part-time studies covers many or few subject areas out of a maximum of 20 major subject groups (including one category for combined studies).

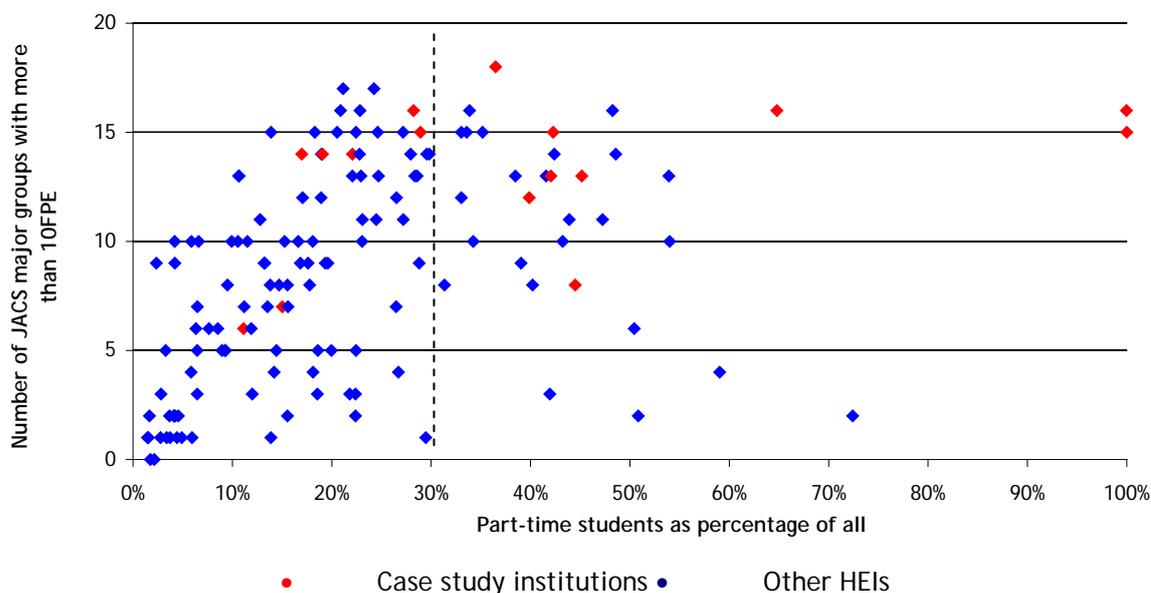
Using these dimensions we can distinguish between four types of part-time undergraduate HE provider:

- **Large-scale providers** – there are 24 HEIs with high shares of part-time students and a wide coverage of subject areas. The institutions include the OU, Birkbeck College and Teesside University. Other HEIs with more than 10 major subject groups covered and more part-time students representing more than 40 per cent of their total undergraduate student body are noted below, and the majority of institutions in this group are post-92 universities:
 - University of Warwick
 - Staffordshire University
 - Anglia Ruskin University
 - University of Cumbria
 - Edge Hill University
 - Glyndwr University Wrexham
 - London South Bank University
 - University of West London
 - University of Sunderland

³⁸ The HE sector in the UK uses a system of identifying and coding subjects known as JACS – the Joint Academic Coding System. This provides a uniform way to identify the subject matter of programmes and modules across all levels and modes of HE study. There are three levels of categorisation – subject area (or major subject group), principle subjects and individual subjects.

- University of Bolton
 - UHI Millennium Institute
 - University of Wales at Newport.
- **Specialist providers** – nine HEIs which offer relatively few subject areas, but have high shares of part-time students. In some HEIs like the Institute of Education, University of Wales at Lampeter and St George’s Medical School, there are very few subjects covered. Other HEIs specialist providers like Buckinghamshire New University or University of West of Scotland cover more areas and are more like the large-scale specialist providers.
 - **Small-scale providers** – there are 46 HEIs with relatively low part-time rates (below 30 per cent of all undergraduate students) offering part-time studies for a wide range of subjects. These 46 HEIs include some of the largest providers of undergraduate studies in the country, in particular the University of Plymouth, Manchester Metropolitan University, Sheffield Hallam University, the University of the West of England, Leeds Met and the University of Northumbria at Newcastle, all with more than 20,000 undergraduate students enrolled in 2009/10. Again, these tend to be post-1992 institutions.
 - **Limited providers** – the largest group of 79 HEIs offer part-time studies in limited subject areas and at the same time have relatively few part-time students. This group includes specialist HEIs for the Arts, generally without or with very few part-time students, and institutions with traditionally a limited range of subjects on offer, such as the London School of Economics and Political Science, the School of Oriental and African Studies, the School of Pharmacy and the Royal Agricultural College. However, there are also some very large-scale HEIs in this category like the University of Manchester (with almost 24,000 students the seventh biggest provider of undergraduate studies in the country) or the University of Nottingham, with 20,800 students and part-time coverage in six out of 20 subject areas. In contrast to the other groups, many of the institutions here are pre-1992 universities with a long history and tradition of full-time undergraduate study.

Figure 2.5 shows the variation across the UK. The red dots indicate the case studies selected for this study representing these different models of undergraduate provision.

Figure 2.5: Subject coverage and part-time shares at HEI level (2009/10)(per cent)

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

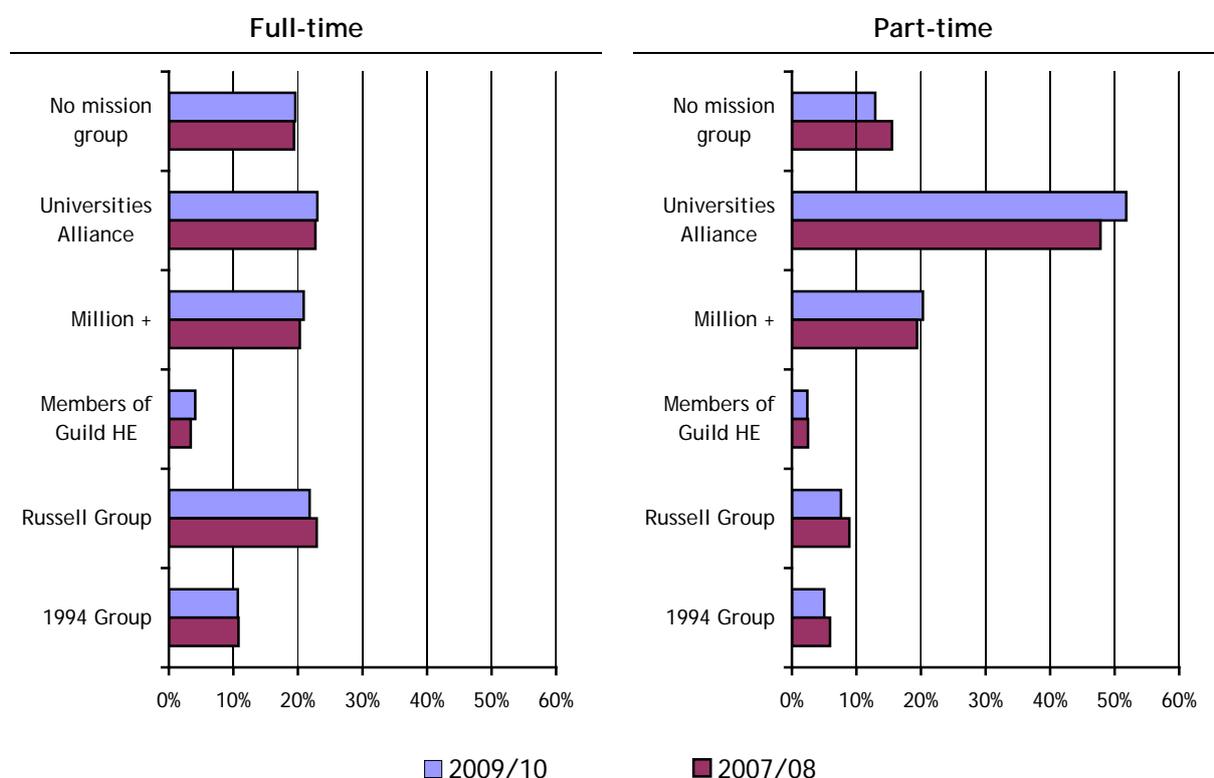
Mission groups³⁹

Part-time study tends to take place in different types of institutions to full-time study and this is likely to align with institutions' priorities and stated missions. HESA student data shows that part-time students are less likely than full-time students to be attending a Russell Group university (eight per cent compared with 22 per cent) and they are also less likely to be attending a 1994 Group university (five per cent compared with 11 per cent). Between 2007/08 and 2009/10 the proportion of part-time students in these research-focused institutions fell slightly over time⁴⁰. Instead part-time students tended to be concentrated in Universities Alliance institutions, which include the OU. The proportion of all part-time students studying in a Million+ institution is very similar to the proportion of full-time students; see Figure 2.6.

³⁹ Many HEIs have formed groups to reflect their common interests; these are known as mission groups. The key mission groups in the HE sector are the 1994 Group (founded in 1994) of 19 universities, Million+ mainly comprising post-1992 universities, the Russell Group of 20 major research-intensive universities, and the University Alliance launched in 2007. See Universities UK for an overview. The Association of Colleges, the 157 Group and the Mixed Economy Group are also important organisations, representing institutions in the FE sector who offer HE-level provision. They are not included in this analysis as HESA student data is restricted to HEIs only.

⁴⁰ The technical appendix to this report gives a breakdown of universities by mission group.

Figure 2.6: Type of institution attended by UK undergraduate students by mode (for 2007/08 and 2009/10)(per cent)



Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Looking within university groups and the relative size of their part-time student population (Figure 2.7), HESA student data shows that over half of students across the **Universities Alliance** group of institutions are studying part-time (52 per cent, in 2009/10). This pattern is largely driven by the OU, which has nearly 100 per cent of its students studying part-time. Other institutions within this group with a high concentration of part-time students are Teesside University, and University of Wales, Newport. Universities Alliance institutions with a relatively small part-time cohort are Nottingham Trent University (10 per cent), the University of Wales Institute (11 per cent) and Manchester Metropolitan University (14 per cent).

Across the **Million+** group of institutions, almost one-third (32 per cent) of the UK-domiciled undergraduate student body are studying part-time. Across this group of institutions, the relative size of the part-time student cohort varies considerably – from the University of Sunderland (which has almost half of its undergraduate population studying part-time, 48 per cent) to Kingston University (11 per cent), University of Abertay Dundee (10 per cent) and Bath Spa University (10 per cent).

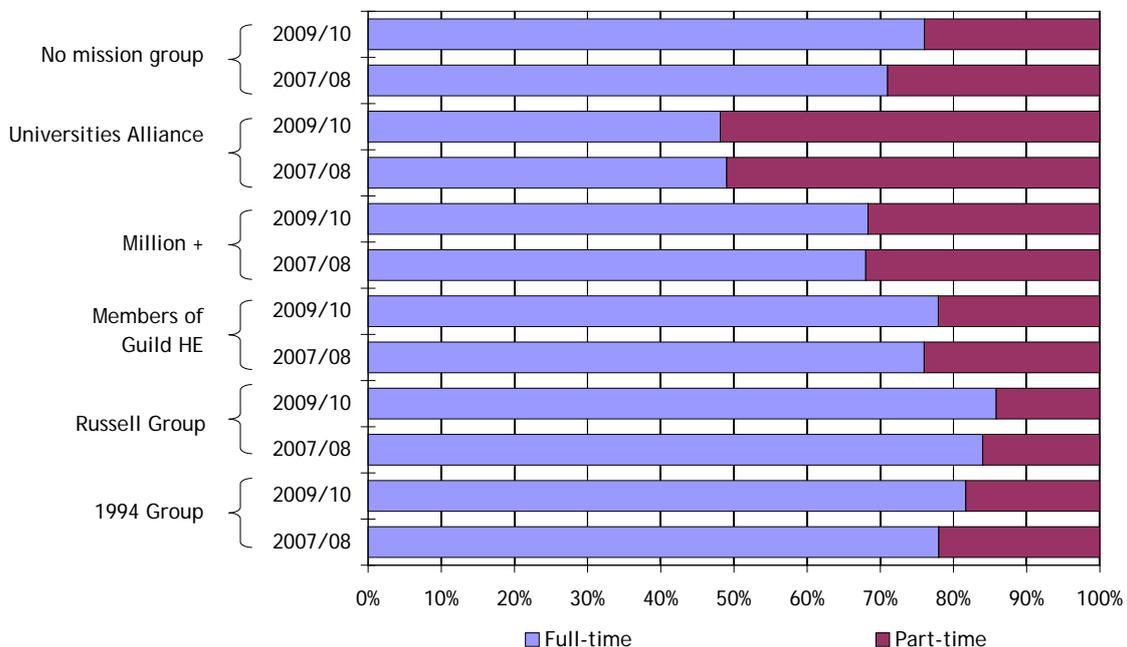
The members of the **Guild HE** mission group of institutions have a much lower prevalence of part-time undergraduate study. Across the group, 22 per cent of the combined UK-domiciled undergraduate student body are studying part-time. Many institutions in the group have very few undergraduate students studying part-time. These tend to be the specialist creative and performing arts institutes (reflecting the lower proportion of part-time students studying creative arts and design subjects). The University of Cumbria and

Harper Adams University College have the highest rates of part-time study in this group (42 and 59 per cent respectively).

The **Russell Group** universities, overall, have the lowest rates of part-time undergraduate study. Across the group, part-time students only account for 14 per cent of their UK-domiciled undergraduates. Many institutions in this group have less than 10 per cent of their undergraduate student population studying part-time. The exceptions are the University of Warwick, which has approaching one-half (42 per cent) of its undergraduate population studying part-time, and the University of Oxford (with 31 per cent). This type of part-time study, however, is likely to be very different to that offered in other institutions; it is largely not at first degree level and could be termed 'extra-mural'.

Across the **1994 Group** of universities, part-time students make up below one in five (18 per cent) of the UK-domiciled undergraduate population. Many of these 1994 Group universities have a very small proportion of their student populations studying part-time (less than 10 per cent). The exceptions here are Birkbeck College (which, as noted earlier, is a specialist provider of part-time study) and the Institute of Education (with 100 and 71 per cent of their populations respectively). Almost half of the rest of the universities in this mission group have less than 10 per cent of their undergraduate population studying part-time.

Figure 2.7: Balance between UK full-time and part-time undergraduate student population by mission group (for 2007/08 and 2009/10) (per cent)



Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Differences across the countries of the UK

The proportion of part-time students appears to vary between the four nations of the UK. Comparing the location of the university rather than the student domicile shows that there

is a higher rate of part-time students in England but this difference is entirely driven by the recording of OU students as studying in England in the HESA data set. However, as noted earlier, the OU includes students from the other nations of the UK and these students are likely to be studying in these other nations. When the OU is excluded from the England totals, the differences across the nations are only marginal. The part-time rates are marginally higher in Wales and England than in Scotland and Northern Ireland (Table 2.8).

Table 2.8: Part-time rates across countries of the UK (based on HEI location) (2009/10) (per cent)

	Full-time	Part-time	Base(N)
England	65.9	34.1	1,422,455
<i>(England excluding OU)</i>	<i>76.4</i>	<i>23.6</i>	<i>1,227,275</i>
Wales	74.2	25.8	87,640
Scotland	78.6	21.4	145,835
Northern Ireland	77.9	22.1	37,210
UK total	67.7	32.3	1,693,140

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Examining the level of students' studies shows a much higher share of students in Wales in other undergraduate programmes (84 per cent) compared with other nations in the UK (62 per cent in England, or 73 per cent when OU students are excluded; 69 per cent in Scotland; and 63 per cent in Northern Ireland) (Table 2.9).

Table 2.9: Level of studies across countries of the UK (based on HEI location) (2009/10) (per cent)

	England*			Wales		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
First degree	89.1	38.0 (27.3)	71.7	93.6	16.1	73.6
Other undergraduate	10.8	61.8 (72.7)	28.2	6.5	83.8	26.4
Base (N)	937,370	485,085 (289,040)	1,422,455	65,050	22,590	87,640
	Scotland			Northern Ireland		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
First degree	95.2	30.6	81.3	99.1	36.8	85.3
Other undergraduate	4.8	69.2	18.7	0.8	63.2	14.7
Base (N)	114,570	31,265	145,835	28,970	8,240	37,210

Note:* For England, the relevant proportion and number excluding Open University students are shown in brackets.

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

In Table 2.10, we analyse potential differences in the qualifications on entry of full-time and part-time undergraduate students in the different nations of the UK. This table shows two important differences:

- The proportions of both full-time and part-time undergraduate students with previous HE qualifications or an existing degree are higher in Scotland than in the other nations of the UK.
- There are relatively more part-time students in Wales with no formal or other qualifications. As described above, the higher proportion of people in other undergraduate programmes seems to correspond to this.

Table 2.10: Entry qualifications across countries of the UK (2009/10) (per cent)

	England			Wales		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Postgraduate and PGCE	0.5	8.3	3.0	0.4	11.0	3.0
First degree, other graduate, HE credits, other HE and professional	8.7	45.0	20.6	7.3	45.1	16.5
GCE A-level, SQA High	85.8	38.4	70.2	86.9	31.7	73.4
Other and no formal qualifications	5.1	8.3	6.2	5.5	12.2	7.1
Base (N)	928,240	454,980	1,383,220	63,795	20,545	84,340
	Scotland			Northern Ireland		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Postgraduate and PGCE	0.4	10.1	2.1	0.7	9.5	1.9
First degree, other graduate, HE credits, other HE and professional	15.9	58.0	23.3	7.8	51.3	14.0
GCE A-level, SQA High	80.0	23.7	70.0	89.9	35.7	82.1
Other and no formal qualifications	3.7	8.2	4.5	1.7	3.5	2.0
Base (N)	109,535	23,520	133,055	28,610	4,780	33,385

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

The subject areas studied by both full-time and part-time students in the different nations of the UK are very similar, with subjects allied to medicine and education being the most important areas everywhere (Table 2.11). There are some differences, particularly the high share of part-time students in England, whose subject area is combined or unspecified, which is again likely to be driven by the OU's student body, but there is also a similarly high proportion in Scotland. In contrast, there are much lower proportions of part-time students with combined or unspecified subject areas in Wales (14 per cent), but in particular in Northern Ireland (0.2 per cent).

Relatively more part-time students are enrolled in programmes in subjects allied to medicine in Northern Ireland (20 per cent) than in England (18 per cent) and Wales (13 per cent), similar to Scotland, where there are 22 per cent of all part-timers study this subject. The percentage of part-time students on business studies courses (23 per cent) and education courses (30 per cent) is much higher in Northern Ireland than elsewhere. Business studies accounts for nine to 10 per cent of the part-time students in the other nations in the UK, and education for between six per cent in Scotland and 11 per cent in England. However, there are also relatively many more part-time students on courses in

education in Wales, where a quarter of all undergraduate part-time students study this subject.

Table 2.11: Subject breakdown across countries of the UK (2009/10)(per cent)

	England			Wales		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Medicine/Dentistry	3.5	0.1	2.3	3.1	0.0	2.3
Subjects Allied to Medicine	11.8	18.0	13.9	10.7	13.2	11.4
Biological Sciences	9.5	5.5	8.2	13.3	1.5	10.3
Veterinary Sciences/Agriculture	1.2	0.9	1.1	1.1	0.9	1.0
Physical Sciences	4.4	2.8	3.8	5.8	0.4	4.4
Mathematical/Computer Sciences	6.1	4.6	5.6	5.9	2.9	5.1
Engineering	4.6	3.3	4.1	4.4	7.2	5.1
Technologies	0.9	0.6	0.8	1.2	0.7	1.0
Architecture/Building and Planning	2.5	2.6	2.5	1.8	3.2	2.2
Social Studies	9.4	8.1	8.9	7.9	7.2	7.7
Law	4.2	2.5	3.6	4.4	0.3	3.3
Business and Administrative Studies	11.1	9.2	10.5	8.5	9.6	8.8
Mass Comm./Documentation	3.2	0.6	2.3	2.7	0.7	2.2
Linguistics/Classics	3.9	2.2	3.3	5.0	4.1	4.7
European Languages/Literature	1.8	3.0	2.2	1.8	2.8	2.1
Other Languages	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.2
Historical and Philosophical Studies	4.4	4.2	4.3	5.3	4.1	5.0
Creative Arts and Design	11.7	2.1	8.4	11.3	2.5	9.0
Education	4.9	10.5	6.8	5.5	25.4	10.6
Combined/Unspecified	0.4	19.1	6.8	0.3	13.5	3.7
Base (N)	937,370	485,085	1,422,455	65,050	22,590	87,640

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

	Scotland			Northern Ireland		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Medicine/Dentistry	4.2	0.0	3.3	4.7	0.4	3.7
Subjects Allied to Medicine	13.9	22.2	15.7	16.0	20.4	17.0
Biological Sciences	10.8	2.2	9.0	6.9	1.9	5.8
Veterinary Sciences/Agriculture	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.1	0.2	0.9
Physical Sciences	5.8	1.1	4.8	3.2	0.6	2.6
Mathematical/Computer Sciences	6.6	2.9	5.8	8.2	3.8	7.2
Engineering	7.0	4.3	6.4	6.1	2.2	5.2
Technologies	0.5	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.1	0.4
Architecture/Building and Planning	3.0	3.0	3.0	5.9	2.8	5.2
Social Studies	8.2	5.3	7.6	8.6	6.7	8.2
Law	4.1	1.4	3.5	4.9	2.6	4.4
Business and Administrative Studies	11.7	8.6	11.0	13.2	22.6	15.3
Mass Comm./Documentation	1.6	0.2	1.3	2.7	0.4	2.2
Linguistics/Classics	3.3	0.6	2.7	3.3	2.5	3.1
European Languages/Literature	2.3	8.4	3.6	1.3	0.3	1.1
Other Languages	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Historical and Philosophical Studies	4.7	8.5	5.6	3.3	1.6	2.9
Creative Arts and Design	6.4	1.9	5.5	5.3	1.4	4.4
Education	4.2	5.8	4.6	4.7	29.6	10.2
Combined/Unspecified	0.1	22.6	4.9	0.0	0.2	0.1
Base (N)	114,570	31,265	145,835	28,970	8,240	37,210

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

2.4 Part-time provision in the FE sector

The foregoing analysis has presented the picture of part-time HE within UK universities and higher education institutions – covering HE students who are registered with HEIs. However, further education colleges (FECs) are important providers of HE, particularly to local communities, and play a critical role in increasing the accessibility of HE.

'In spite of the relatively small number of places they offer, FECs are important in widening participation, including delivering HE in areas where there are no higher education institutions. Not only this, but they also offer programmes that are central to enhancing student skills and employability.'

HEFCE (<http://hefce.ac.uk/learning/heinfe/>)

Data on the FE sector is collected and analysed separately from data on the HE sector. Current responsibility for FE data collection rests with the Data Service on behalf of the SFA and the Young People's Learning Agency. The data is captured in the Individualised Learner Record (ILR).

The numbers studying at HE level in FE colleges are not insignificant. Work by the University of Sheffield (Rashid et al., 2011) identified that in 2006/07 there were 121,323 UK students studying at HE level registered with a FE institution (FEI). Of these, 76 per cent were studying part-time. Overall, seven per cent of HE students are registered with FEIs. The authors also identified that there were 170,932 students taught at HE level in FEIs (this will include students registered with a HEI but taught at a FEI; this group of individuals will be covered by HESA data returns).

More recently HEFCE reports that in 2007/08 there were over 100,000 HE students in the FE sector. The majority of these were studying at other undergraduate level (63 per cent studied foundation degrees, HNCs, HNDs or equivalent); almost half (48 per cent) were studying part-time; and although many FECs offer HE courses, students tend to be concentrated in just a few large colleges often termed 'mixed economy' institutions (each of which has more than 1,000 HE students).

HE-level study in FE institutions is, under current arrangements, funded:

- directly through HEFCE, in which case the college has responsibility for the student administration (including making data returns)
- indirectly through a franchise agreement⁴¹ with another institution, and it is the latter that has the responsibility for student administration (and data collection). This accounts for roughly half of HE students in FE, although many FECs offering HE will have a mixture of directly and indirectly funded students
- from another source, such as employers, the SFA or students themselves. This will tend to include non-prescribed HE, which, as noted earlier, is focused towards professional and technical vocational study. The latest data available from the Data Service⁴² reports that in 2009/10 there were 50,700 full- and part-time learners in FE in level 4 or above courses that were funded by the SFA (formerly the Learning and Skills Council), and learner numbers have fallen from the 69,000 reported for 2005/06.

⁴¹ It is important to note that the ILR does not include students registered with HEIs but taught in FECs – these students are instead captured by the HESA data which is described in Section 2.3. The response from the government, drawing on information provided by HEFCE and the Data Service, to a recent parliamentary question suggests this could have been as many as 58,600 in 2009/10.

⁴² See the supplementary table MarSFRLevel4Learners.xls to the latest BIS Statistical First Release available from http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_supplementary_tables/further_education_skills/

Given the size and complexity of this group of HE students, and the dominance of part-time study, it is important to further explore their characteristics and study patterns using the ILR dataset. This will enable us to provide a more inclusive map of the scale and nature of part-time undergraduate provision in the UK. The next section focuses on the provision of HE in FE⁴³ – the scale, regional distribution and nature of providers. Further analysis of the nature and profile of HE students registered with FE institutions is provided in Chapter 7.

2.4.1 The size of the HE-in-FE group

Identifying the number of HE level students in the ILR and their level of study, and whether they were studying full- or part-time, threw up a number of challenges. The level of study could only be accurately determined by coding from the title of the student's learning aim. Mode of study was based on two variables – one indicating whether the course itself was deemed to be full- or part-time and the other identifying study load (full-time equivalence/FTE⁴⁴), and students were coded as part-time students if they had both a FTE of less than 75 per cent and were coded as part-time or missing on the other variable.

Using data from the ILR, our analysis shows that in 2009/10, there were approximately 120,530 individuals studying at HE level in a FEI – this includes over 7,000 individuals studying at postgraduate level. If these individuals are excluded to focus only on undergraduate-level study, there were 113,198 individuals studying at HE level in the FE sector. This represents a slight increase (1.7 per cent) over the 2008/09 figure. Of these, 58,912 individuals or just over half (52 per cent) of students in 2009/10 were studying part-time. Among those studying at undergraduate level in the FE sector, part-time students outnumber full-time students – which is not the case for those in the HE sector.

The number of part-time students fell slightly from 2008/09, when the proportion of part-timers was 55 per cent. Indeed, the numbers of part-time undergraduate students in FE have fallen slightly (by three per cent from 2008/09 to 2009/10). A similar pattern was noted for the numbers of part-time HE students in HE, which although they increased slightly between 2007/08 and 2009/10, decreased between 2008/09 and 2009/10 (see Section 2.3.1).

2.4.2 Regional distribution of HE in FE

Looking at the regional distribution of HE in FE (of all modes) we find that the North West region accounts for the largest number of undergraduate students in both 2008/09 and 2009/10, while Yorkshire and Humberside, the West Midlands and the South East also

⁴³ Although we refer to the students in our analysis of ILR as HE in FE students, we do not capture *all* HE in FE students. Franchised HE students in FECs (those registered with HEIs but taught by FECs) are excluded from the ILR. It is estimated that group is therefore under-enumerated by close to one-third, and that part-time students comprise a significant number and proportion of this missing category. A full analysis of the size and profile of whole of the HE in FE population for 2009/10 is the subject of a separate report which will be published by the Department later this year.

⁴⁴ See Section 7.1.3 for a full description of FTE

have large populations of undergraduate HE in FE students. The West Midlands experienced the largest fall in numbers between 2008/09 and 2009/10, while the South East and Yorkshire and Humberside saw the largest increase. The East of England and Greater London have the smallest number of students (see Table 2.12).

Focusing on part-time students, the pattern is very similar. Again it is the North West region that accounts for the largest number of part-time undergraduate students in both years, followed by West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside and the South East. Again, the East of England and Greater London have smaller proportions of part-time undergraduate students. However, it is interesting to note the relatively small (and falling) proportion of part-time undergraduate students in the North East – here the numbers of full-time students at HE level far outweigh the number of part-time students (more than double). It is also interesting to note that in the East of England, the numbers of part-time undergraduate HE in FE students far outweigh the number of full-time students (by almost four to one in 2009/10). This is also the case in the West Midlands and in the South West (in both years), although the difference is not so extreme.

The regional distribution of part-time undergraduate learners in the FE sector largely corresponds to that found for students in the HE sector, although it is interesting to note the much lower concentration of FE sector part-time undergraduate students in London (compared with those in the HE sector). This is perhaps explained by there being only two FE-sector colleges with any large-scale provision of HE in the Greater London area (Croydon College and Havering College of Further and Higher Education, see Table 2.12); whereas there are several institutions in the region in the HE sector with large-scale part-time provision.

Table 2.12: HE students in FE by region and mode of study

	2008/09				2009/10			
	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)
East of England	3.2	5.8	5,143	4.6	1.9	6.2	4,648	4.1
East Midlands	8.7	9.1	9,909	8.9	8.3	9.4	10,065	8.9
Greater London	8.3	8.2	9,135	8.2	8.2	8.4	9,367	8.3
North East	12.5	6.8	10,474	9.4	13.0	5.4	10,246	9.1
North West	17.8	17.8	19,776	17.8	19.8	17.0	20,725	18.3
South East	12.4	12.3	13,756	12.4	12.1	13.5	14,536	12.9
South West	7.1	10.7	10,108	9.1	7.0	10.9	10,191	9.0
West Midlands	10.9	16.1	15,301	13.8	10.1	15.3	14,453	12.8
Yorkshire & Humberside	19.1	13.2	17,639	15.9	19.6	13.9	18,834	16.7
Base (N)	50,261	60,980	111,241	100.0	54,236	58,829	113,065	100.0

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Exploring the regional breakdown further, to focus on level of study, we find that the North West, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the North East have the largest number (and proportion) of part-time students at first degree level, and that the number of part-time undergraduates studying at first degree level has fallen considerably in the North East over time. For those studying at other undergraduate level, the areas with the largest numbers of students are the North West, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside (see Chapter 7 for further analysis by level of study, but note that the size of the group studying at first degree level is substantially smaller than the group studying at other undergraduate level) (see Table 2.13).

2.4.3 Providers of HE in FE

The vast majority of all undergraduate students (both full-time and part-time) were studying at a general FE college (including tertiary, 92 per cent in 2009/10). Outside of general FE colleges, the main providers of HE in FE are special colleges of art, design and performing arts, or for agriculture and horticulture. Part-time HE in FE students were also concentrated in general FE colleges, even more so than found for full-time students (see Table 2.14). Special colleges for art, design and performing arts account for nearly five per cent of full-time students, but very few part-time students – and these full-time students tend to be studying at first degree rather than other undergraduate level.

Table 2.13: HE students in FE by level of study, mode of study and region

	2008/09		2009/10	
	FT (%)	PT (%)	FT (%)	PT (%)
First degree or above				
East of England	2.5	3.1	0.4	1.3
East Midlands	2.6	2.7	2.4	3.2
Greater London	8.4	8.3	8.3	12.4
North East	9.1	19.1	10.6	13.6
North West	18.0	20.9	19.7	19.0
South East	10.2	12.6	9.0	11.3
South West	5.0	5.5	4.8	4.7
West Midlands	7.0	9.0	6.4	11.7
Yorkshire & Humberside	37.2	18.8	38.6	22.9
Base (N)	12,385	4,060	13,371	3,522
Other undergraduate				
East of England	3.4	6.0	2.4	6.5
East Midlands	10.7	9.5	10.3	9.8
Greater London	8.2	8.1	8.2	8.1
North East	13.7	6.0	13.8	4.9
North West	17.7	17.6	19.8	16.9
South East	13.1	12.3	13.1	13.7
South West	7.8	11.1	7.7	11.3
West Midlands	12.2	16.6	11.3	15.5

	2008/09		2009/10	
	FT (%)	PT (%)	FT (%)	PT (%)
Yorkshire & Humberside	13.1	12.8	13.4	13.4
Base (N)	37,876	56,920	40,865	55,307

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Table 2.14: HE students in FE by type of provider and mode of study

	2008/09				2009/10			
	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total I (%)	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total I (%)
General FE college incl tertiary	91.6	93.8	103,320	92.8	89.5	94.6	104,300	92.1
Special college - art, design and performing arts	5.0	0.3	2,709	2.4	4.9	0.3	2,859	2.5
Special college - agriculture and horticulture	2.5	2.0	2,468	2.2	2.8	1.7	2,488	2.2
Local education authority (LEA)	0.3	1.6	1,160	1.0	1.4	1.1	1,434	1.3
Sixth form college	0.2	0.9	617	0.6	0.6	1.0	868	0.8
Specialist designated college	0.4	0.6	546	0.5	0.3	0.7	580	0.5
Other*	0.2	0.7	520	0.5	0.6	0.6	669	0.6
Base (N)	50,314	61,026	111,340	100.0	54,286	58,912	113,198	100.0

Note: * Other includes external institution, business organisation, HE organisation, school sixth form (not college), other voluntary organisation, charity, other local authority, and other private organisation.

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

The largest providers of HE students were The Manchester College, Bradford College, Newcastle College, Blackburn College, Blackpool and the Fylde College, New College Durham, Hull College, South Tyneside College, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education and Doncaster College. Each of these had more than 2,000 HE students. In some institutions HE students represented a substantial proportion of their student body – these tended to be specialist colleges such as Leeds College of Art and Design, Plymouth College of Art and Design, Cleveland College of Art and Design, and Hereford College of Arts. In each of these colleges, HE students made up at least 40 per cent of their total student body.

Focusing on part-time undergraduate learners, the largest provider was Blackburn College with just over 1,500 part-time undergraduate students in 2009/10. Other large providers of part-time undergraduate HE in FE (using 2009/10 data) were:

- The Manchester College (1,190)
- Loughborough College (1,030)

- Bradford College (980)
- South Staffordshire College (960)
- New College, Durham (900).

Table 2.15 notes the top 25 providers of part-time undergraduate HE in FE and this shows that many of these colleges are located in the North West (five institutions, including the two largest providers), Yorkshire and Humberside (five institutions, including the fourth largest provider), and the West Midlands (four institutions), corresponding with the regional distribution of part-time students noted above (see Figure 2.8).

Table 2.15: Top 25 providers of part-time HE in FE provision

	Region	PT(N) in 08/09~	2009/10		Total
			PT (N)	FT (N)	
Blackburn College	NW	1,658	1,532	1,832	3,364
The Manchester College	NW	1,385	1,189	1,662	2,851
Loughborough College	EM	973	1,027	848	1,875
Bradford College	Y&H	969	977	2,434	3,411
South Staffordshire College*	WM	-	959	247	1,206
New College, Durham	NE	1,345	903	865	1,768
Blackpool and The Fylde College	NW	717	846	2,046	2,892
Hull College	Y&H	884	828	1,149	1,977
Newcastle College	NE	711	807	2,979	3,786
Worcester College of Technology	WM	1,125	797	868	1,665
Stockport College of Further & Higher Education	NW	774	796	682	1,478
Doncaster College	Y&H	1,048	790	786	1,576
Grimsby Institute Of Further & Higher Education	EM	819	787	1,204	1,991
Warwickshire College	WM	922	772	687	1,459
Stoke-on-Trent College	WM	860	748	25	773
Somerset College of Arts & Technology	SW	649	745	704	1,449
Farnborough College of Technology	SE	731	686	751	1,437
New College, Nottingham	EM	42	654	770	1,424
Leeds City College**	Y&H	-	647	564	1,211
Rotherham College of Arts & Technology	Y&H	480	632	82	714
Gloucestershire College of Arts & Technology	SW	568	592	177	769
Lincoln College	EM	641	592	98	690
Cornwall College	SW	763	578	15	593
St Helens College	NW	802	573	621	1,194
Havering College of Further & Higher Education	Lon	472	550	793	1,343

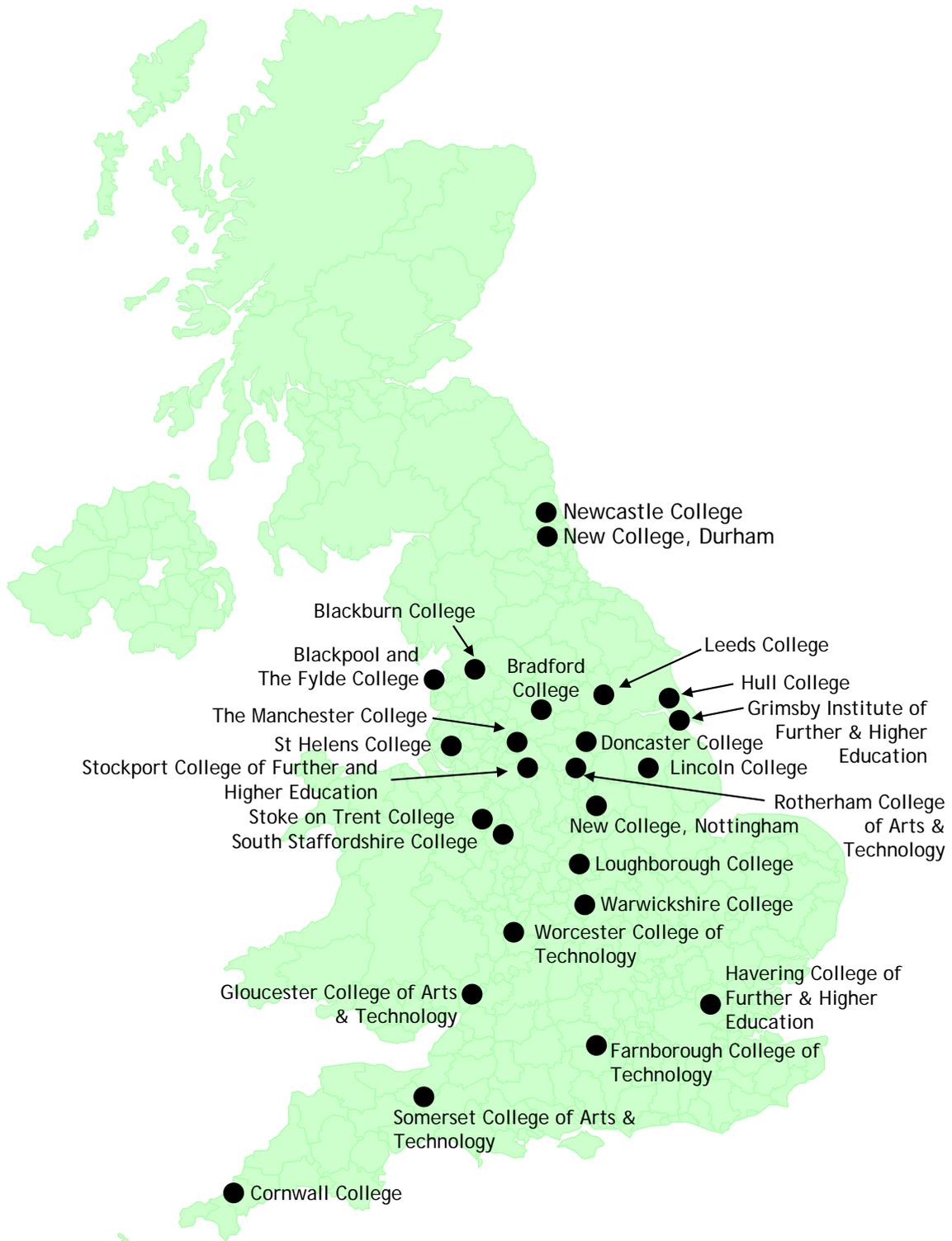
Note: * established in 2009 (merger of four existing colleges, no previous data)

Note: ** established in 2009 (merger of three existing colleges, no previous data)

Note: ~ 2008/09 data for part-time students included for comparison

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Figure 2.8: Top 25 providers of part-time HE in FE provision (2009/10) (excluding postgraduates)



Notes: A) Map Bruce Jones Design (reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey, Crown Copyright NC/2005/3257), B) Institution headquarters only for multi-site FEIs, C) Part-time rates for all undergraduate students (in full-person equivalents, 2009/10) based on ILR data.

2.5 Private sector part-time HE

Students studying outside of publicly funded institutions will not be captured by the HESA student dataset or the ILR HE dataset. Indeed, data on the scale and nature of part-time undergraduate study in the private sector is limited, as there has been no requirement for private providers to supply government or any agency with information on staff and student numbers.

The **review of literature** identified recent research commissioned by Universities UK (Fielden et al., 2010) that explored the role of private and for-profit providers in delivering HE in the UK. The authors suggested four categories of providers in this group: those delivering academic content and awards; those teaching international students in the UK; those developing and sometimes delivering content for other universities' programmes; and those providing other academic support such as educational testing, CPD projects and/or tutorial support. This research indicates that much of the current private and for-profit provision in the UK is targeted towards international students: institutions offering foundation, language and study skills courses to international students in partnership with a host UK university; and small private colleges with international students offering UK university accredited awards (at substantially lower fees than the awarding institution).

Further work undertaken by HESA (HESA, 2011) established the size of this private and for-profit provision. They surveyed 65 private and for-profit providers in the UK⁴⁵ and found that in 2010, these organisations taught nearly 38,000 students on HE courses (and a further 18,000 on FE-level courses). However, only 171 students were UK-domiciled and studying part-time at undergraduate level and another 55 UK-domiciled individuals were studying at undergraduate level via distance learning.

⁴⁵ HESA note that the sample developed for the survey was created from drawing together lists of institutions from a variety of sources: the Quality Assurance Agency, the British Accreditation Council and the Accreditation Service for International Colleges. Institutions were surveyed in winter 2010/11.

3 Part-time Delivery Models

Key points

- An institution's history and mission tend to determine the part-time delivery models it engages with.
- Part-time provision can be delivered in a number of ways. The two key models are:
 - integrated or infill provision that mixes together full- and part-time students. This may emphasise a deficit model of part-time. However, integrated provision operates on a spectrum of flexibility and the extent of flexibility is the greatest influencer on how part-time is understood and valued within institutions
 - free-standing provision that can be described as bespoke part-time delivery. This can encompass part-time open courses and closed courses which are targeted at employers. This may be a more costly model to operate.
- Part-time study may also be delivered through partnerships with FE colleges. This increases geographic access and has potential to widen participation. Managing the partnership, however, may accrue additional cost.
- Online delivery is not particularly common and requires upfront development to do well. Use of managed and virtual learning environments – to act as a repository for courses and other resources – is far more common.
- Part-time provision may also be targeted at employers which may entail 'closed' courses for specific employers or sectors, professional courses and bite-sized provision in the form of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). There are mixed views over the extent to which employer provision is demand led.

The previous chapter has set the context for part-time higher education provision. In the next sections we begin to explore how part-time higher education is delivered in practice. This indicates a range of delivery models and modes, and different means of delivery, for example by the institution itself or through franchising arrangements. Other facets of delivery are also considered, such as timing, whether there is a distinctive learning model, and part-time delivered through new media approaches.

3.1 Part-time study encompasses diverse models of delivery

Existing evidence and the data presented earlier in this part of the report shows that the relative importance of part-time provision to institutions is mixed and the spread of subjects available to part-time students is also mixed. The **research literature** indicates that this is partly a reflection of institutional history and mission, and local economic context. In a major study of part-time provision, Callender et al. (2010) noted that how an institution's history and mission were incorporated into their Strategic Plan influenced the levels of part-time provision it offered. Other authors have suggested that part-time provision tends

to be unevenly dispersed across an institution's portfolio, with part-time students most likely to be found in specific subject areas, such as subjects allied to medicine, and education (Ramsden et al., 2006; Foster, 2009). Callender et al., (2010) found that institutions reported some courses, particularly those that were not vocational, were less well-suited to being offered on a part-time basis.

There are a number of ways in which part-time provision can be organised, structured and delivered apparent in the literature and in our case studies. The variety and flexibility in these part-time models offers access to HE study, and an alternative pathway through HE for 'non-traditional' (Foster, 2009), or non-conventional students, contributing to widening participation in HE. Callender et al., 2010 propose a typology of delivery models, which includes:

- provision that is fully integrated with full-time provision or infilled to full-time courses
- mixed provision where some part-time provision is integrated, but other courses are provided separately
- separate part-time provision which is the responsibility of a school/university department
- programmes that have an equivalent full-time course and others that do not (free-standing part-time provision).

The **case studies** indicate a diverse mix of models which, in addition to the above, encompass part-time provision delivered partly or solely by partners, e.g. FE colleges, closed provision targeted at specific employers and different types of provision for part-time rather than full-time, such as vocationally focused and/or employer sponsored courses.

Moreover, the case studies demonstrate that it is rare for any of these models to exist in isolation. While one particular model may dominate part-time delivery in an institution, particularly undergraduate studies, within some departments and for some types of provision, other delivery models exist. Consequently, the mixed model is frequently observed and this is an artefact of historical developments in institutions – and their departments – rather than deriving from centralised strategy. The delivery model for undergraduate studies may also vary considerably from the offer for adult and community-type provision, postgraduate provision, and closed courses targeted at employers or continuing professional development (arguably a part of undergraduate provision). As a member of staff in one institution noted:

'[The part-time delivery model] is very much routed in the school's particular portfolio and the employer base that they serve.'

[Staff, small-scale provider]

3.1.1 Part-time integrated with full-time

The most common delivery mode across all non-specialised part-time **case studies** is the integrated model whereby part-time students are taught in the same classes as full-time students. This is commonly known as ‘infill’ although it is apparent that the term covers a spectrum of greater and lesser flexibility – and visibility. Institutions anticipate that the integrated model provides a cost-effective approach to part-time delivery although there are also indications that infrastructure and systems must be developed for this to be achieved (see Chapter 5). However, there is some concern that integrated delivery reinforces deficit notions of part-time (noted by a limited provider):

‘If you’re a part-time student who’s... doing a subset of [what] a full-time student does... the difference to the institution is negligible. Whereas, if you’re being really flexible and... letting people... chop and change modules... and you’re offering them at different times of the day and week so that somebody can fit a package together... to fit in with the rest of their life, then that’s a different matter.’

[Staff, large-scale provider]

For institutions, the integrated model is felt to be efficient since part-time can be validated and operated as part of full-time routes and hence ensures part-time is available across a significant volume of undergraduate studies (noted by large-scale and small-scale providers).

‘We rarely develop distinctive part-time stand alone courses. It tends to be they develop a full-time course and then see if we can actually package it slightly differently for a part-time audience.’

[Staff, small-scale provider]

Integration can lead to part-time ‘only in theory’

However, it is possible for institutions to validate integrated part-time routes without putting any emphasis on marketing them (see Chapter 9). This can lead to the situation such that part-time exists ‘in theory’ although in practice very little is delivered. Validating programmes as part-time ensures a route is there if desirable for some reason, although when institutions are sustainable without part-time provision, they may see no reason to develop or market it.

‘We validate courses with part-time options but it is largely up to those applying to find a way to study part-time – there is no brand or package, it’s an inert possibility.’

[Staff, small-scale provider]

Some choose not to deliver part-time

The reasons why institutions actively choose to have little part-time delivery may be associated with the costs of delivery, particularly administrative issues surrounding staff

contracts, research intensity and the more complex tracking that is needed for part-time students. However, the decision may also be driven by the implications of the field of study such that lab-intensive, science and technology courses may be seen as less suitable for part-time than humanities and arts provision.

'Laboratories cost money to keep open and staffed and then you have to consider the consumables and technical support. This led us to focus [our part-time provision] on arts and social sciences but the point remains that we are research intensive. In order to get on in their careers, our academics know that there are criteria to be met. Evening teaching or teaching in vacations or at weekends constrains the time they have available for research.'

[Staff, small-scale provider]

For others part-time increases flexibility for all

In other institutions (large-scale providers), the use of an integrated model has led to an increased emphasis on flexibility for all students. While the infill approach has become dominant and is being taken forward as the model for the majority of courses, where the volume of students is sufficient there is an emphasis on delivering each semester's modules more than once, at a variety of times (i.e. day and evening). While, typically, part-time registered students may opt for evening study, there is flexibility to shift between evening and day-time study for students registered for either mode.

3.1.2 Part-time study as separate, free-standing provision

Part-time provision can also be developed and delivered independent of full-time courses, as a free-standing model. Here courses may be bespoke rather than developed or repackaged from an existing full-time course. In one of the case studies (a limited provider, one with a small and concentrated part-time student body), for example, part-time students are registered within a dedicated department – which has its own building and facilities. The students do not share the same ICT systems as full-time students and are not registered on the institution's database systems for full-time students. While the department for part-time students is dedicated to the teaching of a particular subject, not all of the part-time students are engaged in study within this subject – rather they are spread across a number of other teaching departments in terms of their studies. The location of part-time students in this one department results from a historical situation whereby part-time study was the sole option in the school and the systems required to track and record part-time students were different from those for full-time students.

In another example (a specialist part-time provider), while part-time students are taught alongside full-time students, they are registered with a department that has overall responsibility for the quality of their experience. This department provides specialist support to part-time students and has historically led the development of part-time provision. There is now an intention to spread part-time support more evenly across the institution. There is, however, recognition that the model of individualised support developed by the specialised department is particularly beneficial to the part-time student experience, hence the tailored nature will be strategically encouraged in rolling out part-time support across the institution.

Other institutions have departments dedicated to particular aspects of their part-time suite. This can include departments focused on Lifelong Learning (broad subjects, leisure learning/adult and community learning) as noted by one large-scale provider but also departments providing specialist courses for employers and enterprise (noted by a small-scale provider). Developing and delivering part-time provision through specialised departments is felt to ensure that the needs of students and employers can be captured and cascaded through provision.

3.2 Other issues in the delivery of part-time study

3.2.1 Where it is delivered - partner delivered part-time

In some of the case studies (these tend to be large-scale providers) most – and in some instances all – part-time provision is delivered by partners within the FE sector. The scale of partnership can be extensive: one case study institution had set partnership working as a strategic objective in order to grow its part-time provision and reach out to potential students through ensuring accessibility. This involved it in working with 29 partner colleges. A more limited partnership arrangement was observed in another example, with 10 per cent of the part-time foundation degree or HNC/D provision delivered by five FE partners. The benefits of this model include the creation of pathways to full undergraduate-level study with the lead HEI, as well as spreading the provision of HE within a region or locality (for smaller-scale providers).

'The partner network has made a huge difference to raising aspirations and has put in place the means to realise them.'

[Staff, small-scale provider]

Driving the partner delivery model may be the accessibility of the lead institution and widening participation considerations. Through the use of partners, an institution can increase the availability of part-time within a particular locality and can make it accessible to a wider group of students through delivery in an area and provider in which they feel comfortable⁴⁶.

What may inhibit the further development of this model are the changing regulations for degree awarding powers (DAP) which enable FE colleges to become providers of HE in their own right. Some of the colleges encountered within the research were involved in this change, and in other cases, HE institutions were concerned about the implications of this change since partner colleges could in time become competitors in the HE market. This was noted by HE institutions which validated the HE provision in FE colleges, who felt that their partners might in time become their competitors. Undermining this, at least to an extent, was the effect of reputation: those FE colleges taking up DAP did not know the extent to which the take-up of their HE provision was based on the reputation of the

⁴⁶ There are concerns in some quarters that institutions may use partnerships with FE colleges to provide part-time study in order to widen participation rather than truly get involved in this themselves – although we did not find evidence of this within our case studies.

awarding HE institutions or the convenience of their location to their student body. It appeared then that the new policy represented risks to both sides of the partnerships.

'We currently work with three HEIs to validate our HE courses. This can limit the speed of development and affect how quickly we can get new qualifications to market so when we become an awarding body it will reduce the time involved. But what we don't know yet is whether students want a qualification from [FEC] or whether they are attracted by a degree awarded by University X.'

[Staff, FE college]

3.2.2 When part-time is delivered

The case study institutions demonstrated a variety of approaches to part-time delivery which, as we noted earlier, vary between different types of provision or departments within any institution. Courses that are specifically designed for part-time delivery encompass twilight or evening delivery, weekend provision and intensive block delivery. Where an integrated model is pursued, class hours tend to be determined by the full-time delivery model and therefore tend to involve day-time study.

At its most flexible, part-time study can be tailored to individual preferences and operate through multiple entry points during the academic year – whereas typically institutions operate one start point in September – and make available a range of times for class-based delivery from which individuals can select.

'Our modular programme structure allows new part-time students to enrol at three different points during the year – this is more flexible since many of them are in employment.'

[Staff, specialist provider]

'Lots of our programmes have friendly hours... lectures are arranged compactly, over two or three days each week rather than four or five to make it easier for our part-time students to access them. We offer the same modules during the day and into the evenings. Full-time students can be expected to attend evenings – it depends on their route. But it all leads to maximal opportunities for part-time students in terms of flexibility.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

Other examples were also noted in the case studies where drives to develop increased flexibility, perhaps targeted at full-time or international students, resulted in (sometimes unanticipated) benefits for part-time students. In one example (a large-scale provider) IT services were being extended to 24-hour cover in order to support a course being delivered overseas. A side benefit of this was that part-time students could access IT support outside normal hours.

More frequently, the approach to delivery depends upon the target student group for the provision. For example, in one institution (large-scale provider) the approach or model for the delivery of provision targeted at teaching assistants takes the form of a one-day

intensive each week, whereas the dominant model for part-time delivery was integration with full-time. It was delivered in this way to suit local employers.

A strong driver was the preferences and expectations of employers. Closed courses, those delivered for a specific employer or group of employers, are more frequently offered in intensive blocks, whereas courses pursued by individual employees and other students would typically follow a more extensive model (see Chapter 4).

3.2.3 An inclusive pedagogy

There were indications of a distinctive part-time pedagogy where part-time students formed the majority of a teaching group, or a free-standing teaching group (generally in large-scale providers). Since part-time students tend to be older, have work and life experience, the pedagogy can draw on their experiences to enrich the curriculum. Specialist part-time providers are able to elaborate and expand on the differences of managing part-time student groups. Generally part-time pedagogy can take an applied approach relating theory to practice.

‘There would be risk to us if demand from young people were to increase, especially if it was among 18-year-olds. Our provision is designed for adults; it assumes you have some experience. If we thought numbers of 18-year-olds would significantly increase, we’d have to revisit how our courses are designed and think more about the support young students need.’

[Staff, large-scale provider]

This goes beyond pedagogy into an appreciation that the time available for class-based study is precious and must be used to best effect. A tutor described how activities that would work with a full-time student were not transferable to part-time. In part-time study, students expect to be actively engaged in classes and are willing to prepare background reading prior to class.

‘With a traditional cohort you have to keep the reading and the teaching inputs in balance for them to keep up. With our part-time group you can set reading and design the course so each session builds on the other and it matters that you set independent study tasks to maximise the value of the face-to-face sessions – these learners don’t expect to be reading in class. You can never just babysit them – you can’t ask them to do things that they could do elsewhere as part of class. The students treat the class time as precious. You have to equip them to prepare properly and do the valuable stuff which requires input when you meet and trust they will do independent study you set.’

[Staff, large-scale provider]

3.2.4 Part-time study via non-traditional delivery methods

The **research literature** suggests that other factors may also influence the delivery model implemented by institutions. For example, the model may be an artefact of the (in) accessibility of an institution and/or its rurality. Institutions covering a large and/or rural geographic area may make more use of distance or blended learning, for example

(Callender et al., 2010), and as we have seen, it can drive the use of provision via partnership arrangements with FE colleges.

Beyond this, our **data analysis** (see Chapter 2) demonstrates that the OU is the dominant provider of part-time and has been growing steadily over the past 10 years. Its delivery model is centred on non-traditional delivery, namely blended and online learning. The high levels of satisfaction reported by its students (see Chapter 12) suggest that this approach is appropriate and supportive of many people wishing to study part-time.

Within the **case studies**, the use of online or blended learning as the main approach to learning delivery appeared somewhat limited. Only two of the institutions (a large-scale and a specialist provider) made any significant use of learning technologies as a delivery tool to any significant degree, i.e. across the range of subjects and courses and in both, blending online learning with some face-to-face delivery was emphasised.

Other institutions (generally large-scale providers) were making forays into online delivery, although this was very new and limited in scope to one particular programme. The programmes targeted for online offer some insight into why the online methodology might be selected: in one institution, eLearning was the delivery model for a course targeted at senior corporate managers – for whom time off the job would be a problem and would consequently value methods which offer increased flexibility. In another, eLearning was targeted at the oil industry, i.e. the learners work off-shore and are not available for more traditional teaching models.

Some institutions noted some capacity to deliver (more) online learning, although not necessarily an intention to develop it further. The online provision might be focused on work-based learning provision or the overseas market. In one (a small-scale provider), degrees were delivered overseas, through a partnership with a private provider which designed teaching materials and employed online tutors while the institution quality assured and made the awards.

More frequently, the institutions had introduced managed and virtual learning environments (M/VLEs), which were used as a repository for course resources (lecture notes and handouts), and a coordinating access point for central services and facilities such as an online library, IT services or learner support services. Part-time students in some institutions noted the value of being able to access course and other resources online, although they had concerns about consistency and quality – not all members of the teaching staff used the M/VLE, and the quality of the material put online was variable.

There is an established literature about online learning and the challenges of delivering learning well through this methodology. It cannot be considered to be a low-cost model to introduce and this may limit the extent to which institutions are involved. While the introduction of M/VLEs is far more common, the process of ensuring all courses and staff consistently use these can also be lengthy. Training can address this to some degree, although staff may not be convinced of the value, which may inhibit uptake.

4 Part-time Provision Targeted at Employers

Key points

- Employer engagement with HE has resulted in a range of partnerships, initiatives and programmes, but the vast majority of provision developed for or in partnership with employers is delivered on a part-time basis.
- Not all institutions are engaging with employers to understand their needs and to develop their undergraduate portfolio to meet these needs. The institutions that are doing so, often (but not always) have a regional focus to their mission and a desire to engage with local employers and the local economy, and a commitment to the lifelong learning agenda. They also see employer-led programmes as another (valued) source of income.
- However, the numbers of learners (generally employees) involved in this aspect of part-time provision varies between institutions and can fluctuate wildly from year to year. This can make demand from employers difficult to predict.
- Much of the employer-led provision is closed, developed specifically for an employer and open only to its employees. Institutions often work initially with one local employer to develop a programme which they then adapt for a wider market.
- In the case studies, the programmes developed tended to be low intensity module-based courses, resulting in a university certificate (at sub-degree level) and university credits, which a learner could use to build towards a foundation degree or first degree. In the main, the programmes described tended to be focused on developing leadership and management skills (within a particular occupation or industry context).
- There is an uncertainty about future demand from employers. Some institutions are optimistic but others are concerned that cuts in the public sector (a key sponsor of part-time HE for employees), likely increases in fees and withdrawal of HEFCE seed funding will have a negative impact on demand and supply.

In this chapter we explore the size and nature of part-time provision targeted at employers. Employer engagement has been a key part of HE policy and has attracted funding support from HEFCE who are *'encouraging a new relationship between higher education and employers that supports business growth through developing the knowledge and skills of their employees'*⁴⁷. The policy drive aimed to encourage HE and employers to work in partnership to develop HE programmes and to encourage employers to support their employees to undertake HE study, and much of this has centred upon part-time

⁴⁷ www.hefce.ac.uk/econsoc

undergraduate level study. Thus another aspect of part-time provision is that developed by institutions for and/or in partnership with employers.

As identified in the research literature, the nature of employer engagement with HE is very diverse, covering a range of offerings from the provision of bespoke courses, workshops and seminars, to the assessment or accreditation of in-company learning (Bolden et al., 2009).

4.1 Nature of employer influenced part-time provision

Feedback from the case studies highlights how part-time provision developed by institutions for and/or in partnership with employers tends to be closed courses, developed exclusively for the employees of a specific organisation and generally they attract no public funding (at least no funding via the HEFCE teaching grant). Sometimes these courses can be opened up to non-employees, often to employees of other companies (but again institutions receive no teaching grant support). Instead, this type of provision is funded through employer support, capacity building funds from HEFCE and in some instances from fees charged to individual learners. This type of provision tends not to be recorded in the main source of student statistics (HESA student record), so it can be difficult to estimate its size and scale.

4.1.1 Size of employer-led provision

The **management information data** provided by the case study institutions indicates, first, that not all institutions are engaged in this aspect of part-time provision and, second, that the numbers of learners involved vary between institutions and can fluctuate wildly from year to year.

In one of the case studies (a small-scale provider) the numbers of learners they have in their work-based learning programmes has increased from 800 to over 1,000 in the last three years, and this number is now similar to the size of their more traditional part-time undergraduate population. They are optimistic that the numbers will increase further. In fact, they have concerns that they may not be able to cope with the demand, which has been growing largely by word of mouth, with more and more employers (across the public and private sectors) expressing an interest in the courses they offer. In another of the case studies (again a small-scale provider) the numbers have fallen from approximately 50 to less than 20 and they have recently lost two of their public sector employers (who have not been able to send any learners). In contrast, two of the case studies (large-scale providers) have seen their learner numbers from the public sector increase substantially in the past few years – in one case growing from a handful to approaching 500; and, in the other, rising from 2,000 to 3,000 in the same period.

Looking to the future there are mixed opinions on the direction of employer demand from staff in the **case studies**. Some institutions are optimistic and feel there is a strong market, especially for short module-based programmes to develop professional skills, which arguably has been the preserve of the private providers. Others, particularly those with longer programmes delivered to public sector clients, are worried by the cuts in public sector budgets. They fear that these cuts could not only affect employer willingness to engage in workforce development, but that the shrinkage in public sector employment could reduce the number of potential learners.

There are also concerns about the withdrawal of HEFCE-provided seed funding, which could affect institutions' ability to respond to employer needs; and uncertainty about how the new funding system (extending access to student loans for some part-time study) could affect demand and employer sponsorship. One member of staff in an institution with a large and spread part-time student body, and a track record of employer-led provision for the local health care sector, felt that although the public sector are more engaged with academic provision (rather than in-house training), cuts in public sector funding coupled with an increase in fees and the removal of employer engagement funding from HEFCE would reduce the opportunities for part-time HE:

'It is a changing landscape – it is complicated and we are not sure what is going to happen, especially with increased fees. The gut feeling is that there is more than enough business out there. The issue is being sure that you can fulfil promises. Are the resources there in the schools to develop new courses and qualifications?'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

Whereas one employer noted:

'Employer involvement in HE is a leap of faith. In challenging economic times there is a leap of faith in investing time or cash in development opportunities. Universities need to do a better job of demonstrating the relevance of what they do to business objectives, they need to better articulate that.'

[Employer, linked to a large-scale provider]

4.2 Developing employer-led provision

4.2.1 Institutional motivations to employer engagement

Feedback from staff in the **case studies** (often those with a business development or knowledge transfer role) gives an insight into the development of this provision. As noted above, not all of the case study institutions were working intensively with employers to develop part-time provision, but those that were tended to be motivated by a range of reasons. These institutions often had a regional focus to their mission and a desire to engage with local employers and the local economy. Employer-led programmes provided them with another (valued) income stream and fitted in with their commitment to the lifelong learning agenda. As one case study (large-scale provider) noted: 'we want to be the first port of call for local employers'. However, not all employer engagement was regional. In one case study institution (another large-scale provider) their engagement with public sector bodies led them to roll out provision across regional boundaries.

4.2.2 Building supply

Staff in the case studies often described how programmes were developed with one particular employer and they were then able to adapt and re-package the programme to offer to other (similar) employers. Institutions therefore tended to start with one programme and build from this. In some respects, this type of part-time provision appears to be supply led in that it is driven by what institutions could do (with relatively little additional resource

or expenditure) rather than what they should do. The case study institutions reported different levels of engagement from employers:

'Some are heavily involved with the curriculum; others just have an inkling of an idea or a title. Some want a collaborative model with delivery by their own staff. Employers differ in their needs.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

The programmes developed tended to be module-based courses, resulting in a university certificate (at sub-degree level) and university credits, which a learner could use to build towards a foundation degree or first degree. In the main the programmes tended to be focused on developing leadership and management skills (within a particular occupation or industry context). The move away from full undergraduate study programmes towards shorter bite-sized courses was not always welcomed by HE staff, and some were concerned about the quality of programmes on offer.

4.2.3 Challenges with employer-led part-time provision

Staff also talked about the challenges associated with employer-led part-time provision. First, there are challenges in raising awareness of these potential courses within the institution, but also to potential students and employer sponsors. It could be argued that if there is limited awareness of part-time provision as a whole, there is even less awareness of this type of part-time study as it is largely promoted to employers (who are still unaware of the range of opportunities), not employees. One interviewee involved in developing a new foundation degree, commented:

'Universities have some work to do to engage employers. This includes increasing knowledge among employers about what different types of qualification mean and the potential benefits.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

A second challenge is the level of resource required. Developing new bespoke programmes requires significant resources. The courses tended to be credit-bearing so would have to adhere to HEFCE regulations for quality assurance, which could take time and be somewhat burdensome for institutions. However, employers could be frustrated by the timescales involved and were found to be reluctant to pay towards this:

'We need to charge for our services but employers are reluctant to meet the full costs of provision.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

Institutions often had a strategy for their employer engagement and were developing a range of projects to target specific sectors or employers. However one case study institution (large-scale provider) noted how their provision was initiated by one member of staff with excellent links to a major local employer, and how their success in developing a programme for one employer that was then taken up by other employers had happened largely by accident.

4.3 Examples of employer-led part-time provision

The following examples of employer engagement in part-time study drawn from the **case studies** illustrate the nature of this type of part-time provision and the benefits gained by organisations.

A recently established medium-sized public organisation in the health care sector has an active policy of encouraging further study and each year staff can make a business case for further study. They can receive full or at least part support for their fees, support for travel costs and other costs such as resources, although these become the property of the organisation, and if an employee leaves they may have to pay back some of these support costs. They are also given time off to study, although staff are encouraged to follow courses that have less impact on business time. They currently have about 10 staff following a variety of part-time HE courses. They have no formal graduate scheme but most senior staff (i.e. decision-makers) have degree-level qualifications although this is not a job requirement. This organisation has worked with the case study institution to develop a university certificate in professional development, a unique programme for this company only, which all senior staff are required to complete. Employees study in work time; the course is delivered in the workplace but assessed and externally verified by the university. The company is positive about the benefits of part-time study, which is seen as providing the organisation with skills and knowledge, improving staff retention and promoting career progression. It is also positive about the case study HEI, which is felt to engage strongly with local business and the community: *'the university is very friendly and has fully supported us through the process of getting the certificate off the ground'*. The company is also working with a FEC to develop a vocational qualification for wider staff.

A large private sector manufacturing company has worked with the case study institution over a number of years to deliver CPD (formalised academic qualifications) in management, leadership, critical thinking and influencing to staff in senior roles: 'A lot of people who have been here for some time are now delivering in senior roles but if you look at their qualifications they are often significantly less than you would expect for that level and consequently have a lack of maturity or professionalism in how things are done or lack confidence'. A key requirement was that staff would not need to go off-site and they have developed a series of awards based on work-based learning tailored to the needs of the individuals in the workplace. It is a relatively small scheme, involving approximately 10 staff each year. The awards fit into a progression framework so individuals can move onto other (higher-level) programmes. The company worked hard to get the university to understand their needs, and found this was very challenging at first as there was a lack of ability on the side of the university to engage with business and talk their language.

A large private company in the leisure sector (employing large numbers of casual and seasonal staff) was looking to expand and move into the international market, and so wanted to up-skill its current workforce. It has been working with the case study institution to provide a leadership and management programme to senior staff. It is a 30-credit university diploma course and all staff in a managerial or senior supervisory role (with at least two years service) was required to take part: *'they were not given a choice. It is about us making sure we have the skills for our future. There was some resistance as it was a new thing, but some people have been really motivated and said they have benefited from it.'* They have more than 50 employees on the programme, and they are looking to develop a next stage (for senior managers). They do not tend to recruit graduates but are generally working more closely with the case study institution to see if there is scope to offer undergraduate work placements and if they can recruit graduates. They are also working with another HEI in the region to deliver a diploma programme that involves tutors visiting the workplace one a month to deliver half-day group sessions. This is supplemented by online materials and an intranet portal. They felt this other HEI had a better presence in the leisure sector: *'[other HEI] was so more advanced in terms of what they had previously done in other businesses...they had a programme that we could just pick up'*.

A large private-sector manufacturing company worked with the case study institution to develop a bespoke leadership programme (certificate in leadership) for existing employees. The course is pitched at sub-degree level, and is a modular programme with five modules each requiring two days study. Employees are given time off to study and the fees are paid for by the company. The company has a good track record in training and workforce development, and a formal graduate scheme (and tends to recruit those who studied full-time). They have a very positive view of part-time HE as it allows *'new skills to be brought back and used quickly'*. They also have a very positive view of the HEI and the staff: *'the trainers are flexible, accommodating and professional. They have a good depth of knowledge. They are people with a lot of experience.'* Support for part-time study in the company remains high and they are optimistic that demand for part-time study for their employees will increase in the future.

4.4 Wider research on employer engagement

The literature review identified other research focused on employer engagement in HE. A key study (Bolden, 2009) used a number of case studies of HE-employer initiatives, and categorised the relationships into six types:

- direct relationships between one HE institution and a single employer (most of the provision described in our case studies would fall into this category)
- HE networks consisting of two or more HE institutions and a single employer

- employer networks with a single HEI and two or more employers
- HE-employer consortia, with two or more HE institutions and two or more employers
- sub-contracted provider networks managed through a HE lead institution
- mediated relationships established and/or maintained by an intermediary or broker.

The research indicates that the variety of ways in which employers can engage with HE institutions creates a dynamic market for part-time provision. Employers and their employees, therefore, are an important market for part-time provision at HE level. The public sector as an employer, for example in the fields of education and health, is a large purchaser of part-time higher education for their employees (Williams, 2010; SPA, 2010). Employers' attitudes to part-time study have been found to be an important influence on the part-time HE offer (Callender et al., 2010). However, as reflected in our case studies, the level of demand for part-time courses from employers can be unpredictable and has been found to be affected by the economic climate (Williams, 2010), and it is suggested that many employers are poorly informed about the part-time learning opportunities that are available (FreshMinds, 2006).

The literature review identified recent work by HEFCE that has begun to map this aspect of part-time provision, focusing on provision formally associated with the co-funding component of their Workforce Development Programme. This research has confirmed that almost all of this type of provision is part-time. The study reports that the number of institutions involved in this type of provision increased significantly between 2007/08 and 2008/09 but that provision, in terms of learner numbers, is largely concentrated in post-1992 institutions, as 85 per cent of co-funded students were registered with a post-1992 HEI. The number of students in each institution tends to be 50 or fewer. The findings of the study correspond with the feedback from our case studies in that provision tends to be limited to only one or two subjects (although the wider research points to subjects allied to medicine or veterinary science, agriculture and related subjects); it is targeted at sub-degree level (to achieve institutional credits, undergraduate certificates and diplomas, and less frequently, foundation degrees); and is low-intensity (relative to full-time equivalent study). The students on these programmes tend to be highly qualified (half are already qualified to HE level and so will be studying for a qualification that is either equivalent to or below their existing qualification level), aged between 20 and 49, and female (the latter is associated with the subjects that are offered); and of UK domicile. They also do not tend to have a very recent history of HE or FE study (HEFCE, 2011).

5 Costs and Challenges of Supporting Part-time Delivery and Part-time Learners

Key points

- The least flexible forms of integrated delivery are felt to be the cheapest to operate although not entirely without additional costs.
- When calculating costs, the literature focuses on costs associated with out-of-normal-hours delivery (which will depend on the scale of provision). There can be mixed views of whether increasing use of the estate and facilities provides sufficient return on the operating costs.
- Staff contracts are a bigger barrier to extending provision beyond normal hours – although some institutions are willing to take this issue on.
- If the delivery model involves working through partners, institutions can accrue additional costs of managing partnerships. The lead institution may provide recruitment, assessment and awards ceremony support.
- There may be some additional costs associated with recruitment for part-time courses, as currently this is not part of the UCAS system, although these can be managed. Additional costs of recruitment were not felt to be particularly problematic.
- Previous studies have suggested that supporting part-time students is costly. The case studies did not particularly support this but it was recognised that if services did not align with part-time hours, it could limit uptake. There were mixed views of whether pastoral or educational guidance support was needed.
- There was some concern that the new fee regime – and aligning part-time fees to pro-rata of full-time – might increase costs of bite-sized provision above what the market would bear.

In examining part-time as a mode of higher education, it is useful to understand the costs of delivery and of supporting students. Identifying what is needed by part-time students may help to encourage (more) institutions to supply this. This chapter focuses on costs but also explores the challenges and risks to institutions in delivering part-time higher education.

5.1 The costs of delivering part-time study

As we have implied in Chapter 3, the costs of part-time provision depend upon the delivery model adopted. Where institutions deliver part-time in the least flexible form of infill, any

additional resources required to deliver part-time are minimised (although some may still accrue). The delivery of free-standing part-time is more costly, and in debates about costs, part-time is often assumed to be delivered outside of an institution's normal hours. There are two main reasons for increased cost in these instances: the extra resource inputs required, due to the demands of the different type of provision; and the frequently smaller groups of students than for other provision (JM Consulting, 2003a).

While the literature and case studies identified a range of costs involved in delivering (all forms of) part-time study, it was apparent from the case studies that institutions did not have a detailed account of the costs involved. The following sections explore the case studies in relation to existing evidence and then provide information on other 'costs' that might be incurred in part-time delivery – although these latter costs may not have been calculated by institutions in terms of pounds and pence.

5.1.1 Costs associated with the estate and facilities

The **research literature** suggests that the costs of delivering part-time vary by institution, depending on the scale of provision but also in part on the flexibility and range of services they offer to their full-time students. For example, if the institution's library facilities are open 24 hours a day, then this service is available for all students, regardless of their study hours or mode. However, some costs are greater for delivering to part-time students – and here considerations move to part-time outside traditional hours. Examples of this include the costs of keeping premises open later and providing services over extended hours (Boorman et al., 2006).

The issue of the costs of facilities and estate impacting upon decisions to deliver part-time gained a mixed response from staff in the **case studies**, and overall there was an indication that services such as libraries most typically operate longer hours than they once had, and virtual and managed learning environments (V/MLE) could provide information for other services. Similarly, canteen and refectory services tend to operate longer hours and hence are more supportive of part-time students who are taught outside traditional hours.

A large-scale provider indicated that in order to replicate its model, institutions would have to consider other types of service in order to attract a broad group of students. This includes crèche provision, which needs to operate alongside the part-time teaching hours to support working parents. However, this case study also indicated that some services did not need to change from 'office hours' since students would be content to access them by telephone or email. This included central academic registry services and academic enquiries to course tutors. The delivery mode was supported by the use of the V/MLE which was used as a repository for course, faculty and central departmental information.

While increasing use of existing resources might be viewed to generate cost-efficiencies, it was apparent this was not a straightforward calculation. For example, in one case study (a small-scale provider) that did not intend to grow its part-time market beyond its existing limited scale, it was noted that it might appear more cost-effective to have the estate in use in the evening but other costs would be generated which could undermine the value of increasing use of the estate.

Staff member 1: 'If we extended into the evenings, then it could make better use of our estate, and return on investment calculations indicate that we need intensive use of assets but increasing or changing the contract hours of staff would be problematic.'

Staff member 2: 'Other facilities do not readily meet the needs of part-time students – the security presence, street lighting, catering... the fabric is attenuated outside office hours.'

[Staff, small-scale provider]

While developing eLearning provision might be assumed to offer a cost-effective model, one of the case studies (a large-scale provider) noted that the upfront costs meant that it would take some time to recoup development costs. In addition to the comments of a specialist eLearning provider, there is an established literature that sets out the alternative pedagogies that are required for eLearning, and costs of developing quality provision are higher than might be assumed. In addition, eLearning does not necessarily avoid staff costs in terms of delivery, and may require contact time outside normal contract hours, and in this way may not present a cheaper alternative for delivery.

5.1.2 Staffing costs

A more pressing resourcing and cost issue of concern in the case studies and in the literature may have a greater influence over the selection of a delivery model. This is the cost of staff time when teaching takes place out of normal teaching hours (Boorman et al., 2006) although some institutions have staff contracts that require flexible working hours.

Institutions where staff may be contracted for flexible working hours include those in the FE sector, some specialist part-time providers and private providers. The issue of changing staff hours to incorporate non-traditional HE delivery models is perhaps less contentious because of this. In an example, members of staff in the **case studies** spoke about joining the case study institution (large-scale provider) because of its student population and ethos and had an expectation from the outset that they would work non-traditional hours and/or with non-traditional pedagogies. The willingness of staff to work alternative hours was linked to the students that would be encountered, who were perceived to be better motivated, have greater life experience and less requiring of discipline. Staff also talked positively about the potential for more applied pedagogies which would maximise the value of contact time and reduce any emphasis on tasks that could be undertaken away from the classroom.

In other institutions (for example, limited or small-scale providers), part-time delivery may be hampered by staff unwillingness to work beyond normal contract hours. There were suggestions that where institutions were research intensive, it would be hard to compensate staff for evening or weekend working by a relaxation of working hours during vacations, since it was already expected that staff would be involved in research in the vacation periods. There had to be consideration of institutional mission, reputation and position and to determine the affordable part-time options on that basis.

An alternative to changing staff contracts (which is viewed as difficult and hence resource intensive) is to employ staff to deliver provision that takes place out of normal hours as

noted by one small-scale provider. This was indeed the approach in some of the case studies which employed staff who were retiring but wanted to continue teaching with fewer hours, and others seeking greater flexibility than a standard academic contract.

5.1.3 Costs of partnerships

The **literature** suggests that managing and operating the franchise arrangements with FECs used to deliver some part-time courses can also have cost implications for institutions (Boorman et al., 2006), although HEIs can ‘top-slice’ funding in these arrangements (157 Group, 2010). The **case studies** – even those managing a large number of partners – did not emphasise particular management costs incurred by this. However, one highlighted that partner institutions also receive services from the lead institution. For example, one of the case study institutions (a small-scale provider) noted that the support offered to partners included the provision of admission services, electronic library access and the hosting of awards ceremonies.

5.1.4 Recruitment costs and approaches

It has been asserted in the **research literature** that part-time students can be more expensive to recruit because they do not apply directly through the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS). Instead they apply directly to individual institutions, and often individual departments within these (JM Consulting, 2003a). However this individual approach may be more appropriate for part-time students, particularly mature applicants and those progressing from one course to another within the same institution. Indeed, the ongoing review of the Admissions Process finds that mature applicants can find the UCAS system inflexible and impersonal (UCAS, 2011; see Chapter 1).

Responses from the **case studies** did not greatly support the view that part-time recruitment is more costly, although they acknowledged that methods and criteria for recruitment of full- and part-time students varied. First, the view from the case studies is that part-time students do not apply to multiple universities – rather, as other studies have indicated, students apply to a course at the most local university which delivers it (in part because study has to fit around their other circumstances). Consequently, UCAS would not offer any economies of scale within part-time application processes. In addition, it was noted that UCAS only reduces one aspect of the costs of recruiting full-time students in any case and that institutions still need to operate a central registry and have departmental staff to market the institution and its courses and make final selection of candidates.

Recruiting part-time was considered more expensive by staff in the case studies since there was greater likelihood of interviewing many or all candidates, whereas it was reported that decisions for full-time students would be made on the basis of grades achieved at A-level. There was also a need to reconsider the entry criteria since many of those applying to part-time routes do not hold A-levels, and departments could be involved in checking a broader range of qualifications than would be seen for full-time students⁴⁸. However, processes to streamline recruitment costs could be introduced by making part-time applicants, self-selecting recruits:

⁴⁸ Although our analysis of national student data indicates that a large proportion of part-time students already have HE-level qualifications, qualifications that HE staff should be very familiar with.

'We have changed our admissions process – we were getting between 800 and 900 applicants each year. We used to interview everyone with promise which proved to be highly labour-intensive – it needs two people and there is high attrition between stages so, for example, if you booked to interview 12 candidates in one day, 10 would turn up to interview. Of those, six or seven would be appropriate for the course and you would whittle that down to four offers of which two or three would enrol. So we introduced a test and let students self-select – if the test is too challenging they rule themselves out. It's efficient and it means we can move staff hours into supporting retention through offering additional tutorials.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

5.1.5 Risks associated with part-time delivery

In understanding the costs of part-time delivery, there may be other considerations for institutions. For example, the perceptions of costs may vary considerably between those institutions that have a history of delivery and have, as a result, adapted systems and facilities to meet the needs of part-time students than for those where part-time delivery is relatively novel. To enter the part-time market may require greater resource than to maintain a position within it. In this way the costs of part-time delivery may have been under-estimated by (some) case study institutions.

There are also other types of risks associated with part-time delivery that surround institutional reputation and these require some thought when considering how far it is possible to grow part-time HE. For example, as Chapter 12 demonstrates, there are differential rates of retention and achievement between part- and full-time students. These are key measures within league tables and the new Key Information Set (see Chapter 1) and consequently may deter institutions from deciding to increase their share of, or enter, the part-time market.

5.2 Challenges in supporting part-time students

5.2.1 What support do part-time students need?

The feedback from the **case studies** suggests that institutions are aware of the support needs of part-time students, and that these can differ to the needs of full-time students (full-time students in most cases make up the majority of their student body at undergraduate level). Staff are at pains to stress that part-time students need to feel supported or that support is available to them should they need it (such as access to guidance or financial support).

Accessibility

The experiences of staff in the case studies, however, indicated that part-time students do not necessarily take advantage of institutions' support services. This may be by choice since part-time students do not need the types of support on offer (eg if they are working in a job that is satisfactory to them, they may not require careers guidance or support). It may also be the case that they seek support elsewhere – they have existing support systems in their lives (which may not be the case for younger, full-time students), hence would

approach these for support rather than the institution. Staff posited the reverse is true for the traditional, young full-time student:

'Part-time students require less pastoral care and it's available less here than elsewhere. They are more responsible for themselves because they are mature – they have less expectation that we will provide pastoral support and they would more naturally approach other sources. That's quite different from traditional students – it's their first time away from home and they lack the support networks when they study away from home. They also expect tutors to provide the support they need – they don't think about going elsewhere.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

However, it must also be recognised that institutions may not provide services at the times when part-time students would wish to use them. Some institutions (large-scale providers) have identified differences in the uptake of services. For example, one large provider found that while 70 per cent of their student body was part-time, 70 per cent of those using student support services were full-time. It did not know whether this was an accessibility issue or whether part-time students did not require this support. There was an acknowledgement that greater attempts should be made to support part-time students and it is attempting to do this, for example through extending departmental reception desk services into the arrival time of the part-time groups, made possible by efficiency savings elsewhere. Other case studies (large-scale providers) also noted how they were extending the opening hours of many of their facilities and resources, which could improve the access for part-time students. Examples here were extending opening hours for libraries and access to computing support, and providing lecture materials online. However, it was acknowledged that this move was often brought about by working to support and/or improve the experience of their full-time or international students, rather than specifically to meet the needs of their part-time students. Instead, part-time students are indirect beneficiaries.

Well-designed courses

Other delivery modes may require other forms of support. For example, where a flexible and modular system of study operates, it can be difficult for part-time students to build their study programme since they study over a lengthier period. A lot depends on the frequency with which particular modules are delivered and the pre-requisites that exist between modules. In one of the case study institutions (a specialist provider) operating this mode, part-time students are assigned an educational guidance adviser who provides support to navigate and compose an educational pathway. However, where programmes are pre-set (as noted by a large-scale provider), there would not be a need for this support.

For institutions, supporting part-time students has to go beyond support services into how courses and modules are designed and configured and in-course progression is managed. Whereas full-time students can be considered as a largely homogeneous group, studying at a set pace, this is not the same for part-time students who may be seeking to vary the pace of study and who have very different calls on their time. Discussing design of part-time study with small-scale provider case study institutions suggested a need to consider the relationships between modules and how pre-requisites have been set. Where students are studying at the same pace, and following a very similar set of modules, it may be

appropriate to label all modules in the first year as pre-requisites of the second year of study. However, part-time students may not complete all Year 1 modules in their first year of study and may wish to start on related Year 2 modules to build a pathway.

Recognition of their wider commitments

This difference in pace of study is further complicated by the 'other' lives of part-time students. Part-time students encounter other calls on their time which may mean they have to delay or defer studies. This involves institutions (of all types) in having to have more flexible systems to track students who may join as a cohort but soon become a series of individuals moving at different paces. Institutions may also need to consider the length of time module credits remain valid to enable the different paces at which part-time students can pursue their studies. However, there was some suggestion that this might well vary between subjects. For example, some staff questioned whether, in subjects related to medicine and health, it was acceptable for module credits to be valid for five years or more. They were concerned that learning in this field could lose its currency after five years and no longer represent the state-of-the-art learning that the public would expect.

In supporting part-time students, there also has to be academic guidance about their capability to achieve. Staff in the case studies noted that in some cases, support was needed to help part-time students towards a dignified exit. In this suggestion there was an appreciation that the lives of part-time students can be complicated and the students themselves can be tenacious although this may not be in their best interest.

'You have to be realistic in your advice to part-time students and need to get more attuned to when it is in their best interests to pull out. It's a professional disposition thing – you need to talk sense in a crisis and to aim to remove the sense of concern over personal failure – it's so often their circumstances that intervene – you need to empower them to withdraw in a dignified way if it's not their time to be studying.'

[Staff, small-scale provider]

Careers guidance

An issue not raised within the case studies, but that does occur within the **literature** (see Callendar et al. 2009 evidence review for HECSU) is the provision of careers guidance to part-time students. This study finds that the 'literature largely ignores part-time students as a major potential group of recipients of careers guidance in spite of a rhetoric of the need to develop "career management skills"'. The authors note that the available evidence suggests that where pre-entry guidance is received, this can lead to increased rates of entry to HE (including part-time study) and that a lack of guidance meant that young people had not considered a work and study route (i.e. part-time study), rather than a learning first route, to their chosen career. It concludes there is a lack of evidence about how careers guidance contributes to the careers decisions of part-time students, and how guidance may support students during their higher education studies.

5.2.2 Costs of supporting part-time students

Some studies have asserted that pastoral support for full-time and part-time students can cost largely the same in a given period, despite part-time students studying towards a lower number of credits (JM Consulting, 2003). In this way, it is argued that part-time students cost institutions more in terms of supporting their experience. There was not a groundswell of support for this view among staff in the case studies and there were mixed views about the nature of support necessary for part-time students and the extent of support necessary depending upon the delivery model.

5.3 Estimating the extra costs of part-time study

Case study institutions could not provide an exact estimate of any additional costs of managing part-time studies. The literature review identified one study (JM Consulting, 2003a) that had attempted this, although the costs data that they could access was of limited reliability; hence the analysis should be regarded as indicative of the maximum potential differential.

The analysis indicated that delivering to a part-time student in price group D⁴⁹ incurred additional costs compared with delivering to a full-time student in the same price group. The main drivers behind the increased costs for part-time students were the costs incurred on a headcount basis regardless of the number of credits studied, such as recruitment, administration, pastoral support and additional library costs. Delivery to part-time students also incurred additional costs over and above those incurred in delivery to full-time students. Part-time students tend to be taught in smaller cohorts, which are more expensive to deliver to than full-time cohorts which tend to be larger (JM Consulting, 2003b).

The research estimated that a programme for a part-time student studying 0.4 of a full-time student cost an extra 39 per cent to deliver. For part-time students studying 0.7 of a full-time programme this extra cost fell, but the costs of delivering to a part-time student were still estimated to be 15 per cent higher than the costs of delivering to a full-time student. The level of these additional costs for part-time delivery is likely to vary by discipline, the type of the student cohort and the department's teaching style (JM Consulting, 2003a).

5.4 Income from part-time study and setting part-time fees

5.4.1 Paying for part-time study

The **research literature** suggests that while there is evidence that the costs of delivering part-time provision can be higher than for full-time, the income institutions can derive from part-time provision may be lower in some circumstances. There have been different institutional funding arrangements in place for full- and part-time students and differing arrangements for student financial support.

⁴⁹ The HEFCE funding calculation recognises that different courses require different levels of resources. Price Group A, which includes clinical stages of medical and dentistry qualifications, gains a weighting of 4; Price Group B, which includes laboratory-based subjects, gains a weighting of 1.7. Price Group D courses are not weighted, ie are not seen to require an additional resource weighting.

Callender et al. (2010) argue that the financial arrangements (up to 2011/12) have impeded the growth of part-time HE and reduced students' opportunities for studying part-time because students have not been able to access finance in an equivalent way to full-time students. Access to financial support for part-time students has been determined by a student's existing qualifications and the number of hours studied, rather than financial need (Callender et al., 2010). The incoming new arrangements may address this since fee loans will become available to part-time students on much the same basis as full-time students, although part-time students will be expected to begin paying back their loan four years after commencing study if they have reached the specified income level.

5.4.2 Setting fees for part-time study

The **literature** suggests that fees for part-time students have depended on the course and target part-time market, with institutions charging varied part-time fees based on what they feel the market will bear (Callender et al., 2010). Some evidence suggests that the absence of fee loans for part-time students has depressed the fees institutions feel able to charge for part-time courses (Callender et al., 2010).

Part-time fees can be set by departments and therefore vary within an institution. Larger fees may be attached to part-time courses thought to have good job prospects (law, computing etc.) rather than courses in other subject areas (Boorman et al., 2006). The motivation for institutional involvement with part-time provision is also reflected in fee structures: some institutions have separate fee structures for adult and continuing education, compared with mainstream undergraduate provision for example (Boorman and Ramsden, 2006).

More recent work assessing the impact of the variable fees found that many institutions had increased part-time undergraduate fees in real terms since variable fees were introduced, although usually by less than the pro rata increase in the full-time undergraduate fee. On average part-time undergraduate fee levels are now significantly higher in real terms than before the introduction of variable fees for full-time undergraduates in 2006/07 (Brown et al., 2009).

Some institutions did not raise their part-time fees in line with their full-time fees when variable fees were introduced in 2006, as they perceived that demand from part-time students would be constrained by the student support regime and the need for part-time students to pay upfront fees (HEFEC, 2011). Nevertheless, most institutions in the Callender et al. (2010) study had increased their fees for part-time undergraduate courses in line with variable fees for full-time students, especially where they served employers, but when serving low-income groups, and delivering against an agenda of widening participation, the institutions tended to have lower fees for part-time provision, reflecting the perceived price sensitivity of this group mentioned in the research (e.g. Callender et al., 2006).

Within the **case studies** (generally large-scale providers) there were some discussions about setting fees under the new fee regime, although in some cases, fees have been pro rata of full-time for some time; hence this was not an issue. It was also noted by some institutions that it was not possible to offer part-time at a cheaper rate than full-time because of the costs of developing new modes it would be delivered through. Greatest concern was expressed among institutions with a widening participation mission where it was felt that setting fees as a pro rata of full-time would make study too costly for potential

students. Similarly, institutions feared that raising the fee for bite-sized and CPD provision could make it inaccessible to students and unattractive to employers, which would impact on future delivery.

The case study research was able to explore views of fees with institutions in the devolved administrations. In one of these (a specialist provider) it was reported that there would be no fee increase for either full- or part-time study. In this instance, the part-time fee was calculated on the basis of the amount of credits involved.

In one large-scale provider, consideration was being given to whether the fee structure should change to enable greater flexibility to students. Presently fees are charged per year of study. However, staff were considering whether module-based fees might be more desirable⁵⁰.

5.4.3 Cost-benefit analysis

In the review of **research literature**, the study by Boorman et al. (2006) found private organisations were felt by staff at HEIs to have lower overheads than their own organisation. These costs were then reflected in the student fees which were typically lower in private providers than in publicly funded HEIs. This cost disparity had led to some HEIs closing part-time courses that were in competition with private part-time provision. Our own case study work also identifies this concern among publicly funded HEIs.

When comparing the potentially higher delivery costs with the lower levels of income from part-time provision, in some instances it is clear why some institutions perceive there to be risks and barriers to them entering the part-time market. In a study of HEIs in Wales (Williams, 2010), institutions reported the main barrier to increasing part-time provision was financial because it was difficult to generate an equivalent level of income from part-time students as full-time students, a problem compounded by reported higher costs of delivering part-time provision. Income from part-time students was also felt to be inconsistent when compared with income from full-time students, since part-time students tended to study for credits more flexibly and at a more unpredictable rate than full-time students, and the retention of part-time students and achievement of the full qualification can be lower than that of full-time students – findings with which other studies have concurred (Williams, 2010; King, 2008).

In addition, the income from full-time fees has been guaranteed because it is covered by student loans. This has not been the case for part-time students, who may be more likely to be potential debtors (Callender, forthcoming). Earlier work with institutions, however, found that nearly all the sample of 26 had not found that part-time students were any more likely than full-time students to end up as debtors, and some institutions had actually found that part-time students were less likely to become debtors (Boorman et al., 2006).

⁵⁰ It is salient to note that the student fee loan that will become available for part-time study will not support this 'build as you learn' approach since to be eligible, individuals will have to register for a stated qualification aim.

6 Institutions' Assessment of the Demand for Part-time Study

Key points

- Given the variety of provision within part-time, any assessment of the market is highly segmented.
- The orientation to the part-time market is determined by the traditions of the higher education provider and there is a propensity for newer universities and mixed economy colleges to have a stronger tradition of part-time provision.
- The environment may be such that institutions see no reason to change their current orientation to the provision of part-time HE. Demand for HE is already high among young people and institutions can readily fill their places.
- Assessing demand for part-time study is challenging as the potential pool for part-time study is considerably larger than the pool for full-time study. It will include not only school and college leavers but those currently in the labour market and those on the margins. Also there is no central application system for part-time students so, effectively, institutions have no 'early warning' of the numbers wanting to study part-time.
- Some institutions are optimistic about demand. In the view of these, a market exists which can either sustain their current level of provision or in some cases expand it.
- Other institutions are pessimistic and identify falling demand for part-time study driven by the changing policy context and current economic circumstances.
- In a few cases, institutions have experimented with offering part-time study as a compensatory measure when it has not been possible to offer a full-time place to students (mainly young students). This has not proved particularly successful, ie students have not been keen to take this up.
- The positioning of part-time as a widening participation route, and the delivery of sub-degree qualifications in order to develop pathways to HE, is highly valued. However, there is some concern that funding arrangements may undermine this market.
- Local context is highly important to understanding the part-time market. The labour market, travel arrangements, existence of other providers and cultural travel boundaries all have influence here.

In assessing the potential to further encourage and support part-time study, it is useful to understand institutions' own assessment of the part-time market and the factors that they take into consideration when making these assessments. The analysis discussed in this

chapter shows both optimistic and pessimistic assessments. The chapter concludes with an examination of what has encouraged institutions to develop and deliver part-time higher education, and what may act as barriers to part-time delivery.

6.1 Assessing the potential part-time market

The risks to entering the part-time market have been found to mean that institutions with stable or expanding numbers of full-time students have little incentive to expand into part-time provision. The extent to which universities are willing to invest in part-time provision depends on the size and nature of their part-time provision and perceptions of demand for part-time learning, the associated opportunity costs, and the costs of developing infrastructure.

A recent major study into part-time provision, identified in the **literature review**, concluded that the funding model in place at the time of the research favoured full-time provision and did not adequately cover the risk of delivering part-time courses, creating barriers to entry (Callender, et al., 2010) (see Section 6.5 for a full discussion of these perceived barriers). It might be inferred that these factors have also affected institutions' assessment of the market and the benefits of continuing to deliver part-time and the way in which it is delivered. Reviewing institutions' considerations and views of potential demand for part-time HE may give some insight into structural and institutional barriers to its supply.

Feedback from the **case studies** highlights the difficulties in assessing potential demand for part-time study. There are two key difficulties. First, anyone could be a potential part-time student – a young person coming to the end of their further education, an individual in a job who wants to further their career or change career direction, or an older person who wants to pursue an interest outside of work or in their retirement. The potential pool is therefore larger, more dispersed and considerably more varied than the main target for full-time HE – the young school or college graduate. Second, there is no early warning system. For the full-time HE market, the single application system administered by UCAS provides the sector and individual institutions with a clear picture of size and nature of demand. The timetable set by UCAS also ensures that the majority of applications are made well before the start of the new academic year. However, those considering part-time study make their enquiries and applications direct to an institution, and this tends to happen much closer to the start of the course. These two factors make it difficult for institutions to gauge the size of demand and to make appropriate plans. For example, one case study institution (large-scale provider) spoke of how they had opened a new campus to expand their geographic reach but that their efforts had attracted a greater number of students to their existing campus than to their new site.

6.1.1 A segmented market

The **case study** research indicated that the part-time market is affected by the different needs of different potential students, the traditions within institutions, the local context and the traditional delivery model of HE in the UK. There is widespread acknowledgement that the market for full-time study is different to the market for part-time study. The part-time market is not only different but is also segmented – with different consumers such as employers, adult returners, adult and community learners, and young people. These different consumers of part-time study have different motivations for, and orientations to,

being involved in learning, and crucially are thought by institutions to have a different willingness to pay.

6.1.2 Orientation to the part-time market

The orientation to the part-time market and its varying segments is determined by the traditions of the university and there is a propensity for newer universities and mixed economy colleges to have a stronger tradition of part-time provision. For example, three of the larger providers of part-time HE in our case studies have a long tradition of widening participation and see part-time as a critical device in achieving this aim. Others are specialists in the part-time market. Consequently, their position on these terms in delivering part-time undergraduate studies is unlikely to change.

Part-time pathway provision is a key market but may be at risk

In some cases, the part-time market is a key part of their widening participation commitment and provides an access route to full undergraduate study (either in full- or part-time mode). For example, several case studies (of different institutional types) had provision delivered in part-time mode to help orient students (back) into academic learning and to provide them with academic skills to enable full undergraduate study. In these institutions, the widening participation access pathways are viewed as a pre-cursor to full-time study and students are expected to change mode once ready to start a degree or other undergraduate programme⁵¹. In one of these examples, it was reported that the student body largely comprised adults without work or other commitments which would prevent full-time study. However, another of these institutions had identified that progression from its access pathway to undergraduate study was problematic and there was greater likelihood that students wanted to continue learning in bite-sized chunks.

There is some doubt over whether these pathway programmes will continue in some institutions and one large-scale provider has already stated an intention to withdraw their programmes. The initiatives had often been funded from the widening participation budget provided by HEFCE, which case study institutions anticipate will no longer be available and so places them at risk. The shifts in funding of this sort may act as a barrier to institutions developing provision for the part-time market.

In contrast to this trend, another large-scale provider, a specialist in the part-time market, intended to strengthen its offer and introduce provision within this arena – specifically to provide a ‘low cost, low risk’ starting point for widening participation students who might not be ready to take on the full costs of undergraduate studies without understanding what it would entail first.

⁵¹ This is also indicated by the student data on entry qualifications where access qualifications were more common among entrants to full-time HE undergraduate study than among part-time entrants

6.2 Institutional perspectives on demand

6.2.1 Optimistic institutions

As noted above, predicting demand is challenging, and views and experiences of the market are far from static. However, some institutions are positive about the future for the part-time undergraduate market. For example, two institutions (one large-scale and one small-scale provider) are considering a radical overhaul to increase flexibility and break down the barriers between full- and part-time. One plans to embed the US model whereby students build their own programmes of study to fit their needs and priorities. This reflects the point about flexibility having greater utility than part-time in defining this market (see Chapter 2).

In another case study (a specialist provider, in that they have a relatively large part-time student body but offer a limited range of subjects), research has been conducted into the potential market for their courses, and this has revealed a largely untapped market for part-time among employers and learners which the institution was hoping to meet.

'We've done four different large surveys of employers and students on their attitudes to part-time study and online study, and that's incorporated over 35,000 respondents. So we've got some pretty good research on what the market is telling us, what employers are prepared to sponsor and pay for, as well as what part-time students are wanting to study, and our research has identified roundabout two million learners who would like to study in the UK for a degree part-time, but don't have, at the moment, a proposition that matches their need.'

[Staff, specialist provider]

Establishing greater flexibility and breaking down the barriers between full- and part-time may benefit full-time students. In one of the case studies (a large-scale provider) there was a recognition that a significant number of students study part-time 'by default' as a result of interruptions to their study and/or the need to repeat modules. Staff felt that if these students had a choice, they would opt for part-time, particularly a more flexible 'pay as you go' model of HE learning.

A mixed model is being encouraged by another large-scale provider in terms of developing its part-time market. Here, where there is high demand and good performance, i.e. a proven market, traditional part-time routes will be pursued and enhanced by an accelerated part-time route. To enable this changed model, new staff contracts are being negotiated to enable greater flexibility.

Another case study institution (again a large-scale provider) was seeking to increase part-time provision in order to open it up to a wider group of students (its traditional target group for part-time had been employees). This institution was seeking to develop a formal and centralised approach to marketing and recruitment and was introducing a dedicated part-time brochure and a team to coordinate part-time across the institution.

In one small-scale institution, the key market to develop is local and would particularly involve older adults. This may be linked to the local (and national) economic trend since

the target market includes individuals working in the public sector and facing the risk of redundancy. This was felt to drive an aspiration to retrain and/or up-skill. However, a note of concern was also expressed in relation to this market and this surrounded the costs of study among a debt-averse group.

However, another institution (a large-scale provider) had a different take and argued that the 'grey' market could grow as individuals understood that given their age, they might not have to pay back the fee loan although the regulations surrounding the new fee loans suggest that debt is written off after a specified number of years following completion, rather than at a specified age. However, it is also questionable whether older adults would make decisions on this basis.

6.2.2 Pessimistic institutions

Overall, there was greater pessimism from staff about the potential for the part-time market to grow. In one case study (a small-scale provider) staff identified barriers to pursuing the part-time undergraduate market which were insurmountable. In this case, there were felt to have been structural barriers to delivery (e.g. no allowance from HEFCE for these numbers) and much of the provision was unsuitable for part-time delivery (ie laboratory-based studies). In addition, other local HE providers were perceived to be more able to meet the demands of the local market for part-time study.

Other institutions reported a fall in demand for part-time study, which was evident in the management information they supplied. Although this was not necessarily experienced in all areas of their part-time provision (indeed some subject areas appeared to maintain their size or even grow over time). The fall in overall numbers was attributed to a number of factors:

- **Employers:** Some case studies (large-scale providers) assessed that the declining market is due in part to employers in the current economic climate becoming more reluctant to support part-time study, particularly part-time study leading to full qualifications. Linked to this was the reduction of the public sector since this has a tradition of supporting part-time study (see Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion of employer demand).
- **Employer sponsorship:** In light of the new fee regime and the availability of fee loans, institutions were concerned that employers would become less willing to sponsor part-time students (again see Chapter 7).
- **Employees:** Given the economic climate and uncertainty over employment, individuals in employment were also felt to be less inclined to commit to part-time learning which could not deliver immediate benefit.
- **Policy changes:** The Equivalent or Lower Qualification (ELQ) policy was already reported to have had an impact on the part-time market. This effectively raised the costs of study for those with an existing HE level qualification and impacted on the 'leisure' learner market. Much of this part-time provision has already been lost and there was further pessimism about whether what remains could be sustained. The ELQ policy may also have deterred some individuals wishing to change career.

- **Anticipated withdrawal of widening participation funding:** Some institutions anticipate that reduced funding for widening participation provision will affect the provision offered in the part-time market. For example, one large-scale provider anticipates the closure of the department with responsibility for their introductory HE studies (which is targeted to widening participation and creating pathways to HE) since the provision will no longer be financially viable.
- **The new fee regime:** As we have already noted, there are also concerns that setting part-time course fees as a proportional rate of full-time courses will 'price them out of the market'. For example, one institution noted how the fee for a short 10-credit course which, until the introduction of the new fee regime, had cost £80 would rise to £800. Staff feared these higher fees would be beyond the level the market was willing to bear.

Part-time as a compensatory measure

Among some of the case studies (across the range of provision, e.g. large and limited providers), institutions had attempted to offer part-time to students as compensation when a full-time place was not available but this had failed to induce a switch from full- to part-time study. This was linked to the increased demand for full-time places in the 2011/12 academic year, i.e. ahead of the introduction of the new fee regime and higher fees. These institutions had experienced a surge in demand for full-time which it was not possible to meet.

Experiences of using part-time to compensate for unmet demand for full-time study did not indicate this was particularly viable. While institutions took great efforts to contact students who were unsuccessful in gaining full-time places, to offer them part-time routes, very few students were keen to take up this offer. One institution (a limited provider), however, thought there could be potential to offer accelerated part-time provision (over four years) as an alternative to those unsuccessful in their bid to undertake full-time courses.

6.3 Importance of the external context

6.3.1 The local context affects part-time supply

Evidence from the US suggests that if there is a tight labour market, i.e. a wealth of job opportunities, then institutions expand their part-time provision in order to tap into potential demand available in the labour force. A number of staff in the case studies indicated that the local economic context was important to their assessment of the part-time market. It was suggested that work was one aspect of the 'other' part of individuals' lives that would drive them to consider part-time over full-time HE options. The motivation to improve career trajectories would also drive workers towards part-time study.

Where institutions have relied upon the local labour market to feed their part-time courses, there are considerable concerns if the labour market comprises a large number of public sector organisations due to the government's plan to reduce this sector. Evidence elsewhere shows that the public sector has had extensive involvement in supporting part-time HE.

The relevance of the local economy to an institution's provision and specialisms was also a driver of the part-time market. For example, one of the case study institutions (a limited provider) had high quality full-time provision targeted at the service sector. However, this sector was not present in any volume within the local economy, which meant that full-time provision could not be repackaged and repurposed to take to the part-time market.

There was some indication that the number and mix of providers of HE in the local context could influence an institution's decision on whether to enter the part-time HE market. Where there was a mixed economy of providers, those with widening participation or more vocational missions had a reputation for part-time, and had developed their market and met much of the local demand, which meant that there were few drivers for other types of institutions (limited or small-scale providers) to get involved.

'Another local institution does more on the part-time market – it's more natural for that type of university... it and another have more of the reputation as local, second-chance providers of higher education – it's unclear whether it's desirable for us to move into the market place, there's just no clear case for it.'

[Staff, small-scale provider]

A further consideration in the assessment of the influence of the local context on the part-time market is the physical accessibility of institutions and local transport arrangements. In some areas, the lack of public transport outside of peak hours can act to constrain the potential of students to travel to institutions after work or at weekends.

A linked challenge is the area out of which potential learners are not willing to travel, i.e. their cultural-travel boundaries. This may be informed by structural issues (such as toll roads) but typically reflects the individual and community sense of a boundary. A solution to this highlighted by one of the case studies (a small-scale provider) was to deliver part-time provision through partners in the FE sector who were more accessible in terms of both their transport links and how they were perceived by communities.

6.4 Dominance of the full-time HE model

In assessing the potential market for part-time HE in the UK, some staff were able to draw upon experiences of other countries and to provide a comparative analysis. In these instances, the tradition of HE in the UK was felt to act as a barrier to greatly expanding part-time provision or at least doing so at any speed. The UK has a lengthy tradition of HE which has surrounded a residential model. This has become the accepted culture of HE – and links to findings elsewhere about HE as a 'rite of passage' experience for young people within our culture. This is discussed in greater detail in Part Two of the report.

Other countries do not share this tradition. For example, a staff member in one institution noted that in Australia – where HE has been a comparatively more recent development – the residential element did not develop and it is culturally accepted that HE study will take place alongside work. It was suggested that to move away from the established model of HE in the UK would require significant cultural and environmental change.

6.5 Drivers and barriers to HE provision

As we noted earlier, Callender et al. (2010), in a major study to explore the provision of part-time HE, found that institutions' history, mission and strategic plans were interlinked influencers of the extent of part-time delivery. This went beyond whether the institution was an old or new university to a mix of local, regional and national factors, historic positions and labour market orientations. This held true within our case studies for this project, which demonstrated a complex mix of, and multi-faceted, reasons to be involved in part-time HE.

6.5.1 Drivers for institutions to provide part-time HE

The **case studies** revealed a number of drivers to the provision of part-time HE, but no single factor appeared to determine the extent of part-time. Instead, it was the interaction between multiple drivers that was influential in explaining why some institutions were more heavily involved in part-time higher education. The drivers included:

- History – the purpose behind an institution's establishment. For example, a large-extensive part-time provider was established on socialist ideals to offer education to workers at a time when education was only available to middle and upper classes. Former polytechnics may continue to focus on vocational HE which may lend itself to part-time provision. The history may have led to strong links within the local labour market and a focus on regional regeneration with linked part-time provision.
- Mission – some institutions have had a stronger orientation to the part-time market since they have seen this as part of their mission. This overlays a view of the market/labour market and a sense of social responsibility (see below). While the 'mission' driver of part-time might be construed to be an old versus new university divide, the Callender et al. (2010) study showed this was an over simplification. It should also be remembered that mission can change and may be driven by national policy and other external factors.
- Labour market links – and particularly an orientation to employer-focused provision, whether directed at a specific sector and employers' needs or at employees in the local labour market. In these examples, institutions may have existing full-time provision that may readily be repurposed or tailored for these employer markets. An alternative is where institutions have a long history of cooperating with local employers, which again lends itself to the provision of part-time.
- Social responsibility – where strong regional and sub-regional links exist and, more generally, part-time may be represented as an institution's social responsibility and this may overlap with its widening participation activities. This may lead to the delivery of part-time HE through local FE providers, to widen reach and participation.
- Differentiation in the local or regional HE market – where a number of HE providers exist within a locality, this may lead to one focusing on part-time as a means to differentiate it from other local institutions, although it might also be argued that this positioning is driven by competition for full-time students, particularly where competitors include higher ranking institutions.

- Personal interest – there was some indication that individuals within institutions could drive forward some part-time provision. This might be within a certain local industrial sector due to subject specialism and employer linkages, or it might be through senior individuals believing that part-time delivery was a good thing (in essence leading the social responsibility agenda).

Complicating this assessment is that within an institution, the drivers to part-time may vary by faculty and/or by department: there may be a greater willingness in some to engage with part-time than in others; there may also be different approaches to, and models of, part-time delivery. Consequently, what happens within an institution may be as different as what happens between one institution and another.

6.5.2 Barriers to institutions expanding part-time HE

In assessing the feasibility and desirability for institutions of expanding part-time provision, it is perhaps salient to note the current context and its likely effect. Demand for HE is already high (over 40 per cent of the young leavers from school and FE now enter HE) and most institutions can easily fill their places and, indeed, are over-subscribed. While the HE White Paper *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System* introduces a range of flexibilities, the environment may be such that institutions see no reason to change their current orientation to the provision of part-time HE.

'It is not clear why we would do part-time with the HE economy geared as it is – we're sustainable as we are – there is no need for us to do more so we don't have that drive. If we were to push anything, it would be to increase the international market.'

[Staff, limited provider]

However, it is not possible to know whether this position of over-subscription will be maintained once the new fee regime is in place. There is some evidence that some institutions are already seeking other funding streams to supplement their budgets, although it's not known how widespread this is. This again underlines the difficulties in predicting future demand for part-time study.

Currently, part-time students are not included in the number cap imposed on institutions and as a consequence may have been viewed as an additional income stream by some institutions. However, while this situation is unlikely to change in the immediate future, there are indications that some forms of part-time HE may in future be in the scope of student number controls (HEFCE, 2011, see Chapter 1).

It is also clear that to deliver part-time well, institutions may need to adapt their services and infrastructure; hence this is a far from cost-free source of income (see Chapter 5). A question surrounds whether non-specialised institutions see this as a cost-effective and valuable form of provision and worth keeping within the mix of their offer, rather than focusing their effort on the more traditional full-time route for young people, which in terms of delivery is more homogeneous and does not involve institutions in significant changes to delivery.

Considering some of the factors mentioned above that help to promote the provision of part-time, institutions may also take a different approach, for instance, to their social responsibility. Some institutions (e.g. limited providers) may choose to break down financial barriers to full-time study as part of widening participation activities rather than look to providing different modes of study. Depending on history and mission and other factors, this may present a lower risk and lower cost option than expanding into part-time – especially where a business case is not established.

Part Two: Understanding Demand-side Issues

In this part of the report we bring together the evidence on demand for part-time HE from individuals and employers, and gain an understanding of the issues affecting demand. We also explore in more detail the needs, experiences and outcomes of part-time students and the attitudes and perceptions of potential part-time students and how they might be encouraged to study part-time. More specifically we examine:

- the profile of the part-time student population to gain an understanding of the characteristics, backgrounds and study patterns of current part-time students (Chapter 7)
- the profile of young people (18 to 22-year-olds) in HE studying part-time and their pathways to HE, and try to understand what type of provision younger part-time students want (Chapter 7)
- the nature of employer demand for part-time HE (Chapter 8)
- understanding of the diversity of HE provision and specifically the awareness of the part-time study option, and how individuals form opinions about HE and make decisions about HE (Chapter 9)
- the perceptions of, attitudes to and opinions on part-time study among young students who are approaching university entrance (those aged 16 to 19), and the decisions they make about part-time study (Chapter 10)
- the motivations of current undergraduate students to choose part-time study (Chapter 10)
- how part-time study might be promoted and encouraged, and the key challenges to attracting potential part-time students and how these can be overcome (Chapter 11)
- how the HE student experience and outcomes of part-time study contrast with that of full-time study, and perceptions of the quality of the part-time experience (Chapter 12).

Much of the evidence is taken from our primary research with current HE students, both full- and part-time, and with potential HE students and their advisers. It should be noted that much of the feedback captured is subjective rather than objective, and is based on potentially inaccurate perceptions built from poor information and influenced by the dominant model of HE which expects individuals to leave home and to study full-time for three years in a university. However, it is important to understand the thoughts that young people have about part-time study in order to gauge potential demand for alternative models of HE, and understand the challenges policy makers will face in encouraging young people to consider part-time study.

Additional evidence is gathered from analysis of secondary data. National student data (from HESA and the ILR) and data from the individual case study institutions have been used to profile the characteristics of part-time students and their studies. Data from the national Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Institutions Survey and the National Student Survey have been used to explore the student experience. Further evidence comes from our review of relevant existing research.

7 Characteristics of Part-time Students

Key points

- Part-time students have a different profile and study pattern to full-time students.
- In the main, part-time students are older, more likely to be female and less diverse (in terms of ethnicity and disability) than full-time students. However, they are not a homogenous group – and should not be treated as such.
- Concentrations of part-time students tend to be located in large cities (though not necessarily close to large-scale or more specialist providers of part-time study), or they are found in more deprived and coastal areas of the UK. Indeed, part-time students are more likely than full-time students to come from areas where there is generally less of a tradition of participation in HE.
- Part-time students, particularly those on other undergraduate programmes, are more likely than full-time students to already have HE-level qualifications when they commence their studies. This has implications for the fee levels charged and, moving forwards, eligibility for student loans.
- Part-time students tend to have other commitments, particularly careers (rather than jobs) and family responsibilities. They see themselves as workers who study, and they fit this study around their other activities.
- Part-time students have a different pattern of study length to full-time students. Many are on short Continuing Professional Development (CPD)-type programmes, and others are on full programmes expected to involve more than four years of study. However, the majority of part-time students have no set programme length.
- Almost two-thirds of part-time students (62 per cent) are studying courses that are of medium to high intensity (equivalent to at least 25 per cent of the full-time equivalent).
- The vast majority of part-time students study at other undergraduate level rather than first degree programmes (the exception here is the OU, where the majority of their part-time students are studying for a first degree).
- Key areas of study for part-time students are subjects allied to health (mostly nursing and social work), education, business and administrative studies, and social studies. A large number of part-time students are studying a combination of subjects (or following a course with an unspecified specialism); many of these are registered with the OU. Relatively few part-time students study creative arts and design compared with the pattern for full-time students. These findings are likely to

be driven by age and gender, as these background factors have a strong influence on subject choice.

- Part-time study is not felt to be for younger individuals, and young part-time students make up only a very small proportion (14 per cent) of the part-time undergraduate cohort in the UK.
- Young part-time undergraduates have a similar profile to young full-time students. However, there are indications that young part-time students are more likely to come from a widening participation background, specifically from a low-participation neighbourhood, compared with young full-time students.
- Younger part-time students may make different choices about HE from those of mature part-time students, and so in some respects begin to look like full-time students. Younger part-time students are relatively more likely than older part-timers to study at first degree level. However these young students still have a greater preference for programmes with a clearer link to a career: business and administrative studies, engineering, and architecture, building and planning.
- Young part-time study may be concentrated in fewer institutions than either full-time study or part-time study for older individuals. Younger part-time students are the least likely group to attend either Russell Group or 1994 Group universities.
- As found in the HE sector, the part-time undergraduate HE students in the FE sector tend to be female, mid career and less diverse than full-time students. However, the gender split is less extreme in the FE sector.
- Part-time undergraduate students in the FE sector are more likely than full-time students to be studying at other undergraduate level, particularly at higher certificate level. First degree level study is rare among part-time students (only six per cent). They are also more likely to be on short courses and many are on low-intensity courses (less than one quarter FTE).
- Shorter courses are considerably more common among undergraduate HE students in the FE sector than among undergraduate students in the HE sector (reflecting the limited extent of first degree level study).
- In terms of young students, the majority of young part-time HE level students in the FE sector are male, which is the opposite of the pattern found for the HE sector. Young part-time undergraduate level study in the FE sector almost exclusively takes place in FE colleges. Very few young part-time students study at first degree level.

It is important to understand who part-time students are and what they study, and how this differs, if at all, from full-time students, as this can determine students' motivations to study at HE, their support needs and their expectations. Knowing who part-time students are (or could be) would help institutions to develop their marketing and recruitment strategies, and help them to develop appropriate support mechanisms to ensure part-time students have a quality experience and outcome. In this chapter we look at the personal characteristics of

part-time students, their educational background, their current circumstances, and their study preferences – what their HE study looks like. We also focus specifically on one particular segment of the part-time population of interest to policy makers, young part-time students (those aged between 18 and 22), to understand how they fit within the wider part-time student population and whether they differ from young people who choose to study full-time in HE.

7.1 Who studies part-time and what do they study?

7.1.1 Who are the part-time students?

Staff across the **case studies** emphasised that part-time students were different to full-time students, in terms of personal characteristics, educational background, and life and work experiences. One of the key differences was age. Full-time students were generally described as 18-year-olds entering HE direct from school or college, whereas part-time students tended to be older, perhaps those mid-career rather than older individuals at the end of their careers.

It was acknowledged that part-time students come to study in HE with a different set of needs and expectations. However, it was also noted that part-time students are not only different from full-time students but different from each other – that they are not a coherent and homogenous group. As one individual said, *‘there is no such thing as a typical PT student’*.

In the last few years, research has begun to focus on part-time students and has mapped the size and profile of the part-time student body as a whole (although not necessarily focusing on UK-domiciled undergraduate students). Our review of the **existing research literature** finds that this emerging body of research, as highlighted in our case studies, makes reference to how part-time students tend to differ from full-time students. It shows that part-time students at undergraduate level are typically older than full-time students and are more likely to be female; that part-time students are more likely to already have higher-level qualifications when they commence their studies; and that the study aims and patterns of part-time students differ from those of full-time students. A striking finding is that in 2007/08 part-time students made up the vast majority of those working towards other undergraduate qualifications (82 per cent) but accounted for only a small proportion of first degree students (16 per cent). A key source is Callender et al., 2010. This research suggests that given the profile of part-time students, many of the previously identified inequalities in access to financial support between full and part-time students are likely to remain.

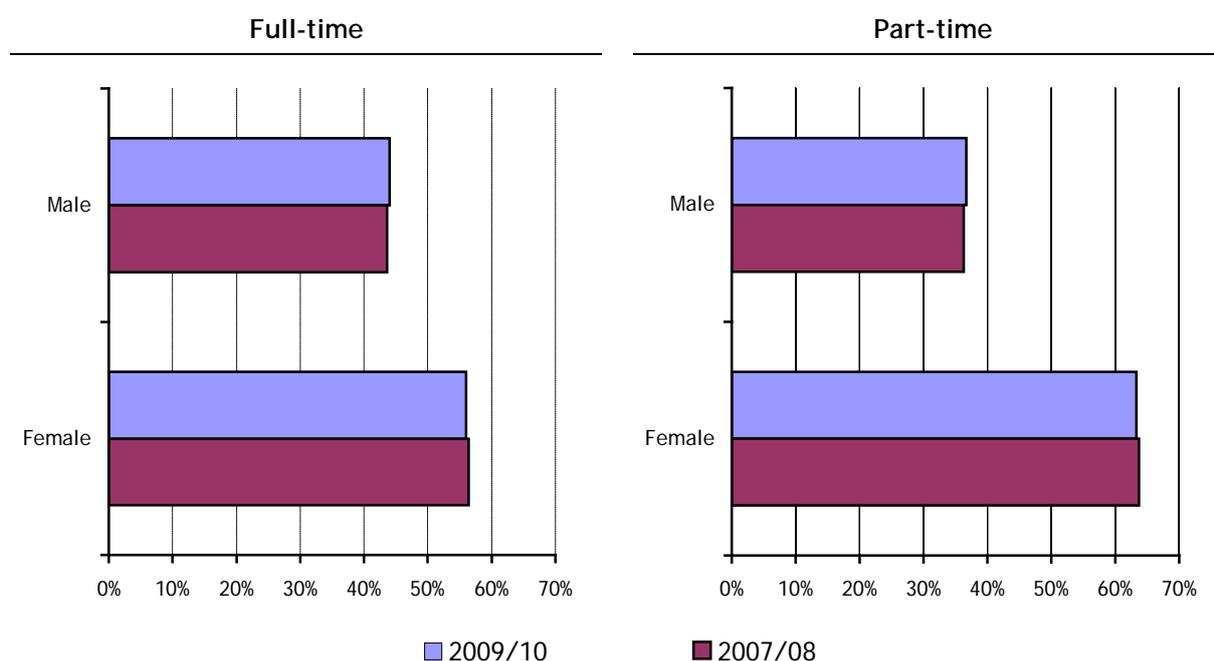
Our **analysis of national student data** from HESA (covering those studying at HE level in HEIs) and from the ILR (which includes those studying at HE level in FEIs, mainly under franchise arrangements with HEIs) updates this picture. It allows us to focus on UK-domiciled undergraduate students, explores whether there have been any changes in the overall profile in recent years, and, more specifically, allows us to focus on young part-time students – a group of particular interest to policy makers.

What are their characteristics?

As noted earlier, there were over half a million part-time students of UK domicile studying in UK HEIs in 2009/10. Analysis of the national student data from HESA indeed confirms that the profile of this group differs to that of full-time students. Part-time undergraduate students are more likely to be female, older and white; and are perhaps more reticent about disclosing information about disability.

In general, women outnumber men in undergraduate study, but women are over-represented in part-time study: 63 per cent of part-time students are female compared with 56 per cent of full-time students (see Figure 7.1). The proportion of part-time students who are female has slightly decreased (down from 64 per cent) over the last three years. The high proportion of female students in part-time study may be driven, in part, by level of study, as female students are more likely than male students to study at other undergraduate level (the most common level of study in part-time mode). Of those studying at other undergraduate level, 66 per cent of part-time students are female, and 65 per cent of full-time students are female. The corresponding figures for first degree level study are 59 per cent and 55 per cent.

Figure 7.1: Gender of UK undergraduate students by mode (for 2007/08 and 2009/10) (per cent)



Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Those who study full-time are overwhelmingly likely to be under 25 years old (86 per cent in 2009/10), with 39 per cent between the ages of 18 and 20, and 47 per cent aged between 20 and 25. Those who study part-time are considerably less likely to be young: only one in five (20 per cent) are under the age of 25; and, of particular interest to this research, only one in seven (or 14 per cent) are under the age of 23. Part-time students are instead more evenly spread across the age groups, with 15 per cent aged between 25 and 30, 26 per cent in their 30s, 23 per cent in their 40s, 10 per cent in their 50s and five per cent in their 60s or older. There has been a very slight increase in the proportion of

younger part-time students over time and a decrease in the oldest age group (see Figures 7.2 and 7.3).

Figure 7.2: Age breakdown of UK undergraduate students by mode (for 2007/08 and 2009/10) (per cent)

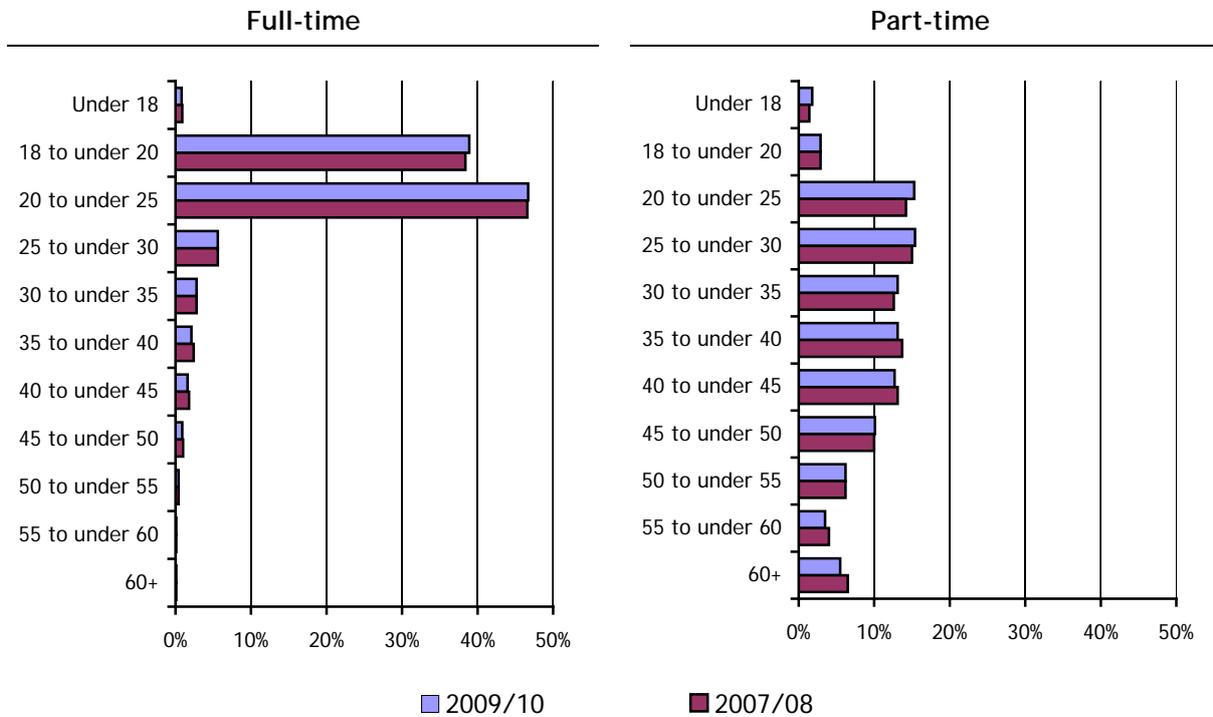
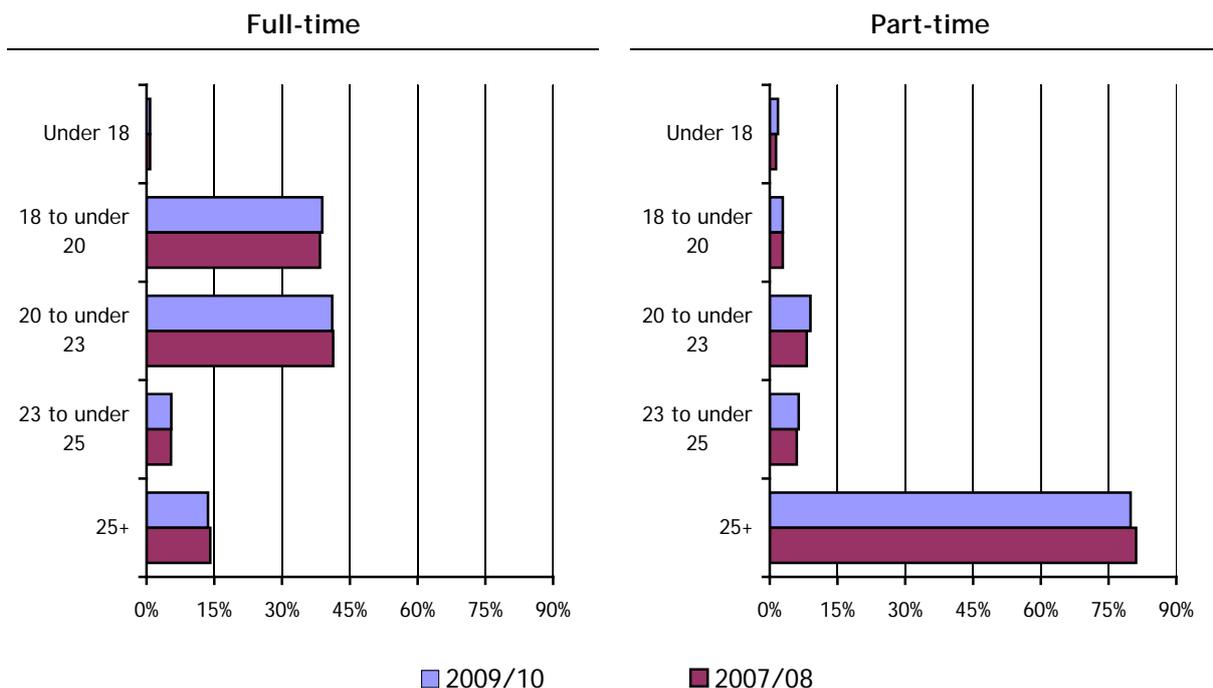


Figure 7.3: Age breakdown of UK undergraduate students by mode (for 2007/08 and 2009/10) (per cent)

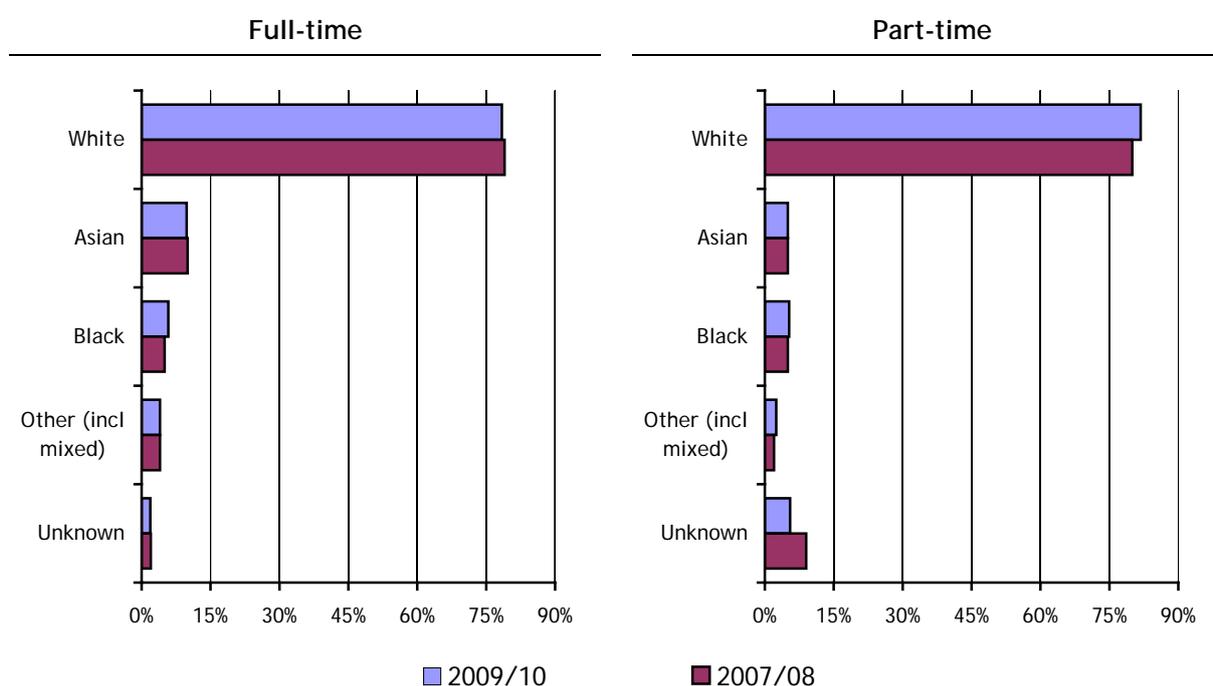


Note: Students across all years of study.

Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

The majority of students, both full- and part-time, are white; a smaller proportion of students studying part-time are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (18 per cent in 2009/10 compared with 22 per cent of full-time students). The greatest difference is noticed for Asian students – this group account for 10 per cent of all full-time UK-domiciled undergraduate students but only five per cent of part-time students (in 2009/10) (see Figure 7.4). These patterns do not appear to have changed over time (from 2007/08), and for part-time students are not affected by level of study.

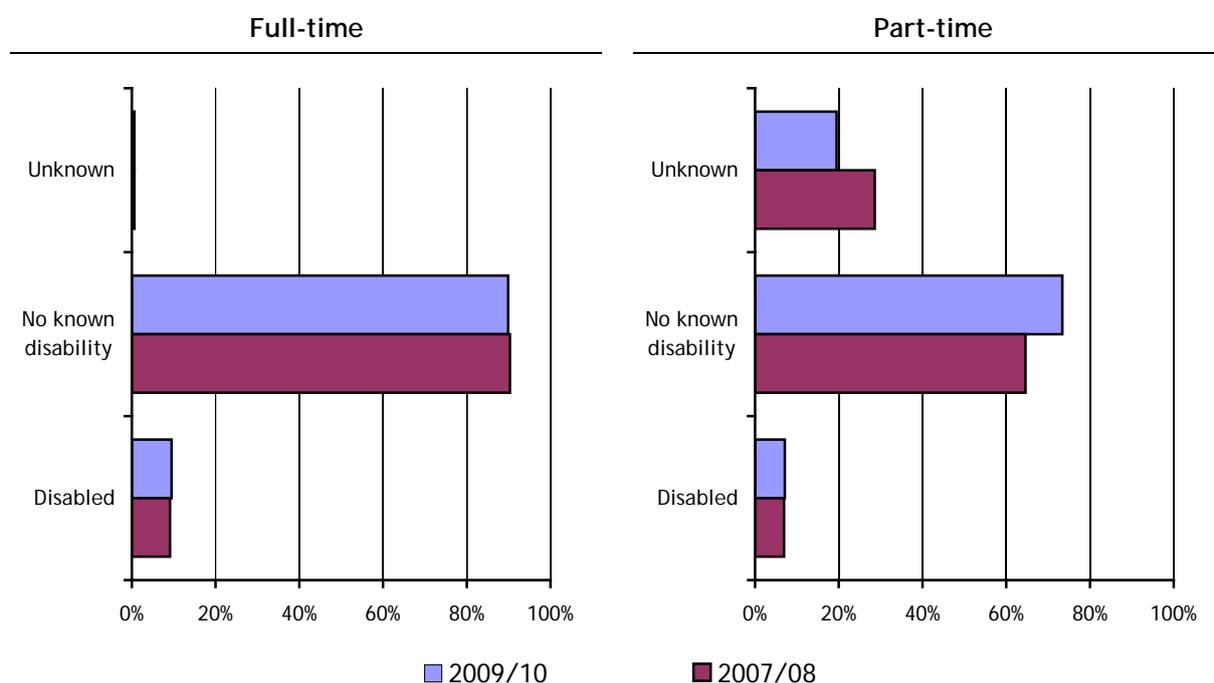
Figure 7.4: Ethnicity (broad group) of UK undergraduate students by mode (for 2007/08 and 2009/10) (per cent)



Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

There are difficulties in interpreting the student data on disability, as there is a substantial group of part-time students for whom their disability status is unknown (20 per cent in 2009 compared with less than one per cent for full-time students). Disability is recorded on the basis of a student's own assessment and they are not obliged to report a disability. It is interesting to note that the proportion reporting their status (whether they have a disability or not) does appear to be improving over time – with more part-time students disclosing this information to their institutions. Across all UK undergraduate students, 10 per cent of full-time students report that they have a disability, compared with seven per cent of part-time students (see Figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5: Declared disability status of UK undergraduate students by mode (for 2007/08 and 2009/10) (per cent)



Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Entry profile

Part-time students not only differ from full-time students in terms of personal characteristics, but also in terms of educational history. In particular, the entry profile of part-time undergraduate students differs to that found for full-time students. Full-time students are most likely to have entered onto their course with A-level qualifications (as their highest prior qualification). Almost four out of five (79 per cent) UK-domiciled full-time undergraduates enter their studies with A-levels. The picture for part-time students is very different: just under one-quarter (23 per cent) have A-levels as their highest qualifications when commencing their HE studies.

Instead, many part-time students already have HE level qualifications (level 4 or above) when they start their studies, which has implications for the level of fees they may be charged, and, in the future (from 2012/13) their access to a student loan to pay for their tuition fees. This includes eight per cent of part-time undergraduates (of UK domicile) who had a postgraduate-level qualification when they started their undergraduate course, 13 per cent with a first degree (or equivalent) and a further 29 per cent who had other undergraduate-level qualifications (particularly professional qualifications). It is perhaps interesting to note that only one per cent of part-time students entered their studies with Access qualifications compared with four per cent of full-time students (see Table 7.1). This perhaps suggests that Access courses are a route to full-time rather than part-time study in HE.

Using simplified categories of entry qualifications, we see an interesting bimodal distribution for part-time students. On the one hand, the percentage share of students with other (non-academic) or no formal qualifications on entry into part-time courses is much

higher than the corresponding share among full-time students. On the other hand, we also found a much higher proportion of part-time students with known HE credits, first degrees and even a substantial share with a postgraduate qualification.

Table 7.1: Highest qualification on entry of UK undergraduate students by mode (for 2007/08 and 2009/10) (per cent)

	2007/08			2009/10		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Detailed breakdown						
Postgraduate (excluding PGCE)	0.5	6.4	2.4	0.4	7.1	2.6
PGCE	<0.5	0.5	0.2	<0.5	0.7	0.2
First degree (UK institution)	2.5	13.9	6.3	2.4	13.3	6.0
Other graduate and equivalent qualifications	0.4	1.7	0.9	0.4	2.1	1.0
HE credits	0.7	1.1	0.8	0.6	1.8	1.0
Other HE and professional qualifications	5.4	24.9	11.9	5.7	24.9	11.9
GCE A-level, SQA Highers and equivalent	78.4	19.9	58.9	79.1	23.6	61.2
Access courses	3.8	0.9	2.9	3.8	1.1	2.9
GCSE/O level, SQA O grades and Standard grades	1.4	9.2	4.0	1.3	9.8	4.0
Other qualifications	3.6	3.4	3.6	3.9	3.9	3.9
No formal qualification required/held	1.1	5.6	2.6	1.0	3.9	1.9
Unknown	2.2	12.4	5.6	1.4	7.9	3.5
Base (N)	1,072,230	536,495	1,608,725	1,145,960	547,175	1,693,140
Main categories						
Postgraduate and PGCE	0.5	8.0	2.8	0.5	8.5	2.9
First degree, other graduate, HE credits, other HE and professional	9.2	47.5	21.0	9.3	45.7	20.5
GCE A-level, SQA High	85.5	34.2	69.6	85.4	37.4	70.6
Other and no formal qualifications	4.9	10.3	6.6	4.9	8.4	6.0
Base (with known entry qualification) (N)	1,049,193	470,237	1,519,430	1,130,179	503,822	1,634,001

Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

A further breakdown of entry qualification by level of study for full- and part-time students shows some interesting differences (see Table 7.2). It suggests that entry profile is associated with level of study, and that part-time students on first degree courses are, in this respect, somewhat similar to full-time students on first degree courses.

Among part-time students, those on other undergraduate programmes are more likely than those on first degree programmes to already have HE level qualifications (59 per cent compared with 46 per cent). Almost half of part-time students following first degree programmes have A-level qualifications or equivalent (47 per cent) compared with just under one-third (32 per cent) on other undergraduate courses.

Table 7.2: Highest qualification on entry of UK undergraduate students by level and mode (for 2009/10) (per cent)

	First degree			Other undergraduate		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Postgraduate and PGCE	0.3	4.7	1.0	1.7	10.8	8.5
First degree, other graduate, HE credits, other HE and professional	8.1	41.4	13.4	19.3	48.4	40.9
GCE A-level, SQA High	87.1	46.8	80.7	69.6	31.6	41.3
Other and no formal qualifications	4.5	7.1	4.9	9.4	9.3	9.3
Base (N)	1,022,464	193,717	1,216,181	106,075	309,246	415,321

Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

7.1.2 Where are the part-time students?

Analysis of national student data shows that concentrations of part-time students tend to be located in large cities (though not necessarily close to large-scale or more specialist providers of part-time study), or they are found in more deprived and coastal areas of the UK. Indeed part-time students are more likely than full-time students to come from areas where there is generally less of a tradition of participation in HE.

We explored the distribution of part-time students across the UK using a fuzzy match⁵² of home domicile postcode sector (available for about 99 per cent of all students) to local authority district (LAD⁵³). We looked at absolute numbers of part-time students to identify the largest existing markets for part-time study. As would be expected, the largest number of part-time students tended to be found in highly populated areas – essentially large cities. The LADs with the largest number of part-time students include Birmingham, Glasgow, Leeds, Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry and Manchester. The top 25 also include areas of Greater London such as Barnet, Lambeth and Croydon. The top 25 also include some

⁵² Full postcode information which would have allowed a more accurate identification of LAD was not available due to data protection restrictions. Instead, postcode sectors were used to identify LADs. This is a fuzzy match, as postcode sectors could fall into more than one LAD. Where this did happen, students were assigned to the LAD that had the highest frequency of LAD-postcode sector correspondence.

⁵³ Based on the 2008 LAD boundaries, which identifies 442 LADs.

of the most deprived areas in England: Birmingham, Manchester, Lambeth, Liverpool, Newham and Hackney (see Table 7.3).

Table 7.3: Distribution of part-time students (by LAD) (2009/10)

	Total students	Part-time (N)	% of local students studying part-time	% all part-time students	IMD Rank**
Birmingham*	32,910	9,465	28.8	1.8	13
Glasgow City	16,015	6,180	38.6	1.2	na
Leeds	17,410	6,070	34.9	1.1	97
Bristol, City of	12,225	4,990	40.8	0.9	93
Barnet	19,670	4,780	24.3	0.9	165
East Riding of Yorkshire	12,030	4,645	38.6	0.9	216
Cardiff	11,935	4,530	38.0	0.8	na
Coventry	11,245	4,235	37.7	0.8	53
Manchester*	14,425	4,176	28.9	0.8	4
Edinburgh, City of	15,040	4,060	27.0	0.8	na
Lambeth*	11,100	4,005	36.1	0.7	14
Croydon	14,395	3,935	27.3	0.7	99
Liverpool*	11,260	3,870	34.4	0.7	5
Sheffield	10,955	3,810	34.8	0.7	84
Bromley	12,545	3,735	29.8	0.7	217
Bradford	12,905	3,640	28.2	0.7	33
Ealing	12,695	3,480	27.4	0.7	61
Newham*	12,450	3,410	27.4	0.6	2
Hackney*	9,375	3,225	34.4	0.6	1
Camden	8,295	3,180	38.3	0.6	55
Newcastle upon Tyne	7,280	3,095	42.5	0.6	66
South Lanarkshire	8,240	3,070	37.3	0.6	na
Broadland	8,575	3,020	35.2	0.6	267
Brighton and Hove	7,610	2,990	39.3	0.6	67
Wirral	9,265	2,925	31.6	0.5	103
Base (with matched LAD)	1,670,265	534,725	32.0	100	

Note: 96 per cent of students had matched LAD.

Note: * indicates LAD with a high level of deprivation (for England only), in top 25 ranked by Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) average rank. ** This is one of six measures of multiple-deprivation provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). This measure is calculated by averaging all of the LSOA ranks in each local authority district. For the purpose of calculation, LSOAs are ranked such that the most deprived LSOA is given the rank of 32482. The LSOA ranks are population weighted within a local authority district to take account of the fact that LSOA size can vary.

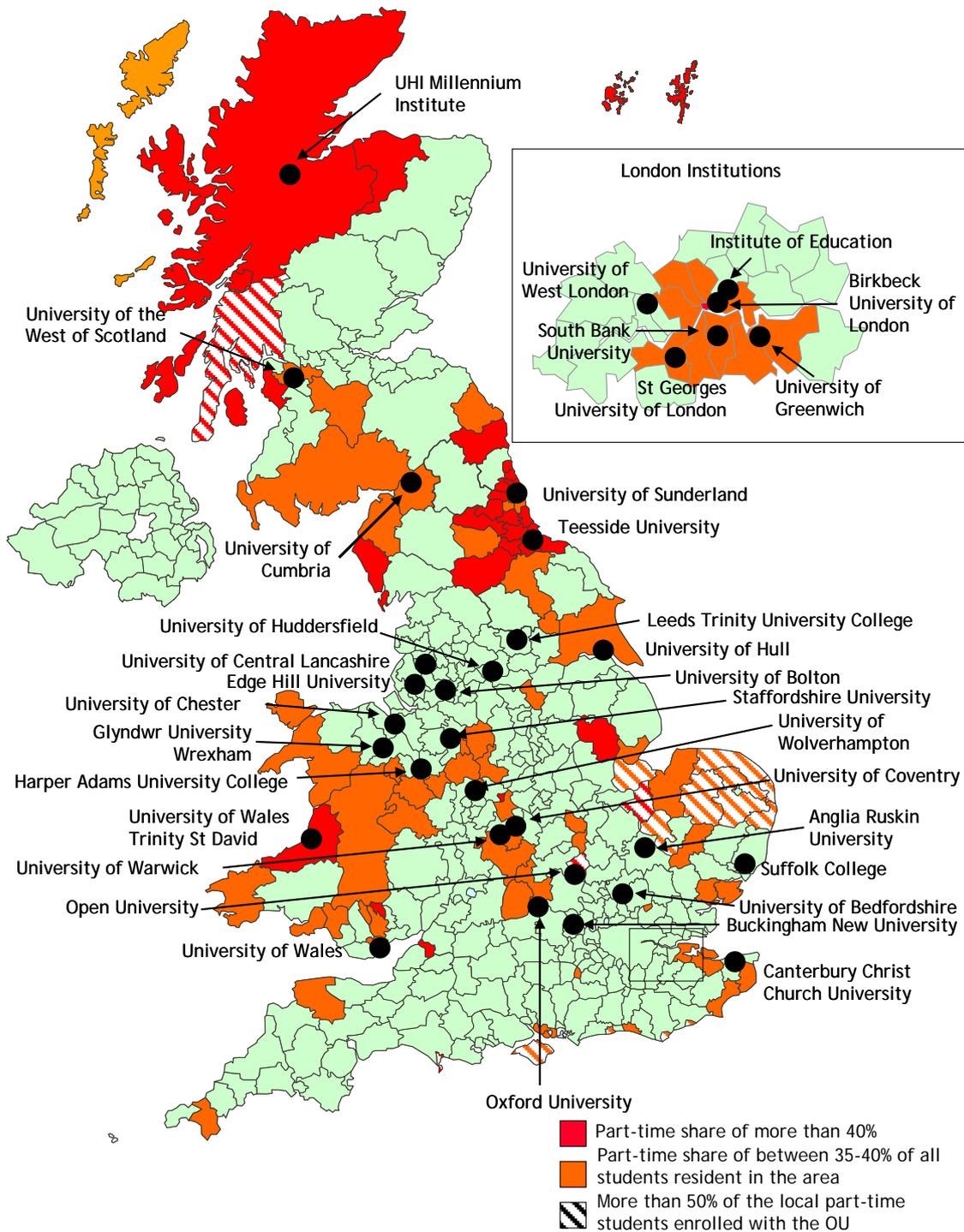
Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, and 2008 LAD boundaries, IES analysis 2011 (with information from the Department for Communities and Local Government, Indices of Deprivation 2010)

We also looked at the relative size of the undergraduate part-time student population living in an area compared with the corresponding full-time population (who may well study elsewhere), expressed as part-time rates. This suggests areas in the UK where part-time study is perhaps a more accepted or indeed necessary way of participating in HE, and that there is a local appetite for part-time study.

Part-time rates (among the local population in HE) range from more than half (City of London) to less than 15 per cent (Limavady, a rural borough in County Londonderry, Northern Ireland), and 160 out of 442 LADs have part-time rates of between 30 and 35 per cent⁵⁴. The following map (Figure 7.6) shows the LADs with part-time rates of more than 40 per cent, shown in red, and rates of between 35 and 40 per cent, shown in orange (hashed areas are those with above average rates of OU participation). The map also shows the location of the HEIs with highest part-time rates (where part-time students make up at least 30 per cent of their student body). This shows that locations of HEIs with high part-time rates and LADs with high shares of part-time students living locally do not systematically coincide very often. The exception is the cluster of LADs with above average part-time rates surrounding the Universities of Teesside and Sunderland. A similar local clustering seems to surround universities in relatively remote (often coastal) locations away from the large centres such as UHI Millennium Institute in Inverness, the University of the West of Scotland and Canterbury Christ Church University in the South East of England.

⁵⁴ We checked whether the high share of part-time students in some areas results from enrolment with the Open University rather than local institutions, and concluded that OU enrolment tended to be distributed fairly evenly across LADs. Only in 5 out of 42 areas with shares of part-time students exceeding 40 per cent were more than 50 per cent of the part-time students enrolled with the OU. Similarly, 14 out of the 90 LADs with 35-40 per cent part-time rates had more than 50 per cent of part-timers enrolled with the OU.

Figure 7.6: Part-time rates of local areas (>35/>40 per cent in 2009, student domiciles)

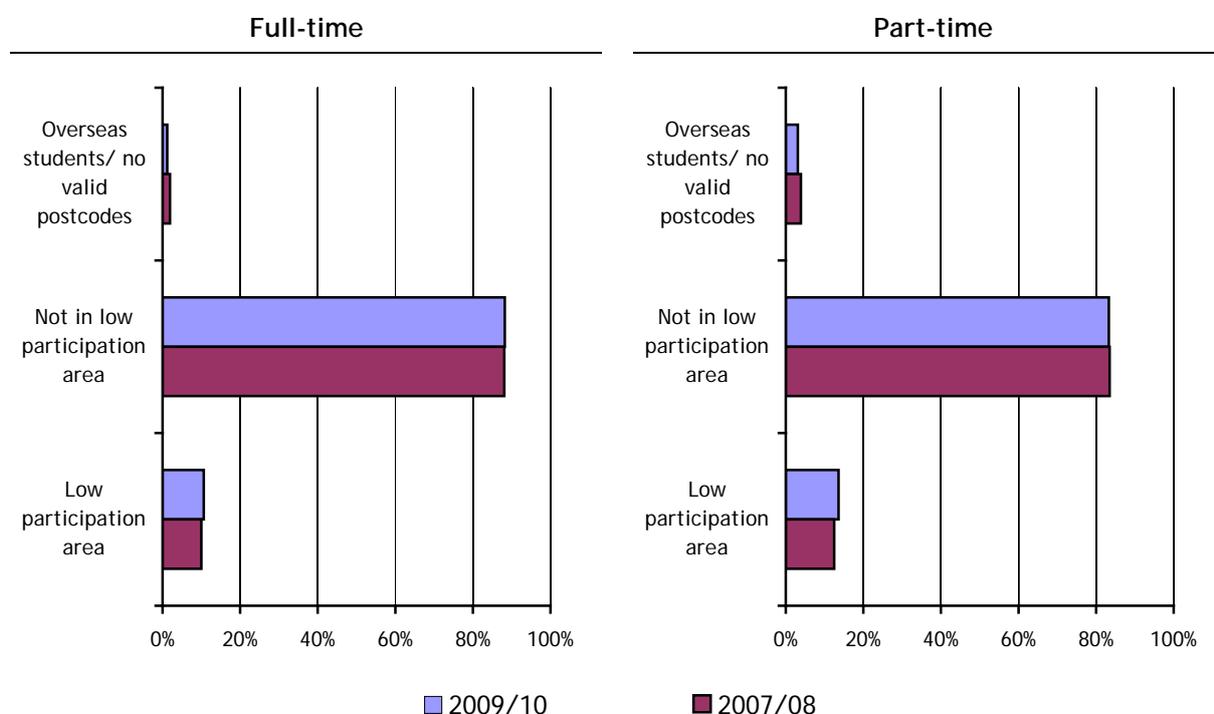


Notes: A) Map Bruce Jones Design (reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey, Crown Copyright NC/2005/3257), B) Part-time rates for all undergraduate students at (in full-person equivalents, 2009) based on HESA data (not available for University College Birmingham, London Metropolitan University and Liverpool Hope University), C) LAD of students' residence derived from postcode sectors (National Statistics Postcode Directory, Version 2, 2008), D) postcode-LAD match based on most frequent correspondence of sector and LAD).

Finally, we explored the penetration of HE study across the UK using a classification of small geographical areas that identifies places with very low HE participation (among young people, those aged 18). The classification (POLAR2 – Participation of Local Areas) developed by HEFCE now takes into account part-time study when calculating participation rates, and uses data from 2000 to 2004. It is a classification that HEIs use in their widening participation activities, and is a measure of local deprivation.

Using POLAR2 mapped onto postcode, HESA data shows that part-time students are more likely than full-time students to come from low (youth) participation areas as defined by HEFCE. In 2009/10 14 per cent of part-time students come from these low participation areas compared with 11 per cent of full-time students (see Figure 7.7).

Figure 7.7: Background of UK undergraduate students (Participation of Local Areas POLAR 2) by mode (for 2007/08 and 2009/10)(per cent)



Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

7.1.3 What do they study?

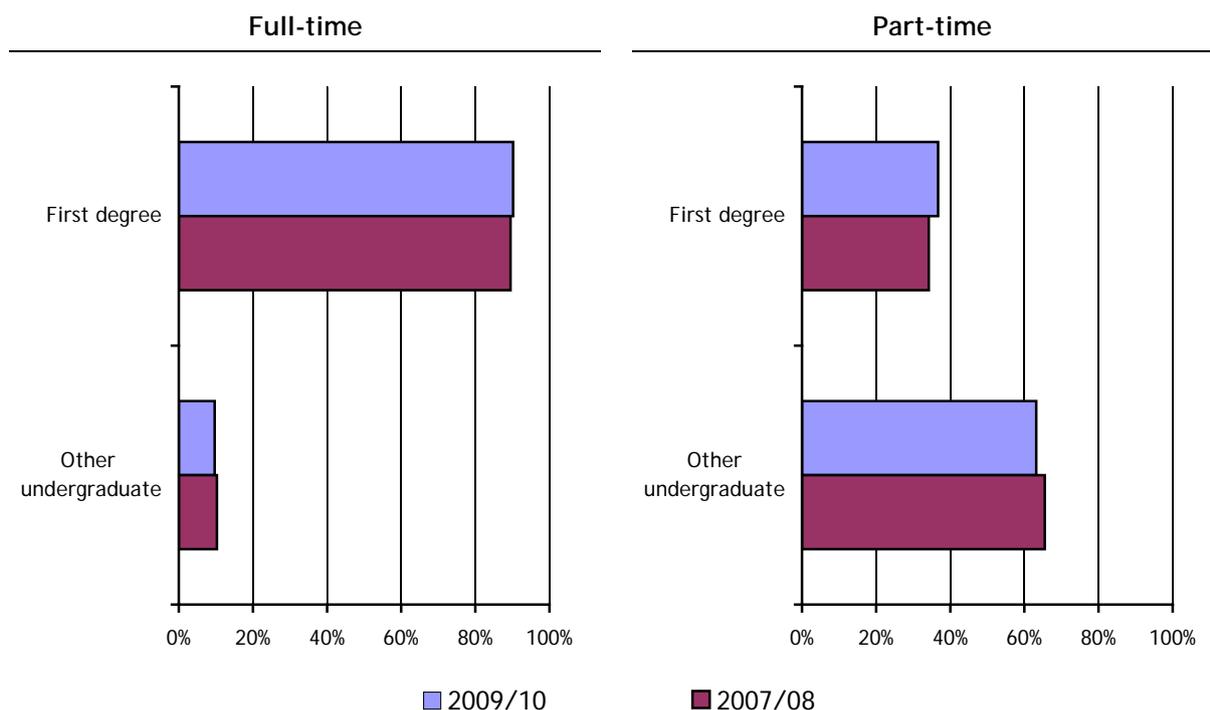
Level of qualification

Analysis of national student data from HESA shows that the level of study and types of undergraduate qualification that full- and part-time students are studying towards differ considerably, and that some of the skew can be attributed to the influence of the OU.

Overwhelmingly, those studying full-time are studying for a first degree, with only 10 per cent studying for other undergraduate qualifications. Other undergraduate qualifications are qualification aims equivalent to and below first degree level and include foundation degrees, diplomas in HE, Higher National Diplomas (HND), Higher National Certificate (HNC), Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE), Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE), foundation courses at HE level, NVQ/SVQs levels 4 and 5, professional qualifications at

undergraduate level, and institutional undergraduate credits. Conversely, those studying part-time are mostly likely to be studying for other undergraduate qualifications, rather than a first degree. Just over one-third (37 per cent) of part-time students study for a first degree, and 63 per cent study at other undergraduate level. The pattern of study level for part-time students has changed slightly over time, with part-time students in 2009/10 marginally more likely to be studying for a first degree than in 2007/08 (see Figure 7.8).

Figure 7.8: Level of study of UK undergraduate students by mode (for 2007/08 and 2009/10) (per cent)



Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Exploring course aims a little further shows that the most common qualifications at other undergraduate level that part-time students are aiming for include:

- credits at level H (15 per cent, this is at honours level in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, ie at first degree level)
- credits at level C (eight per cent, this is at certificate level, ie at Certificate of HE level)
- foundation degree (seven per cent; the corresponding proportion for full-time students is four per cent)
- certificate at level C (six per cent)
- post-registration health and social work qualification (four per cent)
- Certificate of HE (three per cent)

- HND/HNC (two per cent; the corresponding figure for full-time students is one per cent).

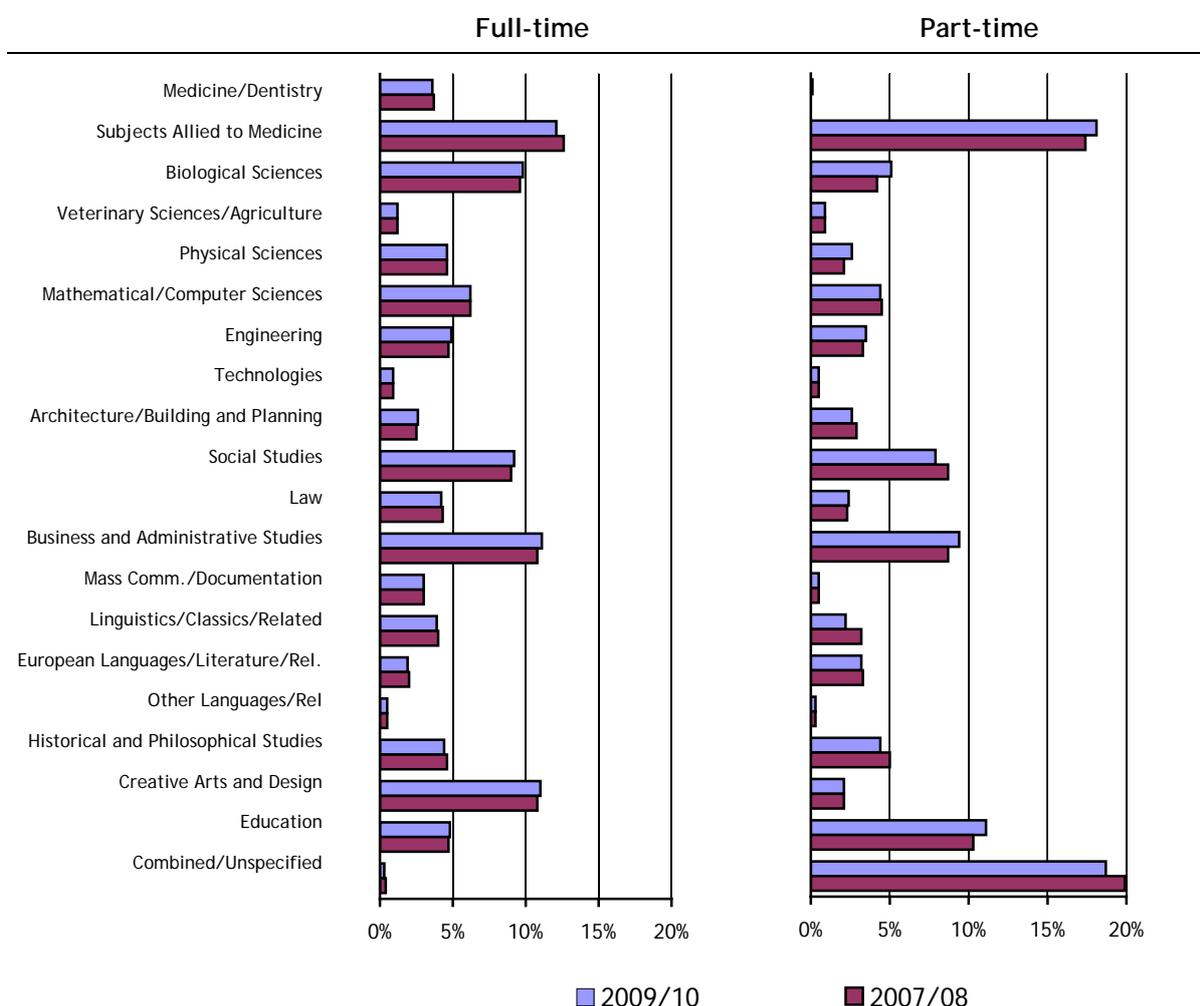
The OU has almost 200,000 students and accounts for over one-third of all part-time students in the UK. An analysis of the study profile of part-time students with the OU and of those studying with other institutions shows that OU students are twice as likely to be studying for a first degree qualification than part-time students at other institutions. Over half (54 per cent) and therefore the majority of OU students are on first degree programmes compared with 27 per cent in other institutions (see Table 2.5).

Subjects

The subjects studied also differ between those studying full-time and those studying part-time. HESA student data shows that part-time HE students are most likely to be studying subjects allied to medicine (18 per cent in 2009/10); the vast majority of these are studying nursing. Approximately two-fifths of all UK-domiciled students studying for nursing undergraduate qualifications are studying part-time rather than full-time. Other popular subject areas among part-time students include: education (11 per cent), business and administrative studies (nine per cent) and social studies (eight per cent). A large number of part-time students (19 per cent) are categorised as 'combined/unspecified', many of whom (approximately three-quarters) are likely to be registered with the Open University (OU). Relatively few part-time students study creative arts and design compared with the pattern for full-time students. These findings are likely to be driven by age and gender, as these background factors have a strong influence on subject choice. As noted above, part-time students tend to be older and female.

The most common subjects for full-time students are subjects allied to medicine (12 per cent in 2009/10), business and administrative studies (11 per cent), creative arts and design (11 per cent), biological sciences (10 per cent) and social studies (nine per cent). There were no real changes in these patterns for either full- or part-time students between 2007/08 and 2009/10 (see Figure 7.9).

Figure 7.9: Subject of study of UK undergraduate students by mode (for 2007/08 and 2009/10) (per cent)



Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Looking at the subjects studied by level of study for both full-time and part-time students, we can see a great similarity between full-time students and part-time students when studying for a first degree. The distribution of students on first degree programmes across the subject groups is broadly similar (although creative arts courses are still less popular among part-time students, and a relatively high proportion are on combined degrees).

However, the distribution of full- and part-time students across the subjects looks entirely different for those on other undergraduate programmes. Although a large group of part-time students (22 per cent) are studying subjects allied to medicine, the proportion of full-time students is even greater (44 per cent). Among both groups, this is the most common subject of study. Other common areas of study for part-time students on other undergraduate courses include education (15 per cent) and business studies (10 per cent), and 21 per cent are enrolled in subject combinations. For full-time students on other undergraduate programmes, common subjects are creative arts, education, and business studies (each with nine per cent) (see Table 7.4).

Table 7.4: Subjects studied by students enrolled for degree courses and other undergraduate programmes (2009/10) (per cent)

	First degree			Other undergraduate		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Medicine/Dentistry	3.9	0.0	3.3	0.4	0.1	0.2
Subjects Allied to Medicine	8.7	11.3	9.1	43.9	22.1	27.4
Biological Sciences	10.4	10.2	10.4	4.1	2.1	2.6
Veterinary Sciences/Agriculture	1.0	0.2	0.9	3.0	1.2	1.7
Physical Sciences	5.0	4.5	4.9	1.2	1.4	1.4
Mathematical/Computer Sciences	6.4	6.6	6.5	4.2	3.2	3.4
Engineering	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.0	2.6	2.9
Technologies	0.9	0.6	0.8	1.3	0.5	0.7
Architecture/Building and Planning	2.5	4.1	2.8	2.9	1.8	2.1
Social Studies	9.6	9.4	9.6	5.2	7.1	6.6
Law	4.6	4.2	4.5	1.2	1.3	1.3
Business and Administrative Studies	11.4	8.4	10.9	8.5	10.0	9.7
Mass Comm./Documentation	3.2	0.6	2.7	1.5	0.5	0.8
Linguistics/Classics	4.3	3.9	4.2	0.2	1.2	0.9
European Languages/Literature	2.1	1.5	2.0	0.0	4.2	3.2
Other Languages	0.5	0.1	0.4	0.0	0.5	0.4
Historical and Philosophical Studies	4.9	6.8	5.2	0.4	3.0	2.4
Creative Arts and Design	11.2	2.6	9.8	9.3	1.8	3.6
Education	4.3	5.2	4.4	8.6	14.5	13.0
Combined/Unspecified	0.4	15.0	2.7	0.2	21.0	15.9
Base (N)	1,033,520	200,600	1,234,120	110,795	345,645	456,440

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Expected length of study

The vast majority of full-time students (88 per cent) are on three- or four-year programmes of study, reflecting the high proportion studying at first degree level (programmes of study that tend to be delivered over three or four years). This compares to only 14 per cent of all part-time students.

In contrast, 21 per cent of all part-time students are on programmes expected to last less than one year (compared with less than two per cent of full-time students). These are likely to be modules that can build to a larger programme or qualification or a stand-alone professional development course (often referred to as CPD provision). Indeed, a relatively high proportion of part-time students studying at other undergraduate level are on short programmes (33 per cent). At the other end of the scale, as would be expected, the data also indicates that part-time programmes are likely to take longer (particularly first degree programmes) than full-time programmes. For only five per cent of full-time students are programmes of study expected to last more than four years, compared with 10 per cent for part-time students (or 20 per cent of part-time students on first-degree programmes) (see Table 7.5).

Table 7.5 Expected length of study (2009/10) (per cent)

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Not known or expected	0.0	42.7	13.8
<5 weeks	0.0	1.5	0.5
=>5 weeks and <24 weeks	0.0	2.2	0.7
=>24 weeks and <=1 year	1.8	17.5	6.9
>1 year and <=2 years	5.1	12.0	7.3
>2 years and <=3 years	62.4	8.7	45.0
>3 years and <=4 years	25.4	5.2	18.9
>4 years and <=5 years	4.8	5.6	5.1
>5 years and <=6 years	0.5	3.6	1.5
>6 years and <20 years	0.0	1.1	0.4
Base (N)	1,145,960	547,175	1,693,140

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

It is difficult to estimate the pattern of study length for part-time students, as almost half of this group (43 per cent) do not have the estimated length of study recorded, and the proportion with unknown study length is even higher when focusing on those part-time students on first degree programmes (see Table 7.6). When no expected length is recorded, this is largely due to there being no normal defined length for that particular part-time programme of study or because the programme of study is self-paced with an indefinite length. Having no set study length can be viewed positively, and as perhaps an accumulation of credit model. This allows an individual to build a study programme over time as and when it suits them, and/or to get on a path to a degree without knowing that they are going to do so at the outset.

Table 7.6: Expected length of study by level of study (part-time students only, 2009/10) (per cent)

	First degree	Other UG	Total
Not known or expected	54.2	36.1	42.7
<5 weeks	0.0	2.4	1.5
=>5 weeks and <24 weeks	0.0	3.5	2.2
=>24 weeks and <=1 year	1.4	26.9	17.5
>1 year and <=2 years	4.2	16.4	12.0
>2 years and <=3 years	10.6	7.6	8.7
>3 years and <=4 years	10.2	2.3	5.2
>4 years and <=5 years	10.4	2.7	5.6
>5 years and <=6 years	7.2	1.6	3.6
>6 years and <20 years	1.9	0.6	1.1
Base (N)	200,600	345,645	547,175

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Self-paced study is particularly important to the OU, and so for this institution we find that virtually all of its students have no recorded expected length of study. Across the remaining institutions with part-time students, only 11 per cent are found to have no recorded study length. Across these institutions, a further 33 per cent are on short courses (of less than one year), 19 per cent are on programmes expected to last between one and two years, 22 per cent are studying for three to four years, and 16 per cent are on programmes expected to last at least four years (see Table 7.7)

Table 7.7: Comparing the expected length of study of students at the Open University and at other institutions (part-time students only, 2009/10) (per cent)

	Open University	Other HEI	Total
Not known or expected	99.8	11.0	42.7
<5 weeks	0.0	2.4	1.5
=>5 weeks and <24 weeks	0.0	3.4	2.2
=>24 weeks and <=1 year	0.0	27.2	17.5
>1 year and <=2 years	0.2	18.5	12.0
>2 years and <=3 years	0.0	13.5	8.7
>3 years and <=4 years	0.0	8.1	5.2
>4 years and <=5 years	0.0	8.6	5.6
>5 years and <=6 years	0.0	5.6	3.6
>6 years and <20 years	0.0	1.7	1.1
Base (N)	195,165	352,010	547,175

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Intensity of study

Institutions also record a part-time student's intensity of study in terms of the proportion of an equivalent full-time course – this is known as the full-time equivalence (FTE). This is an institution's best academic judgement of equivalence as HESA recognise that institutions cannot be exact in all cases and so a strict pro-rata model is not expected. A full-time full-year student will normally be recorded as 100 per cent⁵⁵, and so generally a part-time student will be studying at less than 100 per cent FTE. The full-time equivalences of students on part-time courses are established by comparison with a comparable full-time course, and are estimated on either a 'credit' or 'time' basis. Intensity of study is important as, under the planned changes for 2012/13, new part-time students who study at 0.25 FTE and above will be eligible for a student loan for fees.

⁵⁵ Students can have a FTE of more than 100 per cent if they are studying at an intensity that is greater than the norm for their qualification aim and therefore achieving the qualification in a shorter time than is usual. See http://www.hesa.ac.uk/component/option,com_studrec/task,show_file/Itemid,233/mnl,09051/href,FTE.html/

Analysis⁵⁶ indicates that study intensity varies for both part-time students and also full-time students. Although recorded as studying full-time, a small proportion (four per cent) of individuals on first degree courses study at 75 per cent or less intensity, and this rises to 14 per cent among those studying at other undergraduate level (see Table 7.8). This may indicate a switch in mode part way through the year, or that the study took place over only part of the academic year.

Similarly, a significant minority (12 per cent) of part-time students studying at first degree level are studying at approaching full-time intensity, i.e. at least 75 per cent of a full-time equivalent. Under the new arrangements for 2012/13 these types of individuals will only be able to access a maximum of 75 per cent of a student loan. The data indicates that a greater proportion of young students on first degree courses are studying at 75 per cent plus compared with older students (17 per cent compared with 12 per cent; see Table 7.9). This fits with feedback from our surveys of young potential HE students which suggests that younger people would prefer accelerated part-time courses.

Table 7.8: Intensity of study (% FTE) by level of course and mode of study (2009/10) (per cent)

	First degree			Other undergraduate			All
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Part-time
Below 25%	0.9	19.3	3.9	2.4	49.5	38.1	38.4
25% to >50%	1.1	29.0	5.6	4.3	22.1	17.8	24.6
50% to >75%	1.8	39.3	7.9	7.8	23.0	19.3	29.0
75% and over**	96.2	12.4	82.6	85.6	5.4	24.9	7.9
Base (N)*	1,032,945	199,930	1,232,880	110,760	344,290	455,050	544,220

Note: * Missing values in FTE reduce available student numbers.

Note: ** FTE can be significantly higher than 100% in cases of accelerated study.

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis, 2011

Well over one-third (38 per cent) of part-time students are studying on low-intensity courses. Two in five (19 per cent) part-time students on first degree courses are studying at an intensity of below 25 per cent FTE, and almost half (50 per cent) of those studying at other undergraduate level are on low-intensity courses. These students would be ineligible for student loans under the new arrangements. Interestingly, young part-time students at other undergraduate level are marginally more likely to be on low-intensity programmes than their older peers (53 per cent compared with 49 per cent).

⁵⁶ To explore intensity of study, we merged two datasets at individual student level: one dataset had FTE and the other had more detailed information about study level etc. and student characteristics. Where there were multiple records for some individuals, these were collapsed into one record. There were approximately 30,000 students with no FTE information (these were randomly spread across the dataset) and so the overall numbers are lower than reported in other breakdowns.

Table 7.9: Intensity of study (% FTE) by level of course, age and mode (2009/10) (per cent)

Intensity of study	First degree				Total	Other undergraduate				Total
	FT (other)	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)		FT (other)	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	
Below 25%	2.0	0.7	15.5	20.1	3.9	2.8	2.0	53.3	49.0	38.1
25% to >50%	2.0	0.9	25.5	29.6	5.6	5.3	3.4	14.3	23.2	17.8
50% to >75%	3.6	1.5	41.9	38.8	7.9	9.6	5.9	25.3	22.7	19.3
75% and over**	92.4	96.9	17.2	11.5	82.6	82.3	88.7	7.2	5.1	24.9
Base (N)*	163,465	869,480	32,140	167,790	1,232,880	54,320	56,440	42,425	301,870	455,050

Note: * Missing values in FTE reduce available student numbers.

Note: ** FTE can be significantly higher than 100% in cases of accelerated study.

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis, 2011

Across all part-time students, almost two-thirds (62 per cent) are studying at least 25 per cent FTE. Half of those studying at other undergraduate level are on these medium- to high-intensity courses, and this increases to four in five (81 per cent) of those studying at first degree level. New students on these types of programmes would be eligible for student loans. However, eligibility also depends on prior qualification level, as students cannot access a student loan if they are studying for a qualification at an equivalent or lower level to one that they already have (this is known as the Equivalent or Lower Qualification (ELQ) ruling and also applies to full-time students). Additional analysis suggests that approximately one half would be ineligible for support based on their entry-level qualification.

Across all part-time students our analysis indicates that just under one-third (31 per cent) would be eligible for student loans in that they are studying at least 25 per cent FTE and do not have a higher-level qualification (see Tables 7.10 and 7.11). A greater proportion of those studying at first degree level would meet the eligibility criteria compared with those studying at other undergraduate degree level (44 per cent compared with 23 per cent, calculated from Table 7.12).

Table 7.10: Assessing potential eligibility for students loans - intensity of study (% FTE) by entry-level qualification for all part-time students (2009/10) (per cent)

	Entry qualification		Base (%)	Base (N)
	Eligible (lower than HE level)	Ineligible (HE equivalent or above)		
Intensity				
Eligible (25% FTE and above)	31.2	31.8	62.9	315,400
Ineligible (<25% FTE)	14.8	22.3	37.1	185,845
Base (%)	46.0	54.0	100	-
Base (N)	230,410	270,835	-	501,245

Note: Missing values in FTE reduce available student numbers.

Note: Those in unknown entry qualification level are excluded.

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis, 2011

Table 7.11: Intensity of study (% FTE) of undergraduate students by entry level qualification (2009/10) (number)

Entry-level qualification	Full-time			Part-time		
	Postgraduate	HE	Other	Postgraduate	HE	Other
Below 25%	170	2,055	9,425	19,935	91,690	74,220
25% to <50%	210	2,545	12,385	11,070	59,590	55,455
50% to <75%	295	4,390	22,030	9,680	62,135	76,835
75% and over	4,355	94,000	976,075	1,670	15,065	23,900
Base (N)	5,030	102,990	1,019,918	42,360	228,475	2,30,410

Note: Missing values in FTE reduce available student numbers.

Note: Those in unknown entry qualification level are excluded.

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis, 2011

Table 7.12: Intensity of study (% FTE) of undergraduate students by entry level qualification for those on first-degree programmes and other undergraduate programmes (part-time students only, 2009/10) (number)

Entry-level qualification	First degree			Other undergraduate		
	Postgraduate	HE	Other	Postgraduate	HE	Other
Below 25%	2,225	16,305	18,730	17,715	75,380	55,490
25% to <50%	2,785	23,425	30,005	8,285	36,165	25,450
50% to <75%	3,230	30,845	41,850	6,450	31,290	34,980
75% and over	880	9,120	13,720	795	5,945	10,180
Base (N)	9,115	79,695	104,305	33,245	1,48,780	126,105

Note: Missing values in FTE reduce available student numbers.

Note: Those in unknown entry qualification level are excluded.

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis, 2011

7.1.4 What about their personal circumstances?

Unfortunately, it is not possible to explore an individual's employment status at the time of applying or entering HE using national data. However, feedback from the **case studies** indicates that part-time students are in work, usually a full-time 'career' job, when they start their studies, and that generally they are studying in a field related to this work. Many part-time students talked about how their employers were supportive and encouraging of their studies, often giving them time off to study, being flexible about working hours, and/or making some contribution towards their study costs. Part-time students (who are generally older, in their late 20s, or in their 30s and 40s) also tend to have family responsibilities. Staff in the case study institutions noted that young part-time students tended to be no different in this respect, in that they too had jobs, families and financial commitments such as mortgages. It is interesting to note that in one case study institution (large-scale provider), where all students tended to come from the local area, it was felt that their part-time cohort did not differ greatly from their full-time cohort: 'everyone is in the same boat' when you compare part-timers with full-timers who live at home'. In most cases, however, staff and students felt that part-time students are therefore very different to full-time students, even when compared with the large and growing proportion of full-time students who work, and this is because of the nature of the work that they do and the role this plays in their identity. Full-time students tend to take on part-time work in lower-level occupations (in retail and catering) that they fit around their studies, and they see themselves as students who work. However, part-time students tend to have full-time work in higher-level occupations; they fit their studies around their work and see themselves as workers who study.

Our **literature review** found that there has been some research looking at engagement with employment and this notes a convergence between the work and study experiences of part-time and full-time students with both groups likely to work. There are suggestions that the planned changes to increase tuition fees in HE will continue this trend towards all students both working and studying, and that the lines between full- and part-time students will become increasingly blurred (Williams, 2010). Research indicates that already 83 per cent of part-time students are in employment, and 66 per cent of full-time students are in employment during term time, rising to 82 per cent during holiday periods (Callender et al., 2006). However, the nature of the work undertaken by these groups of students is likely to differ, in terms of the 'level' of that work (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled) and its relevance to the course of study, the extent of paid work, and the income earned from work. Part-time students are doing more paid work than those studying full-time (Harrop et al., 2008; King, 2008); and the income from work is higher for part-time students (£9,580, comprising 71 per cent of their total average income, compared with £2,108 for full-time students representing 20 per cent of their total average income) (Johnson et al., 2009).

Feedback from the **surveys of young potential HE students** indicates that there is a perception that part-time study is for older people (not just that older people study part-time). Although in most cases respondents indicated that part-time study could have benefits, they felt it was not something that would benefit someone like them, at this stage in their life. Instead, potential beneficiaries were regarded as mature students, particularly those with families but also those with full-time jobs, and those who were unable to 'cope' with the demands of full-time study or the costs involved. There was also a perception from some staff in case study institutions that part-time study was more suited to older individuals, and that younger students would need more structure than is afforded by part-time study and therefore would struggle with the reduced engagement with the institution.

Additionally, younger students would be less attracted to part-time study particularly that delivered during evenings and weekends, as it would interfere with their social lives.

To explore this aspect a little further, in the **follow-up interviews** with young potential HE students we specifically asked them who they felt part-time HE was for. They tended to feel that part-time study was mainly suited to older people (those who have left home), those with family responsibilities and/or employment, as part-time study would suit their lifestyle and enable them to keep their jobs. One also noted how part-time study could be a second chance at university:

'People who didn't get the chance or the money to go to university – maybe someone who dropped out and wants to go back.'

[Young potential HE student]

When pressed about what types of young people are suited to part-time study, young potential HE students in the follow-up interviews talked about those who are more practical (rather than academic), those thinking of returning to study after some time away from education, those in financial difficulties or concerned about debts and needing to support themselves with work while studying, those already in work and wanting to gain a promotion, those who prefer variety in their lives and want to fill their time, and again those with children (young parents). One individual spoke of part-time as an option for those who started their HE study full-time but needed to switch in order to cope with a change in their circumstances:

'I knew someone who tried to do it full-time who had to change to a part-time course because she couldn't afford to continue to support her Mum whilst studying full-time. There was not enough time left to work and earn additional money.'

[Young potential HE student]

Some also felt that young part-time students would perhaps want to study sub-degree qualifications which would not take too long but still provide them with a good grounding and improved career prospects.

7.2 Exploring factors associated with part-time undergraduate study

To explore which factors are associated with choosing to study part-time, we undertook a multivariate **analysis of the national student data**. Multivariate statistical models simultaneously test whether a range of potential explanatory factors (independent variables) significantly affect an outcome, in this case the particular decision to enrol for a part-time rather than full-time programme. A range of variables were tested in the model to see whether they had an effect on mode choice and to see the relative size of this effect. These include personal and educational characteristics including age and entry qualification, and other HE decisions such as subject choice. Two separate binary probit models were explored: one to model the full-time/ part-time choice for students on first degree courses, the second to model the full-time/part-time choice for students on other undergraduate programmes.

The outcomes of the models show the most important factors driving the decision to study part-time and are expressed as marginal effects. Marginal effects allow us to understand how much more likely starting a part-time course is for a student showing specific characteristics relative to a base category, and allows a direct comparison of the effect size of the coefficients. Overall, the models of mode choice have a relatively high coefficient of determination (Pseudo R² of around 0.5).

Those on first degree programmes

Using HESA student data for 2009/10, the first model (weighted probit model) estimates the effect of student characteristics on the choice of the part-time rather than the full-time mode when studying for a first degree course.

Findings from the model (see Table 7.13) are as follows:

- The key drivers of part-time study are clearly age and entry qualifications. Compared with students in the prime age group 18-20, students aged 25 years and above show an increase in the probability of studying part-time of 41 per cent, and the group of 23 to 25-year-olds of 27 per cent. The entry qualification of a postgraduate education increased the probability to study part-time by 19 per cent relative to the entry qualification of A-levels and others, and having a first degree or some HE credits increases the probability to study part-time by 10 per cent.
- Other important characteristics affecting whether students enrol in part-time or full-time first degree courses are type of institution (in terms of mission group) and place of study. However, these results are likely to be influenced by the OU. Compared with the Universities Alliance Group (including the OU), the students in the Russell Group universities have an eight per cent lower probability of studying part-time. Related to this, the region of the HEI also reduces the probability of studying part-time – since the dataset records the OU as located in the South East⁵⁷, students in HEIs in the other areas are less likely to study part-time, in particular in the areas further apart like the North West, the South West, Yorkshire and the Humber and Scotland.
- The subject chosen also has an effect. There is a higher probability to study part-time for students on combined honours or unspecified programmes (increasing the probability by 26 per cent). Other subjects have a relatively lower influence on the probability to study part-time (relative to the base category; but, with the exception of natural sciences and linguistics/European languages, all show significantly different part-time rates compared with students of business and administration courses, all other things being equal).
- There is no higher probability to enrol in a part-time course if students come from an area where HE participation is low (a POLAR2 area).

⁵⁷ This is an artefact of the data. All students with the Open University are recorded as studying in the South East, whereas in reality students are studying across the UK.

- The effect of gender is very small. Other things being equal, a female student is only 0.3 per cent more likely to study part-time for the first degree than a male student.

Table 7.13: Probit model explaining the choice of PT first degree (2009/2010)

	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P>z
Gender (left-out: Male)				
Female	0.003	0.000	6.780	0.000
Ethnic group (left-out: White or unknown)				
Asian	-0.010	0.001	-14.980	0.000
Black	-0.027	0.000	-53.730	0.000
Other (including mixed)	-0.016	0.001	-20.280	0.000
Disability (left-out: no known disability or unknown)				
Disabled	-0.013	0.001	-23.280	0.000
Age (left-out: 18 to under 20)				
Under 18	0.043	0.006	6.730	0.000
20 to under 23	0.069	0.001	81.100	0.000
23 to under 25	0.272	0.003	96.240	0.000
25+	0.405	0.002	195.180	0.000
Entry qualification (left-out: GCE A level, SQA Highers & equiv, Access, GCSE/O level, SQA)				
Postgraduate and PGCE	0.187	0.005	35.350	0.000
First degree, other graduate, HE credits, other HE and professional	0.098	0.001	89.840	0.000
Other and no formal qualifications	0.010	0.001	10.670	0.000
Low participation area (left-out: not from low participation area)				
Low participation area	0.001	0.001	1.580	0.115
Subject area (left-out: Business and Administrative Studies)				
Medicine/Dentistry	-0.056	0.000	-173.100	0.000
Subjects Allied to Medicine	-0.012	0.001	-16.690	0.000
Biological Sciences	0.001	0.001	1.100	0.270
Veterinary Sciences/Agriculture	-0.031	0.001	-23.330	0.000
Physical Sciences	0.002	0.001	1.960	0.050
Mathematical/Computer Sciences	-0.001	0.001	-1.180	0.239
Engineering	0.022	0.001	16.010	0.000
Technologies	-0.025	0.001	-17.650	0.000
Architecture/Building and Planning	0.060	0.002	30.460	0.000
Social Studies	-0.014	0.001	-19.480	0.000
Law	0.012	0.001	9.360	0.000
Mass Comm./Documentation	-0.033	0.001	-43.090	0.000

	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P>z
Linguistics/Classics	0.000	0.001	-0.110	0.910
European Languages/Literature	0.001	0.002	0.380	0.702
Other Languages	-0.033	0.002	-16.410	0.000
Historical and Philosophical Studies	0.020	0.001	13.850	0.000
Creative Arts and Design	-0.040	0.000	-83.580	0.000
Education	0.003	0.001	3.130	0.002
Combined/Unspecified	0.259	0.006	45.600	0.000
Mission group (left-out: Universities Alliance)				
No mission group	-0.064	0.000	-152.060	0.000
Million +	-0.050	0.000	-119.870	0.000
Members of Guild HE	-0.049	0.000	-139.460	0.000
Russell Group	-0.076	0.000	-163.840	0.000
1994 Group	-0.055	0.000	-149.450	0.000
Region of HEI (left-out: South East)				
North West	-0.060	0.000	-160.560	0.000
Yorkshire and The Humber	-0.058	0.000	-158.940	0.000
East Midlands	-0.057	0.000	-158.880	0.000
West Midlands	-0.041	0.000	-96.450	0.000
East of England	-0.050	0.000	-148.270	0.000
London	-0.039	0.000	-86.240	0.000
South West	-0.059	0.000	-164.320	0.000
Wales	-0.057	0.000	-164.110	0.000
Scotland	-0.056	0.000	-153.770	0.000
Northern Ireland	-0.033	0.001	-50.360	0.000
Number of observations		1216137		
LR chi2(48)		587084.65		
Prob > chi2		0		
Pseudo R2		0.5505		
Log likelihood		-239665.06		

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Those on other undergraduate degree programmes

The second model estimates the choice of part-time rather than full-time mode for students in other undergraduate programmes, which are the majority of the undergraduate part-time students. As found in the model of first degree mode choice, all characteristics are significant. However, in this model the effect of gender is higher, as is the effect of ethnicity (though in both cases still relatively small). Women show only a two per cent higher probability to enrol in part-time courses than men, and those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds have a lower probability than those from white backgrounds to study part-time (see Table 7.14). Other aspects of note include:

- The second model shows again a particular age profile, with mature students (25+) much more likely to study in part-time mode: an increase in probability of 38% compared with the primary age group 18-20. The age group 23-25, which shows a probability increase to study part-time of 27 per cent for first degree students, only shows an increase of probability to study part-time of 10 per cent for other undergraduate programmes.
- There are higher probabilities associated with studying part-time for students with a first degree or other academic qualifications (as found for students in first degree courses).
- The parameter estimate found for low participation (POLAR 2) is negative, indicating that students from these more deprived areas show lower probabilities to study part-time in other undergraduate programmes.

All other characteristics in this model show similar marginal effects to study part-time and broadly confirm the picture that students are less likely to study part-time in the natural sciences and in Russell Group universities. However, there is one important difference: the probability of studying part-time in other undergraduate programmes is much higher for students of humanities (studying languages and historical and philosophical studies). Other things being equal, this points towards a student body studying selective modules to extend cultural knowledge, whose objective is primarily intellectual and not instrumental in that the knowledge obtained in their studies increases their labour productivity, etc.

Table 7.14: Probit model explaining the choice of PT other undergraduate (2009/10) (Model 2)

	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P>z
Gender (left-out: male)				
Female	0.022	0.001	16.760	0.000
Ethnic group (left-out: white or unknown)				
Asian	-0.027	0.003	-10.720	0.000
Black	-0.096	0.003	-32.880	0.000
Other (including mixed)	-0.063	0.004	-15.140	0.000
Disability (left-out: no known disability or unknown)				
Disabled	-0.076	0.003	-29.850	0.000
Age (left-out: 18 to under 20)				
Under 18	0.110	0.001	86.980	0.000
20 to under 23	0.064	0.001	43.560	0.000
23 to under 25	0.096	0.001	77.360	0.000
25+	0.383	0.003	114.200	0.000
Entry qualification (left-out: GCE A level, SQA Highers & equiv, Access, GCSE/O level, SQA)				
Postgraduate and PGCE	0.109	0.001	87.620	0.000
First degree, other graduate, HE credits, other HE and professional	0.151	0.001	105.010	0.000

	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P>z
Other and no formal qualifications	0.033	0.001	22.630	0.000
Low participation area (left-out: not from low participation area)				
Low participation area	-0.011	0.002	-7.510	0.000
Subject area (left-out: Business and Administrative Studies)				
Medicine/Dentistry	-0.305	0.021	-14.280	0.000
Subjects Allied to Medicine	-0.226	0.003	-72.700	0.000
Biological Sciences	-0.133	0.005	-24.470	0.000
Veterinary Sciences/Agriculture	-0.134	0.006	-21.110	0.000
Physical Sciences	-0.049	0.006	-8.160	0.000
Mathematical/Computer Sciences	-0.056	0.004	-13.870	0.000
Engineering	0.008	0.003	2.970	0.003
Technologies	-0.189	0.010	-18.770	0.000
Architecture/Building and Planning	-0.044	0.004	-10.800	0.000
Social Studies	-0.043	0.003	-14.130	0.000
Law	-0.079	0.006	-12.830	0.000
Mass Comm./Documentation	-0.063	0.007	-9.040	0.000
Linguistics/Classics	0.076	0.004	21.260	0.000
European Languages/Literature	0.129	0.001	110.730	0.000
Other Languages	0.111	0.001	74.270	0.000
Historical and Philosophical Studies	0.075	0.003	28.180	0.000
Creative Arts and Design	-0.277	0.006	-47.210	0.000
Education	-0.040	0.003	-15.510	0.000
Combined/Unspecified	0.177	0.001	162.230	0.000
Mission group (left-out: Universities Alliance)				
No mission group	-0.064	0.002	-29.060	0.000
Million +	-0.051	0.002	-27.120	0.000
Members of Guild HE	-0.061	0.004	-16.730	0.000
Russell Group	-0.041	0.003	-13.460	0.000
1994 Group	0.020	0.002	8.670	0.000
Region of HEI (left-out: South East)				
North West	-0.062	0.003	-23.790	0.000
Yorkshire and The Humber	-0.158	0.004	-41.110	0.000
East Midlands	-0.225	0.005	-47.530	0.000
West Midlands	-0.045	0.003	-16.130	0.000
East of England	-0.081	0.003	-24.160	0.000
London	-0.118	0.003	-37.780	0.000
South West	-0.239	0.004	-54.130	0.000
Wales	-0.024	0.003	-7.770	0.000

	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P>z
Scotland	-0.078	0.004	-19.930	0.000
Northern Ireland	0.045	0.006	8.090	0.000
Number of obs		414574		
LR chi2(48)		185440.05		
Prob > chi2		0		
Pseudo R2		0.3933		
Log likelihood		-143029.07		

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

7.3 What about young part-time students?

Analysis of **national student data** from HESA finds that in 2009/10 there were just under 75,000 (74,745) part-time undergraduate students of UK domicile aged between 18 and 22 (inclusive), and they accounted for only a small proportion (14 per cent) of all part-time students. This group of young people are dwarfed by the number of full-time undergraduates of a similar age, at almost one million (926,700). Indeed, only seven per cent of young people in HE are studying part-time.

The Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England (LSYPE) also confirms that the number and proportion of young people in part-time HE are small. Wave 5 of LSYPE surveyed almost 12,000 individuals aged 17/18, and although just over half (56 per cent) planned to go on to university, at this stage only a handful had a preference for part-time study. In Wave 6, when the tracked cohort were aged 18/19, 30 per cent were in higher education, yet only a very small number of these HE students identified themselves as studying part-time – only two per cent⁵⁸. Of this small group of part-time students in the LSYPE cohort, very few were attending a Russell Group university; almost all were living at home during term-time and were generally doing so to save money, to live with family and to be near friends; half had sponsorship or financial support from an employer; and over half worked during term-time to pay for their fees and living expenses.

7.3.1 Background characteristics

Young part-time undergraduates have a similar profile to young full-time students. They are more likely to be female (53 per cent) and more likely to be white (78 per cent) and the proportions closely match those found for young full-time students (55 per cent and 80 per cent respectively) (see Tables 7.15 and 7.16). However, these biases are more extreme among older part-time students, where two-thirds (65 per cent) are female, and more than four in five (82 per cent) are white. Young part-time students do differ from young full-time students in terms of neighbourhood, in that young part-time students are more likely to come from a neighbourhood where participation in HE has traditionally been low (14 per cent compared with nine per cent) (see Table 7.18). In this respect, young part-time students are more similar to older part-time students.

⁵⁸ Given the size of this cohort, any findings should be treated with caution and should be indicative only.

Table 7.15: Gender of young FT, young PT and mature PT undergraduate students of UK domicile (2009/10) (per cent)

	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	All UG
Male	45.4	47.0	35.0	41.6
Female	54.6	53.0	65.0	58.4
Base (N)	926,705	74,745	472,435	1,693,140

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Table 7.16: Ethnicity of young FT, young PT and mature PT undergraduate students of UK domicile (2009/10) (per cent)

	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	All UG
White	79.8	77.5	82.4	79.5
Asian	10.5	9.2	4.3	8.3
Black	4.2	4.7	5.3	5.6
Other	4.0	3.3	2.3	3.5
Unknown	1.5	5.3	5.6	3.1
Base (N)	926,705	74,745	472,435	1,693,140

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Table 7.17: Declared disability status of young FT, young PT and mature PT undergraduate students of UK domicile (2009/10) (per cent)

	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	All UG
No known disability	91.0	79.5	72.5	84.6
Disabled	8.6	6.5	7.2	8.7
Unknown	0.5	14.0	20.4	6.7
Base (N)	926,705	74,745	472,435	1,693,140

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Table 7.18: Background of young FT, young PT and mature PT undergraduate students of UK domicile (Participation of Local Areas POLAR2 for 2009/10) (per cent)

	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	All UG
Not in low participation area	89.5	83.8	83.2	86.6
Low participation area	9.4	13.5	13.6	11.6
Not known (invalid postcode)	1.0	2.7	3.2	1.8
Base (N)	926,705	74,745	472,435	1,693,140

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Widening participation

As noted earlier, for some institutions part-time provision is positioned and valued as an aspect of their widening participation activity for students of all ages, with part-time study at sub-degree level regarded as an important pathway to HE.

A range of performance indicators are collected and disseminated to monitor widening participation in individual institutions and across the HE sector as a whole. The latest HESA performance indicators show that there has been an increase over the last 10 years in the proportion of young people⁵⁹ from widening participation backgrounds. In England there was a gradual increase in the proportion of young full-time first degree entrants from:

- state schools – from 84.4 to 88.4 per cent between 1998/99 and 2009/10
- lower socio-economic backgrounds, measured using NS-SEC⁶⁰ classes 4 through 7, from 27.9 to 30.1 per cent between 200/03 and 2009/10
- low-participation neighbourhoods, measured using POLAR2, from 9.2 to 10.5 per cent between 2005/06 and 2009/10.

However, young people from widening participation backgrounds are still marginally under-represented in HE compared with their profile in the population⁶¹.

Widening participation among the part-time student population is more challenging to monitor. The vast majority of entry profile data for students is collected during the UCAS application process, and as part-time students do not currently apply via this system the data available on the widening participation characteristics of part-time students is limited. In particular, information on NS-SEC and school type is generally not available. HESA performance indicators for part-time students therefore focus on low participation neighbourhood.

The latest data (for 2009/10) show that of the young entrants to part-time undergraduate courses (including first degree and sub-degree programmes) in England, 13.8 per cent were from a low participation neighbourhood⁶². This represents a slight increase from 13.0 per cent in 2006/07. The figure for mature entrants was 6.7 per cent (no change from the proportion in 2006/07). It is difficult to compare the profile of young entrants by study mode using performance indicator data to see if there is a better representation of young people from widening participation backgrounds in part-time study. This is largely due to the

⁵⁹ In the performance indicators, young students are those who are aged under 21 as at 30 September of the academic year in which they are recorded as entering the institution.

⁶⁰ NS-SEC is the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification, this has been the measure of social class used in all official surveys and statistics since 2001

⁶¹ See HESA PIs 2009/10: Summary tables and charts (http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2075&Itemid=141)

⁶² This group also had no previous HE qualifications, so were first-time HE entrants. See Table E

limited entry profile data available for part-time students and due to different categorisations used in the performance indicators. Given these caveats, there is, however, an indication that for young students, those studying part-time are indeed more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds: 10.5 per cent of young full-time first degree entrants were from low-participation neighbourhoods, compared with 13.8 per cent of young part-time undergraduate entrants (all levels of study but with no previous HE qualification). Our own analysis would support this tentative conclusion. Focusing on UK-domiciled undergraduate students in UK HEIs (all levels of study and across all years of study), 13.5 per cent of young part-time students are from low-participation neighbourhoods compared with 9.4 per cent of young full-time students (see Table 7.18).⁶³

Further and focused monitoring of the backgrounds of the young part-time population would be useful, particularly if similar indicators and categories to those used to monitor widening participation performance among the young full-time population are adopted. This could be facilitated by a change in the application system that would allow young individuals planning to study part-time to use the central UCAS system.

7.3.2 Prior qualifications

Looking at prior qualifications, unsurprisingly given their age, young part-time undergraduate students were considerably less likely than older part-time students to enter their programmes with either postgraduate qualifications, a first degree or professional qualifications. Instead, more than half (55 per cent) have A-levels (or equivalent) as their highest qualification on entry (compared with only 19 per cent of older part-time students). Interestingly, this group are more likely than young full-time or older part-time students to enter with GCSE or equivalent qualifications as their highest qualifications (accounting for 15 per cent) (see Table 7.19).

⁶³ Young students are those who are aged 22 or younger. The valid proportions, removing those for whom POLAR2 categorisation could not be calculated, are 13.9 per cent and 9.5 per cent.

Table 7.19: Comparing highest qualification on entry, for young FT, young PT and mature PT undergraduate students of UK domicile (2009/10)(breakdown by grouped qualification, per cent)

	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	All UG
Not known by data supplier	0.8	7.0	8.1	3.5
Postgraduate (excluding PGCE)	0.1	0.7	8.2	2.6
PGCE	<0.1	0.1	0.8	0.2
First degree (UK institution)	0.7	4.3	14.8	6.0
Other graduate and equivalent qualifications	0.1	0.4	2.3	1.0
HE credits	0.3	1.1	1.9	1.0
Other HE and professional qualifications	3.5	9.9	27.3	11.9
GCE A-level, SQA Highers and equivalent	89.8	55.2	18.6	61.1
Access courses	0.9	0.7	1.1	2.9
GCSE/O level, SQA O grades and Standard grades	0.7	15.1	9.0	4.0
Other qualifications	3.0	3.7	3.9	3.9
No formal qualification required/held	0.3	1.9	4.2	1.9
Base (N)	926,705	74,745	472,435	1,693,140

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

7.3.3 What do they study?

Our analysis indicates that the younger part-time students may make different choices about HE from those of mature part-time students, and so in some respects begin to look like full-time students.

A breakdown by the level of study shows that although other undergraduate study is still the most common level of study for younger and older part-time students (and contrasts strongly to the study pattern found for full-time students), younger part-time students are relatively more likely to study at first degree level (43 per cent compared with 36 per cent) (see Table 7.20). This is reflected in the pattern for study length, where younger part-time students are more likely than their older peers to be on programmes with a defined length, and more likely to be on programmes lasting three to four years (see Table 7.21).

Table 7.20: Comparing level of study for young FT, young PT and mature PT undergraduate students of UK domicile (2009/10) (per cent)

	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	All UG
Postgraduate (research)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Postgraduate (taught)	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.2
First degree	93.9	43.1	35.6	72.9
Other undergraduate	6.1	56.9	64.2	27.0
Base (N)	926,705	74,745	472,435	1,693,140

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Table 7.21: Comparing the expected length of study for students of different ages (part-time students only, 2009/10) (per cent)

	Under 18	18 to under 20	20 to under 23	23 to under 25	25+	Total
Not known or expected	73.4	28.6	27.5	36.1	44.8	42.7
<5 weeks	1.3	2.8	1.5	1.3	1.5	1.5
=>5 weeks and <24 weeks	0.7	3.1	2.1	2.3	2.2	2.2
=>24 weeks and <=1 year	22.6	17.3	11.7	14.6	18.3	17.5
>1 year and <=2 years	0.9	15.0	12.3	12.8	12.1	12.0
>2 years and <=3 years	0.5	16.8	21.9	12.5	6.8	8.7
>3 years and <=4 years	0.3	9.9	10.6	7.8	4.3	5.2
>4 years and <=5 years	0.2	3.5	6.5	6.6	5.4	5.4
>5 years and <=6 years	0.1	2.3	4.7	4.6	3.5	3.6
>6 years and <20 years	0.0	0.7	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.1
Base (N)	9,565	16,025	49,150	34,775	435,635	545,155

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

These younger students are more likely to be studying business and administrative studies, engineering, and architecture, building and planning; and less likely to be studying subjects allied to medicine (essentially nursing), social studies, history and philosophy and education than their older part-time peers (see Table 7.22).

Table 7.22: Comparing subject of study for young FT, young PT and mature PT undergraduate students of UK domicile (2009/10) (breakdown by JACS, per cent)

Subject area	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	All UG
Medicine/Dentistry	3.2	0.1	0.1	2.5
Subjects Allied to Medicine	8.2	6.0	20.0	14.0
Biological Sciences	10.7	6.2	4.9	8.3
Veterinary Sciences/Agriculture	1.2	1.1	0.8	1.1
Physical Sciences	5.2	2.3	2.6	3.9
Mathematical/Computer Sciences	6.6	5.7	4.2	5.6
Engineering	5.1	7.9	2.8	4.4
Technologies	0.9	0.5	0.5	0.8
Architecture/Building and Planning	2.5	6.5	2.0	2.6
Social Studies	8.7	6.3	8.1	8.7
Law	4.5	3.2	2.2	3.6
Business and Administrative Studies	12.0	13.4	8.8	10.5
Mass Comm./Documentation	3.3	1.7	0.4	2.2
Linguistics/Classics	4.4	2.2	2.2	3.4
European Languages/Literature	2.2	3.6	3.2	2.3
Other Languages	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.4
Historical and Philosophical Studies	4.9	2.4	4.7	4.4
Creative Arts and Design	11.6	3.1	1.9	8.1
Education	4.1	8.1	11.6	6.9
Combined/Unspecified	0.3	19.1	18.7	6.3
Base (N)	926,705	74,745	472,435	1,693,140

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Exploring subject patterns a little further, we can see a difference when looking at the level of study. Young part-time students following first degree courses have a subject profile that is more similar to that of young full-time first degree students, than that of their older part-time peers. However, it is interesting to note the importance to young part-time first degree students of the technical and professional areas of study such as mathematics/computing and IT, engineering, architecture/building and planning; and to a certain extent, law, and business and administration studies. These arguably have a more direct link or at least more visible pathway to a career. When focusing on those studying at other undergraduate level, we find that the subject profile of young part-time students is similar to that of older part-time students (see Table 7.23).

Table 7.23: Comparing subject of study for young FT, young PT and mature PT UG students of UK domicile, split by level of study (2009/10) (by JACS, per cent)

	First degree			Total
	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	
Medicine/Dentistry	3.4	0.1	0.0	3.3
Subjects Allied to Medicine	6.5	5.6	12.4	9.1
Biological Sciences	11.0	11.4	10.0	10.4
Veterinary Sciences/Agriculture	1.0	0.4	0.2	0.9
Physical Sciences	5.4	4.0	4.6	4.9
Mathematical/Computer Sciences	6.6	8.2	6.3	6.5
Engineering	5.1	7.2	4.6	5.0
Technologies	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.8
Architecture/Building and Planning	2.5	9.2	3.1	2.8
Social Studies	9.1	7.5	9.7	9.6
Law	4.8	5.5	4.0	4.5
Business and Administrative Studies	11.9	14.4	7.3	10.9
Mass Comm./Documentation	3.4	1.8	0.3	2.7
Linguistics/Classics	4.7	3.7	3.9	4.2
European Languages/Literature	2.3	1.1	1.6	2.0
Other Languages	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.4
Historical and Philosophical Studies	5.3	3.6	7.5	5.2
Creative Arts and Design	11.5	4.6	2.2	9.8
Education	4.1	3.9	5.4	4.4
Combined/Unspecified	0.3	7.1	16.5	2.7
Base (N)	869,740	32,235	168,360	1,234,120

	Other undergraduate			Total
	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	
Medicine/Dentistry	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2
Subjects Allied to Medicine	34.0	6.4	24.3	27.4
Biological Sciences	6.2	2.2	2.1	2.6
Veterinary Sciences/Agriculture	4.1	1.7	1.2	1.7
Physical Sciences	1.5	1.0	1.5	1.4
Mathematical/Computer Sciences	6.0	3.8	3.1	3.4
Engineering	4.9	8.4	1.8	2.9
Technologies	1.8	0.3	0.5	0.7
Architecture/Building and Planning	2.9	4.5	1.4	2.1
Social Studies	3.6	5.5	7.3	6.6

	Other undergraduate			Total
	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	
Law	1.2	1.6	1.3	1.3
Business and Administrative Studies	12.2	12.6	9.7	9.7
Mass Comm./Documentation	2.4	1.6	0.4	0.8
Linguistics/Classics	0.2	1.1	1.2	0.9
European Languages/Literature	0.1	5.5	4.0	3.2
Other Languages	0.0	1.0	0.4	0.4
Historical and Philosophical Studies	0.2	1.5	3.2	2.4
Creative Arts and Design	13.8	2.0	1.8	3.6
Education	4.6	11.3	14.9	13.0
Combined/Unspecified	0.2	28.2	20.0	15.9
Base (N)	56,460	42,490	303,155	456,440

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

7.3.4 Where do they study?

Young part-time students are less likely than mature part-time students to attend either a Russell Group or a 1994 Group university, and are considerably less likely to attend these research-intensive institutions than their young full-time counter-parts (see Table 7.24).

Table 7.24: Comparing the type of institution studied in, for young FT, young PT and mature PT undergraduate students of UK domicile (2009/10) (breakdown by mission group, per cent)

Mission group	FT (<=22)	PT (<=22)	PT (>22)	All UG
No mission group	19.4	14.5	12.7	17.4
Universities Alliance	22.5	47.1	52.6	32.3
Million +	18.0	25.3	19.5	20.7
Members of Guild HE	4.1	3.5	2.2	3.5
Russell Group	24.3	5.7	7.8	17.2
1994 Group	11.8	4.0	5.2	8.9
Base (N)	926,705	74,745	472,435	1,693,140

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

Institutions with large numbers of young part-time undergraduate students also tended to be those with larger overall numbers of part-time students. The largest were the OU, Teesside, Wolverhampton, Central Lancashire, Hull, London South Bank, Staffordshire Cumbria, Plymouth, Anglia Ruskin, Greenwich, Sheffield Hallam, Sunderland and Northumbria. All these English HEIs had 1,000 or more young part-time undergraduate students. The University of the West of Scotland also had more than 1,000 young part-time students. Those with an above average proportion of young part-time students were Wolverhampton, Cumbria, Kingston, Hertfordshire, Trinity University College (now University of Wales, Trinity St David), and Southampton Solent. In each of these

institutions, young students make up at least one quarter of the part-time student body. Alternatively, institutions with a relatively high proportion of young students studying part-time were Teesside, London South Bank, Cumbria, Trinity University College and Newport – in these institutions at least one in every five young students were studying part-time (see Table 7.25).

Table 7.25: UK-domiciled undergraduate population: a focus on young part-time students (2009/10)

Region	Institution	young pt students* (N)	Total students (N)	% young student population = pt	% pt population =young	% all young pt population
SE	Open University	20,415	195,180	100.0	10.5	30.7
NE	Teesside	2,535	23,185	30.6	16.9	3.8
WM	Wolverhampton	1,530	16,780	16.8	25.9	2.3
NW	Central Lancashire	1,510	25,190	11.6	16.5	2.3
Y&H	Hull	1,430	17,645	14.4	20.4	2.2
Lon	London South Bank	1,335	17,360	23.9	17.0	2.0
WM	Staffordshire	1,325	16,250	15.5	19.4	2.0
NW	Cumbria	1,200	9,615	22.6	29.4	1.8
SW	Plymouth	1,185	26,340	8.1	15.6	1.8
Scot	West of Scotland	1,160	14,810	18.9	17.6	1.8
E	Anglia Ruskin	1,070	16,445	15.3	15.4	1.6
Lon	Greenwich	1,065	19,770	11.7	16.3	1.6
Y&H	Sheffield Hallam	1,020	25,505	5.7	18.9	1.5
NE	Sunderland	1,010	13,195	15.7	15.8	1.5
NE	Northumbria	1,000	22,200	7.2	15.1	1.5
Lon	Kingston	980	17,985	7.7	51.2	1.5
Lon	Birkbeck College	970	13,450	100.0	7.2	1.5
Y&H	Leeds Metropolitan	970	22,375	6.1	17.6	1.5
E	Hertfordshire	925	18,740	6.9	26.9	1.4
Lon	East London	915	16,375	13.2	19.7	1.4
SW	West of England	890	24,105	5.9	15.3	1.3
Lon	Westminster	875	14,185	10.1	22.1	1.3
Wales	Glamorgan	815	14,875	9.5	19.4	1.2
Lon	Middlesex	815	14,385	9.7	24.6	1.2
Wales	Trinity University College	795	2,500	44.9	63.1	1.2
NW	Liverpool John Moores	765	19,045	5.7	21.2	1.2
NW	Edge Hill	690	14,645	10.7	10.9	1.0
Scot	Glasgow Caledonian	665	13,625	8.0	21.2	1.0

Region	Institution	young pt students* (N)	Total students (N)	% young student population = pt	% pt population =young	% all young pt population
NW	Manchester Metropolitan	650	25,685	3.4	18.2	1.0
WM	Birmingham City	620	19,085	5.9	11.9	0.9
SE	Kent	590	14,055	5.8	18.5	0.9
Lon	Thames Valley	590	12,310	15.3	10.2	0.9
Wales	Wales, Newport	590	7,240	20.5	15.1	0.9
EM	Derby	545	12,905	7.4	15.6	0.8
Y&H	Huddersfield	535	17,660	5.9	9.1	0.8
WM	Coventry	530	16,340	5.8	9.8	0.8
SW	Bournemouth	520	14,725	5.2	16.0	0.8
SE	Southampton Solent	515	10,020	6.5	40.2	0.8
NW	Chester	505	11,000	8.3	13.5	0.8
	Total (all known institutions)**	66,535	1,269,755	7.5	13.7	100

Note: *Young is less than 23 years old.

Note: **Where institution breakdown is possible.

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

7.4 Part-time HE students in the FE sector

The analysis has presented a picture of the characteristics of part-time students registered with universities and HEIs. However, as noted earlier (in Chapter 2) a significant proportion of HE students are registered with and/or studying in FEIs⁶⁴. In 2009/10, there were approximately 120,530 individuals studying at HE level in a FEI, and 113,200 of these were studying at undergraduate level (on prescribed HE courses eligible for HEFCE funding or non-prescribed HE courses funded by SFA⁶⁵). Across the FE sector there were 58,910 or just over half (52 per cent) of registered undergraduate students studying part-time. In this section we explore the characteristics and study patterns of this group of part-time undergraduate students⁶⁶.

7.4.1 What are their characteristics?

As found for part-time students in HE institutions, part-time students tend to be female, mid-career and less diverse than full-time students.

⁶⁴ Recorded in the ILR.

⁶⁵ These learners have been identified as receiving SFA funding through the Adult Learner Responsive stream

⁶⁶ There were 7,332 students who were deemed to be studying at postgraduate level. These have been excluded from the analysis in order to mirror, as far as possible, the analysis undertaken on HE sector data taken from HESA.

Gender

Over half of all undergraduate HE students in FE (56 per cent) were women, and this proportion was only marginally higher among part-time students (57 per cent) than among full-time students (55 per cent). Overall, women are marginally more likely than men to be studying part-time (see Table 7.26). The gender split for part-time HE students in the FE sector is less extreme than that found in the HE sector (where 63 per cent of part-time students were female).

Nearly two-thirds of students studying at first degree level or above were women, among both part-time and full-time students. Indeed, women are over-represented in first degree study.

Table 7.26: HE students in FE by gender and mode of study

	2008/09				2009/10			
	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)
Female	54.7	56.3	61,839	55.5	54.8	56.7	63,149	55.8
Male	45.3	43.7	49,501	44.5	45.2	43.3	50,049	44.2
Base (N)	50,314	61,026	111,340	100.0	54,286	58,912	113,198	100.0

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Age

Part-time students tend to be older than full-time students, replicating the patterns found for those registered with HEIs (i.e. HE in HE).

Overall, just under one-third (32 per cent) of all undergraduate HE level students were aged under 23 in 2009/10 (a slight increase over 2008/09), while eight per cent were aged 50 or older. There is a clear age split between full- and part-time undergraduate students, with approximately 26,980 individuals representing half (50 per cent in 2009/10) of full-time students aged under 23, compared with only 9,720 learners representing 17 per cent of part-time students. Three-quarters of part-time students were aged 23 to 49 (72 per cent in 2009/10) compared with 46 per cent of full-time students (see Table 7.27). The relative size of the young part-time group (those under 23) was almost the same as that found for part-time undergraduates in the HE sector (14 per cent).

This age pattern holds true when looking at level of study: part-time students still tend to be older than full-time students, whether studying at first degree or other undergraduate level. However, a greater proportion of other undergraduate part-time students are aged under 23 compared with those studying for first degree qualifications (17 per cent compared with 11 per cent in 2009/10). This was not found among HE sector part-time undergraduates students – for this group, there was a higher proportion of young part-time students studying at first degree level compared with other undergraduate level (16 per cent compared with 12 per cent).

Table 7.27: HE students in FE by age and mode of study

	2008/09				2009/10			
	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)
under 18	0.5	0.4	479	0.4	0.4	0.2	374	0.3
18-19	22.8	5.5	14,829	13.3	23.6	5.4	15,958	14.1
20-22	25.4	11.2	19,589	17.6	25.7	10.9	20,378	18.0
<i>Subtotal: under 23</i>	<i>48.7</i>	<i>17.1</i>	<i>34,897</i>	<i>31.3</i>	<i>49.7</i>	<i>16.5</i>	<i>36,710</i>	<i>32.4</i>
23-24	7.4	6.6	7,783	7.0	7.3	6.8	7,985	7.1
25-29	12.4	15.8	15,886	14.3	11.9	16.0	15,890	14.0
30-34	7.9	12.1	11,375	10.2	8.0	12.6	11,771	10.4
35-39	7.4	13.4	11,853	10.6	7.2	12.9	11,501	10.2
40-44	6.9	13.5	11,705	10.5	6.5	13.2	11,267	10.0
45-49	5.0	10.5	8,924	8.0	4.9	10.9	9,057	8.0
50-54	2.6	6.4	5,188	4.7	2.7	6.6	5,326	4.7
55-59	1.2	3.1	2,509	2.3	1.2	3.1	2,466	2.2
60+	0.7	1.5	1,220	1.1	0.6	1.4	1,204	1.1
Base (N)	50,314	61,026	111,340	100.0	54,282	58,895	113,177	100.0

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Other characteristics

One in seven (14 per cent) of all undergraduate HE students in FE were from minority ethnic groups. The largest minority ethnic group was Asian or Asian British, accounting for six per cent of all students, followed by Black or Black British, who accounted for four per cent. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups was lower among part-time students (11 per cent in 2009/10) than among full-time students (18 per cent) (see Table 7.28). A similar pattern was found for part-time undergraduates in the HE sector. This pattern holds true when exploring level of study (first degree compared with other undergraduate level), but among both part-time and full-time students, first degree students were more likely than those studying at other undergraduate level to be from a minority ethnic group.

Table 7.28: HE students in FE by ethnicity and mode of study

	2008/09				2009/10			
	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)
Asian or Asian British	8.4	4.2	6,780	6.1	8.3	4.4	7,068	6.2
Black or Black British	5.4	3.4	4,793	4.3	5.2	3.6	4,943	4.4
Mixed	2.1	1.4	1,906	1.7	2.2	1.5	2,055	1.8
White	79.2	87.6	93,352	83.8	79.8	87.1	94,677	83.6
Other inc Chinese	2.4	1.5	2,106	1.9	2.4	1.6	2,240	2.0
Not known	2.5	1.9	2,403	2.2	2.2	1.8	2,215	2.0
Base (N)	50,314	61,026	111,340	100.0	54,286	58,912	113,198	100.0

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

The ILR records whether the learner considers that they have a learning difficulty, disability or health problem, and the data appears to be more complete for part-time undergraduate students than found for part-time students in the HE sector (only five per cent not known compared with almost 20 per cent). Overall, nine per cent of undergraduate HE in FE students, some 9,600 individuals in 2009/10, considered themselves to have a learning difficulty, disability or health problem. This proportion was higher among full-time students (11 per cent) than among part-time students (six per cent) (see Table 7.29). Exploring further, there is little difference by level of study, particularly for part-time students. However, among full-time students a greater proportion of those studying at first degree level considered themselves to have a learning difficulty or disability than those studying at other undergraduate level.

Table 7.29: HE students in FE by learning difficulty/disability and mode of study

	2008/09				2009/10			
	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)
Learning difficulty, disability or health problem	10.3	5.8	8,749	7.9	10.8	6.3	9,603	8.5
None	85.1	88.9	97,036	87.2	84.9	88.9	98,462	87.0
No information	4.6	5.3	5,555	5.0	4.2	4.8	5,133	4.5
Base (N)	50,314	61,026	111,340	100.0	54,286	58,912	113,198	100.0

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

7.4.2 What do they study?

Level of study

Overall, around two fifths of all undergraduate students were studying at higher certificate level, just over two fifths were studying at foundation degree/HND level, and 15 per cent were studying at first degree level.

Part-time students were considerably more likely than full-time students to be studying at other undergraduate level (94 per cent compared with 75 per cent), particularly at higher certificate level (61 per cent, compared with 17 per cent of full-time students). For full-time students, foundation degree or HND-level study was more common than found for part-time students: over half (58 per cent) of full-time students were studying at this level, compared with 33 per cent of part-timers (see Table 7.30).

Full-time students were also more likely than part-time students to be studying at first degree level (25 per cent compared with six per cent). This follows patterns found for HE sector students, but among the HE sector students the difference was much more extreme (90 per cent of full-time students were studying at first degree level compared with 37 per cent of part-time students). There was a difference noticed by age, in that older part-time undergraduates were relatively more likely than younger part-time undergraduates to be studying at first degree or foundation degree/diploma level, whereas more than two-thirds of younger part-time students (aged 22 or under) were studying at higher certificate level, compared with 60 per cent of older part-time students (see further analysis by age below).

Table 7.30: HE students in FE by level of study and mode of study

	2008/09				2009/10			
	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)
First degree	24.6	6.7	16,445	14.8	24.6	6.0	16,893	14.9
Foundation/Diploma	57.9	31.9	48,599	43.6	58.1	32.8	50,856	44.9
Certificate	17.5	61.4	46,296	41.6	17.2	61.3	45,449	40.2
Base (N)	50,314	61,026	111,340	100.0	54,286	58,912	113,198	100.0

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Length of programme

The length of course was calculated as the difference between the actual starting date of the course (recorded as learning aim), and the planned end date. Across all undergraduate HE in FE students, half were on a course that was planned to last for between one and two years, and just under a third were on courses of up to one year, and this pattern has remained stable (see Table 7.31). Shorter courses are considerably more common among undergraduate HE students in the FE sector than among undergraduates in the HE sector (where the majority of courses last between two and four years, 64 per cent).

Full-time students tended to be studying courses with longer durations than were part-time students, which mirrors the pattern found among HE sector undergraduates. Just under two-fifths (38 per cent in 2009/10) of part-time students were studying courses that lasted one year or less, compared with 24 per cent of full-time students. The proportions studying courses that lasted for three or more years were similar, at just under one fifth. As would be expected, when looking at level of study, part-time students studying at first degree level were considerably more likely to be on longer courses (three years or more) than those studying at other undergraduate level (50 per cent compared with 17 per cent). The pattern was more extreme for full-time students (66 per cent compared with five per cent).

Table 7.31: HE students in FE by length of course and mode of study

	2008/09				2009/10			
	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)	FT (%)	PT (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)
up to 1 year	22.5	37.1	34,001	30.5	23.5	37.5	34,869	30.8
1 to 2 years	56.3	44.5	55,507	49.9	56.5	43.7	56,406	49.8
3 years and above	21.2	18.3	21,832	19.6	20.0	18.8	21,923	19.4
Base (N)	50,314	61,026	111,340	100.0	54,286	58,912	113,198	100.0

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Intensity of study

We also explored intensity of the course, based on the full-time equivalence (FTE) proportion, for part-time undergraduate students and found that around half of part-time students were on courses with an FTE of between one quarter and one half (47 per cent). Those studying at other undergraduate level were more likely than those at first degree level to be on 'low intensity' courses with an FTE of below one quarter (39 per cent compared with 15 per cent in 2009/10); and, conversely, those studying at first degree level were more likely than those on other undergraduate programmes to be on 'high intensity' courses (31 per cent compared with 15 per cent) (see Table 7.32).

Table 7.32: Part-time HE students in FE by intensity of course based on FTE

	2008/09		2009/10	
	PT (N)	PT (%)	PT (N)	PT (%)
0-25%	22,188	36.4	22,286	37.8
25-50%	29,852	48.9	27,488	46.7
50-75%	8,986	14.7	9,138	15.5
Base (N)	61,026	100.0	58,912	100.0

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

7.4.3 Young part-time HE in FE students

As noted above, there were almost 10,000 learners studying at undergraduate level in the FE sector who were studying part-time and were aged under 23 years old (the age group of particular interest to this research). This compares with almost 27,000 young full-time students. Young part-time students are outnumbered by approximately three to one.

Background characteristics

The majority of younger part-time undergraduate students were male (64 per cent), which is opposite to the pattern across all part-time students where women outnumber men; indeed, three-fifths or 61 per cent of older part-time graduates were women. It also differs to the pattern found for young full-time students where there is an even split between men and women (see Table 7.33). Finally, it differs from the pattern found for young part-time

HE students in the HE sector, where female students outnumber males (53 per cent compared with 47 per cent).

Younger undergraduate part-time students were marginally less likely to be from ethnic minority backgrounds than were older students (and a similar pattern was found for full-time students) (see Table 7.34). Young part-time undergraduate students were also less likely to consider themselves to have a learning difficulty or disability than older part-time students but there is a greater proportion of missing data for mature students than for younger students (see Table 7.35). Comparing young part-time students with young full-time students, young part-time students are less likely to be from an ethnic minority background and less likely to consider themselves to have a learning difficulty or disability.

Table 7.33: HE students in FE by age and mode of study, and gender

	PT (<=22) (%)	PT (>22) (%)	FT (<=22)(%)	FT (>22)(%)
2008/09				
Female	35.9	60.5	49.9	59.2
Male	64.1	39.5	50.1	40.8
Base (N)	10,435	50,591	24,462	25,852
2009/10				
Female	36.3	60.7	50.3	59.4
Male	63.7	39.3	49.7	40.6
Base (N)	9,734	49,161	26,976	27,306

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Table 7.34: HE students in FE by age and mode of study, and ethnicity

	PT (<=22) (%)	PT (>22) (%)	FT (<=22)(%)	FT (>22)(%)
2008/09				
Asian or Asian British	4.5	4.2	8.9	7.9
Black or Black British	1.9	3.7	3.1	7.5
Mixed	1.6	1.3	2.5	1.8
White	89.7	87.2	80.3	78.3
Other inc Chinese	1.2	1.5	2.4	2.3
Not known	1.1	2.0	2.8	2.3
Base (N)	10,435	50,591	24,462	25,852
2009/10				
Asian or Asian British	4.8	4.3	8.6	7.9
Black or Black British	1.8	4.0	3.1	7.2
Mixed	1.7	1.5	2.4	1.9
White	89.5	86.7	81.5	78.2
Other inc Chinese	1.3	1.6	2.2	2.6
Not known	0.9	1.9	2.3	2.0

	PT (<=22) (%)	PT (>22) (%)	FT (<=22)(%)	FT (>22)(%)
Base (N)	9,734	49,161	26,976	27,306

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Table 7.35: HE students in FE by age and mode of study, and learning difficulty/disability

	PT (<=22) (%)	PT (>22)(%)	FT (<=22)(%)	FT (>22)(%)
2008/09				
Learner has learning difficulty/ disability/health problem	12.7	7.5	13.7	8.7
Learner does not have learning difficulty/ disability/health problem	82.4	87.1	81.2	85.9
No information	4.9	5.4	5.1	5.3
Base (N)	12,385	4,060	13,371	3,522
2009/10				
Learner has learning difficulty/ disability /health problem	9.5	5.7	9.9	6.2
Learner does not have learning difficulty/ disability/health problem	86	89	86.1	89.1
No information	4.5	5.3	4	4.8
Base (N)	37,929	56,966	40,915	55,390

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Study patterns

Following the pattern for all students, the largest number of young undergraduate part-time students was found in the North West. Indeed, one-fifth (20 per cent in 2009/10) of younger part-time learners study in the North West, followed by 18 per cent in the West Midlands, and 15 per cent in Yorkshire and Humberside. Looking further at regional patterns, young part-time students are over-represented in the North East but under-represented in the South West compared with older part-time students. In addition, there are proportionally fewer young part-time students studying in the North East and Yorkshire and Humberside compared with the distribution found for young full-time students, but proportionally more in the West Midlands (see Table 7.36).

Table 7.36: HE students in FE by age and mode of study, and region

	PT (<=22)(%)	PT (>22)(%)	FT (<=22)(%)	FT (>22)(%)
2008/09				
East Of England	4.9	6.0	3.2	3.2
East Midlands	10.4	8.8	8.2	9.2
Greater London	6.5	8.5	5.0	11.4
North East	10.2	6.1	12.9	12.2
North West	19.1	17.5	16.6	18.9
South East	10.9	12.6	11.9	12.9
South West	6.9	11.5	7.1	7.1
West Midlands	17.3	15.9	11.7	10.1
Yorkshire & Humberside	13.9	13.1	23.4	14.9
Base (N)	10,427	50,553	24,421	25,840
2009/10				
East of England	4.5	6.5	1.4	2.3
East Midlands	10.7	9.2	8.8	7.8
Greater London	6.0	8.8	5.6	10.8
North East	7.5	5.0	13.2	12.8
North West	19.9	16.4	18.2	21.4
South East	11.9	13.9	11.6	12.6
South West	7.4	11.6	6.6	7.4
West Midlands	17.5	14.8	10.4	9.8
Yorkshire & Humberside	14.6	13.8	24.2	15.1
Base (N)	9,726	49,086	26,936	27,296

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

As found for all undergraduate HE in FE students, the vast majority of young part-time students were studying in a general FE college (97 per cent), and would appear to be even more concentrated in this type of provision than older part-time and particularly young full-time, learners. Indeed, younger full-time students were the most likely to study outside general FE colleges, mainly at special colleges for arts or agriculture (see Table 7.37).

Table 7.37: HE students in FE by age and mode of study, and region

	PT (<=22)(%)	PT (>22)(%)	FT (<=22)(%)	FT (>22)(%)
2008/09				
General FE college incl tertiary	96.7	93.2	88.1	94.8
Special college - art, design and performing arts	0.1	0.4	8.1	2.0
Special college - agriculture and horticulture	2.1	2.0	3.5	1.5
Local education authority (LEA)	0.5	1.9	0.0	0.6
Sixth form college	0.5	1.0	0.1	0.3
Specialist designated college	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.7
Other	0.2	0.8	0.2	0.2
Base (N)	10,435	50,591	24,462	25,852
2009/10				
General FE college incl tertiary	97.3	94.1	87.6	91.3
Special college - art, design and performing arts	0.1	0.4	7.8	2.0
Special college - agriculture and horticulture	1.3	1.8	3.8	1.7
Local education authority (LEA)	0.4	1.3	0.1	2.8
Sixth form college	0.6	1.0	0.2	1.0
Specialist designated college	0.1	0.8	0.1	0.6
Other	0.2	0.7	0.5	0.7
Base (N)	9,734	49,161	26,976	27,306

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

In terms of level of study, young part-time undergraduate students were more likely to be studying at certificate level than older part-time students (69 per cent compared with 60 per cent in 2009/10). Very few young part-time students were studying at first degree level (four per cent) but just over one quarter (27 per cent) were studying at foundation degree or diploma level; this differs greatly to the pattern found for young full-time students. Two-thirds (65 per cent) of young full-time students were studying at foundation degree or diploma level and a further quarter (28 per cent) were studying at first degree level (see Table 7.38).

Table 7.38: HE students in FE by age and mode of study, and level of study

	PT (<=22)(%)	PT (>22)(%)	FT (<=22)(%)	FT (>22)(%)
2008/09				
First degree	5.0	7.0	28.0	21.4
Foundation/Diploma	25.4	33.2	64.6	51.6
Certificate	69.6	59.8	7.4	27.0
Base (N)	10,435	50,591	24,462	25,852
2009/10				
First degree	4.1	6.4	27.5	21.8
Foundation/Diploma	26.9	33.9	64.6	51.8
Certificate	69.1	59.7	7.9	26.4
Base (N)	9,734	49,161	26,976	27,306

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Older students were more likely than young students (full- and part-time) to be on short courses (of one year or less) and on lower intensity courses (of less than one quarter FTE). Similar proportions of older and younger part-time undergraduate students were studying long courses of three years or more (19 per cent for both), but for young part-time students these courses were more likely to be of high intensity (see Table 7.40). Young part-time undergraduate students were more likely than young full-time students to be on either short courses (22 per cent compared with 14 per cent in 2009/10) and were relatively less likely than young full-time students to be on long courses (19 per cent compared with 23 per cent) (see Table 7.39).

Table 7.39: HE students in FE by age and mode of study, and length of course

	PT (<=22)(%)	PT (>22)(%)	FT (<=22)(%)	FT (>22)(%)
2008/09				
up to 1 year	23.1	40.0	13.1	31.5
1 to 2 years	58.4	41.7	63.8	49.2
3 years and above	18.5	18.3	23.1	19.4
Base (N)	10,435	50,591	24,462	25,852
2009/10				
up to 1 year	22.0	40.6	14.4	32.5
1 to 2 years	59.5	40.5	62.9	50.2
3 years and above	18.5	18.9	22.7	17.3
Base (N)	9,734	49,161	26,976	27,306

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

Table 7.40: Part-time HE students in FE by age and intensity of course

	2008/09		2009/10	
	PT (<=22)(%)	PT (>22)(%)	PT (<=22)(%)	PT (>22)(%)
0-25%	20.0	39.7	19.1	41.5
25-50%	59.6	46.7	60.9	43.9
50-75%	20.3	13.6	20.0	14.6
Base (N)	10,435	50,591	9,734	49,161

Source: IES calculations from ILR data sets, 2008/09 and 2009/10

8 Employer Demand for Part-time Study

Key points

- Employers recognise the benefits of part-time undergraduate study in providing their organisation with skills and knowledge that can improve productivity and efficiency. They also recognise that it can help with staff retention and career progression (playing a part in talent management) and that it is a good model to develop work-readiness in graduates. However, institutions find employers reluctant to pay towards the full costs of provision, and employers acknowledge that they need to see a clear business case before they commit time or resource to part-time HE.
- This type of provision is not necessarily accessible to all employees. The learners on part-time HE programmes tend to be highly qualified (and so will be studying for a qualification that is either equivalent to or below their existing qualification level) and working at senior levels, and they are more likely to be employed in large public sector organisations with a track record of workforce development.
- Feedback from employers demonstrates that they want a different model of part-time HE to that traditionally provided. They want flexible tailored programmes, delivered in the workplace or outside of normal working hours (to minimise disruption and costs in releasing staff to study). They are not necessarily interested in accreditation or the potential for learners to progress to higher levels of learning (which may be at odds with employee aspirations). They want programmes to be developed quickly, to deliver work-relevant skills and to be delivered by credible professionals with industry experience and understanding.

Earlier in this report we explored the scale and nature of employer-led part-time provision, noting that not all institutions are working with employers to develop and deliver programmes for their employees and that the scale of this aspect of part-time provision varies from institution to institution and from year to year. Looking to the future, some institutions see this as a key growth area but others are concerned that the changes in tuition fees and access to financial support among some part-time students, and the public spending cuts will negatively impact upon employer demand. In this chapter we look at the type of employers who engage with HE institutions and their motivation for and experiences of part-time study. We also examine their needs for part-time study

8.1 Employer motivations to engage with part-time study

The feedback from the employers interviewed as part of the institutional case studies indicates that the employers involved in developing, and often delivering, bespoke provision to their employees in partnership with local HE providers are very positive about part-time study, and also about their HE partners. They see the benefits of part-time study to their organisations, to their individual employees and also to the country.

Employers recognise that part-time study provides skills and knowledge to benefit the organisation, possibly helping them to get ahead in their sector. They also acknowledge that in developing staff, they are working with their employees and building a relationship. This rapport helps to retain staff and promote career progression, and so part-time study can be an important aspect of talent management. There is, however, recognition that not all jobs and skill-sets lend themselves to part-time study, and employers generally need a clear business case before engaging in or supporting part-time HE. One employer with a strong learning and development ethos noted:

'Each employee has an Individual Learning Plan and can apply for support...there are clear and transparent criteria set for assessing applications. The key factor is whether the training is relevant to the job and benefits the organisation.'

[Employer linked to a large-scale provider]

In terms of wider benefits, beyond that accrued by the individual employee and individual company, one employer noted:

'Many school children don't see education as important, but once they are in employment, the benefits become more apparent. By increasing the provision of part-time HE, therefore, there will be greater opportunities to increase their skills and qualifications.'

[Employer linked to a large-scale provider]

Another employer felt that a part-time student is more economically productive while gaining their qualification than a full-time student, that part-time study mitigates the number of students unprepared for the world of work because they are already in the workplace, and that part-time study is more inclusive (*'there is the argument that the full-time undergraduate degree is the preserve of the middle classes'*).

The issue of work-readiness was discussed by several employers, and felt to be a general benefit of part-time study. Two employers (linked to different case study institutions) were critical of full-time students and their lack of work readiness (particularly the softer skills required in the workplace) and lack of industry knowledge, and felt that part-time study was perhaps a better model as it enabled students to gain experience of working while studying. Two other employers noted how they found individuals with work experience more effective. One spoke of how he found apprentices become effective more quickly than graduates:

'Higher-level practical skills are of more business benefit than graduates. It takes an IT graduate around two years to become effective.'

[Employer linked to a large-scale provider]

The other noted how he observed that graduates with some work experience are ahead of their peers, and that the sandwich course or part-time route to study gives a balance of academic learning and application, providing the breadth of skills required for the workplace.

The wider **research literature** also suggests that employer motivations for helping their employees to study for a HE qualification are linked to organisational performance, developing enterprise, encouraging innovation, motivating staff, and helping to create and apply new knowledge (Bolden et al., 2009); and part-time modes have been identified as the preferred way of delivering foundation degrees by employers (Harvey, 2009). The bespoke nature of engagement sought by many employers, and the flexibility of the service offered by some institutions, can often result in long-term collaborative relationships between employers and HE institutions (Bolden et al., 2009).

Recent research with 300 employers of part-time students on more intensive part-time study (as part of the Futuretrack study) found employers reported a range of benefits from part-time study. They felt their employees were more knowledgeable and had better job-related skills, and they reported increased productivity and efficiency, and increased retention (Mason et al., 2011). Surveys of part-time students have similarly found that many report being able to apply what they had learned from their studies in their workplace (Yorke and Longdon, 2010), and that their studies had helped them in their current job (Feinstein et al., 2007). While there are reported benefits for employers in their employees undertaking HE qualifications, employers report that undertaking a part-time HE qualification does not necessarily lead to enhanced career progression for employees. Whether or not employees receive a pay rise and/or promotion on completion of a course of study was reported to depend on the state of the business. Employers in private sector organisations reported there was more scope to reward students of part-time HE qualifications than employers in the public sector (Mason et al., 2011).

8.2 Access to employer support

Access to and support for part-time HE is not equally spread across the workforce. The wider research literature suggests that part-time HE tends to be initiated by the employee (not the employer) and is more likely to be requested by well-qualified employees. These individuals are more likely than others to be supported by their employers, as they have already demonstrated that they are capable of achieving at HE level and employers perceive that they would be better able to implement and transfer the benefits of study to the workplace (Mason et al., 2011). Several other studies have found that employer contributions to student fees are most likely to be made to support 'privileged workers' (ie those who already have a level 4 qualification) (Callender et al., 2010; Callender et al., 2010b; Callender et al., 2010c). Full-time employees are also more likely than part-time employees to receive employer support, and students with an annual household income of £25,000 or more are also more likely to be financially supported by their employer. Employer support is critical, and other research found some evidence of a willingness among working adults to consider participation in HE, particularly if they were encouraged to do so, and/or given time off to study, by their employer (Pollard et al., 2008).

The research also provides evidence that large employers rather than small employers (eg FreshMinds, 2006) and public sector employers (Boorman et al., 2006) were more likely to help employees to study for HE qualifications – giving them time off to study and/or paying their fees. Employers are more likely to provide fee support to their employees if they have a training plan and budget and if their interactions with universities involve research and development and the design and delivery of courses (Mason et al., 2011). The likelihood of employer support was also affected by the proposed subject, level and place of study. Those following certain vocational other undergraduate programmes (i.e. accountancy

qualifications, HNCs, foundation degrees) and employees attending HEIs rather than FECs were more successful in this respect. Part-time students studying for first degrees and those on non-vocational undergraduate programmes were least likely to have their fees paid by an employer (Boorman et al., 2006), possibly reflecting the perceived relevance of the course to their current employment.

Employer support is rarely unconditional. It often has clauses, such as having to work at the organisation for a set period of time following completion of the qualification and repaying fees if employees leave the organisation or drop out of the course prior to completion (Mason et al., 2011). Some employers reimburse students with their fees once they complete the course and stay employed with them after a certain date (Boorman et al., 2006).

8.3 Understanding employer needs

During the case studies, feedback was gathered from a number of employers. In the main, these employers were identified by the case study institutions as organisations that they currently work with to develop and/or deliver part-time provision. These employers tended to have a track record in training and development (across all levels of staff), with an older or ageing workforce, and with a formal graduate recruitment programme (so have experience with graduates and understanding of HEIs). They were spread across the public and private sectors and were of differing sizes.

8.3.1 Bite-sized professional development modules

Feedback from these engaged employers linked to the case study institutions (both large- and small-scale providers) indicates that employers want a different model of undergraduate provision. They want flexible, tailored programmes and may work with several HEIs or FECs to develop a range of programmes. They want bite-sized, continuing professional development (CPD) courses: *'something short, sharp and relevant'*, and *'focused on real problems within the organisation'*; and much of the provision they described tended to focus on developing leadership and management skills.

8.3.2 Limited interruption of work

They also want courses that can be delivered in the workplace or outside of normal working hours. In many cases they don't want employees to be away from the workplace and so may require individuals to study in their own time (and therefore outside of normal working hours). For some employers, studying in your own time was felt to demonstrate a dedication and commitment to study. Generally, the employers see time off the job as the major cost (more so than the fees involved), so they prefer delivery models which minimise this. One employer engagement champion in a case study institution (a large-scale provider with a growing employer-led part-time provision) noted:

'Cost is a secondary order issue, if you can demonstrate the value and persuade them to release the person...whether you're charging two, three, four thousand pounds for the year doesn't matter...it's a small part of the overall costs.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

However, one employer did recognise that day-time training may be better for individuals *'because you can't take in learning when you're tired after a day's work'*.

8.3.3 Need for speed

Employers also want programmes to be developed quickly, and can feel that HEIs are too slow to respond to their needs. One employer noted how the HEI they were working with took 18 months to introduce a foundation degree. Another commented:

'My view is that the university is being very slow in developing this foundation degree. The university doesn't move at the pace the industry requires it to move at. People in industry tend to use in-house training and private providers and these are much more responsive.'

[Employer linked to a large-scale provider]

This illustrates that employers' sense of speed is likely to differ greatly to institutions' own sense of speed. The lead time involved in developing programmes is often lengthy due to the need to quality assure programmes. For staff in institutions, this form of other undergraduate level study becomes more like training and there can be a reluctance to move towards these models because of fears around dilution of quality which could negatively affect their reputation.

8.3.4 No need for accreditation

Institutions may build modular programmes so that they can fit together and provide a progression route to a larger (in terms of credits) qualification, but employers may not see a business need for learner progression. Indeed, they do not appear to be interested in accreditation of courses. As noted by one member of staff in a large-scale provider with a very large employer-led part-time provision:

'Employers will tend to come with their staff development needs. The university will then inspire the individual into bigger and better things. It is then in the university's interest to get the provision accredited so that the individual can use the credit for other study. However, employers are often not interested in assessment and qualifications.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

This is not always the case. One employer in the chemical sector was indeed interested in accreditation; he felt it was important that the courses developed in partnership with HEIs were accredited as it would help to demonstrate competence.

8.3.5 Tutors with industry knowledge and experience

Employers want experienced tutors who have an understanding of their industry. Reputation is important to them, but their comments suggest this is measured in terms of individuals with experience rather than the overall reputation of the institution. They want to be reassured that tutors have a good understanding of their industry and their business. Employers linked to one case study institution (large-scale provider) spoke of how important it was to them that a senior member of staff had worked in their industry.

Similarly, a staff member in a case study institution spoke of the difficulty they were facing in promoting a new foundation degree to employers, because:

'Employers don't recognise that [university] has any expertise in this industry sector...universities need to be able to put forward lecturers that have clear links into industry to be more credible with employers.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

8.3.6 Value for money

Employers also want programmes that represent value for money, and delivering in the workplace is cheaper. There is an acknowledgement that the HEFCE funding has made part-time HE study attractive to employers, but with the end of this funding and the uncertainty of the economy, some employers are unsure about their continued demand for part-time HE. Others are more optimistic about continued engagement with HE, but these tend to be large, private-sector organisations in a fairly stable industry.

9 Publicity and Awareness of Part-time Study

Key findings

- Students use a range of sources of information and advice about HE when making their decisions, and institutions are more able to influence some of these sources than others. The key source of advice for young people is the family, and this is very hard for higher education institutions (HEIs) to influence.
- The messages provided about part-time study are patchy, and are provided by HEIs (who are essentially selling their own package) rather than by the sector as a whole. There is no consistent message provided during the early stages of the HE decision process that part-time study is one of a number of options for HE participation. To find out if it is possible to study part-time, a person must first decide on an institution before they can investigate this option any further.
- There is a move away from using the term part-time study in the sector, and this may make this alternative to full-time study even less visible and difficult to understand.
- There is a perception that no one tells young people about part-time study but also that they do not ask about part-time study, and this vicious cycle is self-perpetuating.
- The marketing undertaken by institutions is probably too little too late – and ‘preaching to the converted’. Further research may be needed to explore the impact of marketing activities, particularly on different groups of students.
- There is a feeling that the information or advice potential students do get about part-time study falls on deaf ears, as it butts up against the cultural norm of HE participation, which is full-time study.
- Young people think they are aware of all their options for HE, including local options (which tend to be regarded positively and within their array of options, ie not automatically discounted). But further probing reveals limited real awareness of part-time study – particularly the financial aspects of part-time study. The often erroneous notions of part-time study are reflected in the perceived advantages and disadvantages of part-time study (see Chapters 10 and 11).
- This lack of real understanding is probably because potential HE students are not interested in part-time study, but feedback suggests that if they were made more aware of this option, particularly in the current economic climate (and with the planned changes to HE finances), they may become more interested.

Before looking at perceptions of part-time study and the nature and extent of demand for this type of study, it is important to understand how individuals may form their opinions of

part-time study and make their decisions about HE participation. In this chapter we discuss the extent and detail of the material and information available to potential HE students about their options, including part-time study, and what information or marketing institutions provide specifically about part-time study. We then look at the sources of information and advice that potential students use and are influenced by when making their decisions and consider the extent to which they are truly aware of the part-time option.

9.1 Publicising part-time study

9.1.1 Do institutions promote part-time study?

Evidence from the **case studies** indicates that the information available to potential students about part-time undergraduate study options in HE is varied. All the case study institutions have at least some part-time provision or some part-time students, but the information they provide about part-time study varies considerably. In some institutions a great deal of information is available and in others it is either limited, and perhaps not very useful or persuasive, or is difficult to find. This is perhaps not helped by a debate that is emerging in parts of the HE sector around not needing or wanting to distinguish between full- and part-time study. Institutions also appear to undertake limited activities to encourage potential students to consider part-time study, perhaps because they feel the potential market is too small or too dispersed and/or segmented to reach effectively, or that it is not something they need to do. There are indications that institutions may spend more effort targeting employers rather than individuals, and promoting their professional development/work-based learning provision rather than promoting part-time study more broadly.

In many of the case study institutions there appears to be limited genuine marketing of part-time options to potential students, at least from the central marketing department. In most cases, even when part-time provision is very small, part-time study is mentioned on the institution's web pages and in their general undergraduate prospectus, although sometimes this is in the section aimed at mature students. However, we found that although some institutions may present an image of the availability of a part-time mode of study, in reality there is little detail about what is available, and little is done to actively encourage this mode of participation. Indeed, those enquiring about part-time study may be actively discouraged or strongly steered towards the full-time mode, particularly among small-scale and limited providers.

Other institutions, generally the large-scale and specialist providers, provide detailed information on their part-time provision. This information is easily accessible, for example via a clearly signposted and dedicated section of the website or in a separate prospectus. In these cases there is a sense that part-time study really is an option for potential students to consider. More detailed information could include the range of courses available for part-time study, the nature of delivery and where it is delivered, how to apply and the entry requirements, and the nature of the part-time student experience. Those who have researched their potential part-time market noted that individuals need to know about the university and the department. However, they also need practical information about the course itself such as the commitment required and timetabling, in order to make the decision to apply.

Institutions providing a great deal of specific information about part-time study tend to have a relatively large student body (either concentrated or spread across the institution), and here part-time study is heavily promoted. Here institutions stress their reputation, their delivery method which is often flexible, and their understanding of part-time students. However, it should be noted that the messages may be more applicable to, and indeed targeted towards, mature students looking to return to study rather than young students emerging from further education. Also these institutions are looking to improve the information they provide about part-time study and to improve their marketing materials but there is little evidence of a concerted effort to segment the market and to tailor materials and activity towards the younger market. Among the case study institutions there is an acknowledgement that the part-time market is difficult to find and to reach, and, as stressed by one case study, the marketing message is a different one:

'[Part-time study] is a completely different sell to a full-time degree. We haven't got that annual cycle of 18-year-olds doing A-levels at certain schools that we can target. So we have to go and find these people. Once we have found them, we don't have to convince them to come to [university] that is almost secondary. First we have to convince them that they want to do a degree. We are competing against other institutions and competing against life – the gym, the cinema, the family and everything like that. We are also competing against people's perceptions of HE...it is really quite a hard sell.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

In other case studies, generally small-scale or limited providers, although there is little central promotion of part-time provision to potential students, there was felt to be more marketing activity at a departmental or indeed individual course level, where part-time opportunities may be covered or promoted more explicitly. This may be driven by the organisation of part-time study within an institution. So where an institution has a concentration of part-time students, or where the responsibility for the administration of part-time provision sits in one place in the organisation, this department or office may be better placed to promote the offer and provide more detailed information about this and how it works in practice. Again this is likely to be developed with a mature student in mind.

Is the term 'part-time' helpful when raising awareness?

A theme emerged from some of the case studies of a deliberate move away from using the terminology of full- and part-time study in marketing materials, and away from making a hard distinction between the two modes. This distinction was considered neither helpful nor indeed meaningful any more, and instead it was felt that institutions should be promoting flexibility. In these institutions mode of study was regarded not as a dichotomy between full- and part-time study but a continuum of opportunities 'a continuous flexible world'.

'I think it would be good to stop talking about part-time and full-time. I think it would be really good to talk about flexibility...it would be good to recognise that a system that can adapt to people's needs might encourage more people in.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

The feedback from the case studies suggested that this move may be driven by a need to meet the expectations of students. Looking forward, demand would be for a modular approach, with modules regularly repeated at different times to provide access for different segments of the part-time market. Alternatively, it may be driven by the reality of students' lives, where notions of full- and part-time study are blurring. Interviewees talked about how more and more full-time students take on part-time paid work during their studies, although the nature, quality and relevance of this work to their studies will differ to that undertaken by part-time students. They also noted that full-time students are putting pressure on institutions to provide on-course opportunities to engage with industry in order to enhance their employability, which could potentially extend the period of their study. At the same time, there is pressure from part-time students to compress their period of study, to make full use of the calendar year rather than limiting input to the academic year only.

The change in terminology and the message promoted, from part-time study for a specific group of potential students to flexible study for all, was not always accompanied by a real change in delivery approach. For example, three institutions had moved to promoting the notion of flexibility of study (these were drawn from small and large provider categories). However, in one case this was illustrated by a move away from having a separate part-time prospectus but with no change to programme delivery (a small-scale provider).

9.1.2 Key sources of HE information and advice

How influential is this information and marketing activity? As potential sources of information about HE and influencers on decisions, where do the university website, prospectus and other marketing materials lie? And how influential are the institutions' ambassadors – those having direct contact, planned or unplanned, with potential students? There were very few instances across the case studies of any research into the effectiveness of marketing and promotion.

However, we can explore the key sources of information about HE used by students coming to the end of their studies in FE, through our **surveys of young potential HE students**. Young people across England were surveyed using a panel of respondents (panel surveys, see Section 1.4.5). In addition, young people studying in FE institutions close to the case study institutions were surveyed (Feeder Institution Survey, see Section 1.4.5).

Help from family, friends and teachers

People, rather than data or written information, were clearly a key source of information and advice for potential students when making decisions about HE: whether or not to go on to HE, and what and where to study. The patterns of influence were very similar for respondents to the panel surveys and the Feeder Institution Survey. Only one in 20 (five per cent for the panel surveys and four per cent for the Feeder Institution Survey) said they had not spoken to anyone when making decisions about HE (see Tables 9.1 and 9.2). In general, potential students consulted with several types of individuals (three out of a given list of seven).

- Most commonly, potential students spoke to their families (parents, siblings or other family members) about their HE decisions, and their families appeared to have the greatest influence on their decisions. In the panel surveys 74 per cent spoke to or

sought advice from their families, and 28 per cent said they were the most helpful to them when making their decisions; and for the Feeder Institution Survey the figures were 75 per cent and 30 per cent. Family was particularly important to younger students who were earlier in their decision-making process than their older peers, and to those from more advantaged backgrounds.

- The next most consulted group were teaching staff at their current school or college, followed by school or college careers advisers. Respondents from white backgrounds were more likely to seek advice from teachers at their school or college than careers advisers, but the reverse was the case for those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, who were more likely to talk to careers advisers. There was a concern raised in one case study (a large-scale provider), that with the end of formal networks to provide advice and to encourage HE study, such as Aimhigher and Connexions, potential students, particularly those from backgrounds with lower participation in HE, might not be able to access appropriate advice and support (particularly about student finance and the new part-time model).
- Students also commonly spoke about their decisions with their friends but they were rarely considered the most helpful source of information and advice
- In terms of those in the HE system, potential students were considerably more likely to speak to and be influenced by current HE students than staff in HE (e.g. tutors/lecturers or advisers).

Table 9.1: Use of potential sources of information and/or advice about HE, and person considered to be the most helpful: panel surveys

	Learner Panel		Future Panel		All panel respondents	
	% used	% most helpful	% used	% most helpful	% used	% most helpful
Your school/college careers adviser	59	22	67	25	63	23
Teacher at your school/college	67	24	74	24	70	24
Your mum, dad, brother(s), sister(s) or other family member	68	25	80	30	74	28
Your friends	55	7	64	6	60	7
Someone currently studying at university or college of HE	38	11	47	8	42	10
Tutor/lecturer/adviser working at a university or college of HE	28	10	28	7	28	8
Your employer	7	1	2	1	5	1
Spoke to someone	94	-	97	-	95	-
I didn't speak to anyone about my decision	6	-	3	-	5	-
Base (N)	602	505	612	562	1,214	1,067

Note: Questions were: 'When making up your mind about whether or not to apply to study for a qualification such as a degree, and where you might study, did you speak to or seek advice from any of the following people?' and 'Which of these was most helpful to you, when making your decision?'

Note: Multiple response question.

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011

Table 9.2: Use of potential sources of information and/or advice about HE, and person considered to be the most helpful: Feeder Institution Survey

	% used	% most helpful
Your school/college careers adviser	51	18
Teacher at your school/college	65	25
Your mum, dad, brother(s), sister(s) or other family member	75	30
Your friends	55	5
Someone currently studying at university or college of HE	36	9
Tutor/lecturer/adviser working at a university or college of HE	28	12
Your employer	5	1
Spoke to someone	96	<1
I didn't speak to anyone about my decision	4	-
Base (N)	830	759

Note: Questions were: 'When making up your mind about whether or not to apply to study for a qualification such as a degree, and where you might study, did you speak to or seek advice from any of the following people?' and 'Which of these was most helpful to you when making your decision?'

Note: Multiple response question.

Source: Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

Help from other sources

Potential students also consulted a variety of sources of information when making their HE decisions, but those in the Feeder Institution Survey appeared to use fewer sources of information and a larger number said they used no information sources at all in their decisions. Only three per cent of panel survey respondents said they had not used any of the listed sources, and on average, these potential students used four of the given eight sources of information. In comparison, 11 per cent of those in the Feeder Institution Survey said they had not used any of the listed sources and on average three sources were used (see Tables 9.3 and 9.4). The most commonly cited information sources consulted were similar across the surveys:

- first, university and college prospectuses (90 per cent of panel survey respondents had used these, and 36 per cent said this was the most helpful source; the corresponding figures for the Feeder Institution Survey were 77 per cent and 37 per cent)
- second, visiting universities and colleges
- university and college websites
- university league tables.

The use of prospectuses and institutions' websites was common across most groups of survey respondents, but there were differences noticed for visits and league tables. Those from white backgrounds, from more advantaged backgrounds and/or those 17 to 18 years old were more likely than others to have attended university or college open days and HE fairs and, correspondingly, were more likely to have access to, and be influenced by, those currently studying or teaching in HE. Those from black and minority ethnic groups and/or those from more advantaged backgrounds were relatively more likely to consult university league tables than those from white or less advantaged backgrounds.

Other less frequently consulted sources of information tended to be more general sources:

- the UCAS handbook
- higher education fairs
- books about universities and colleges
- newspaper articles about HE.

Table 9.3: Use of potential sources of information about HE, and source considered to be the most helpful: panel surveys

	Learner Panel		Future Panel		All panel respondents	
	% used	% most helpful	% used	% most helpful	% used	% most helpful
University and college prospectus(es)	85	38	95	42	90	36
UCAS handbook	27	4	28	4	32	4
Book(s) about universities and colleges	29	2	36	2	32	2
Newspaper article(s) about higher education	19	1	27	1	23	1
University league table(s)	49	7	69	7	59	6
University and college website(s)	62	15	75	8	69	10
University and college open day(s)/visit(s)	56	28	70	33	63	28
Higher education fair(s)	33	4	47	3	40	3
Used at least one information source	94	-	100	-	97	-
I didn't use any of the above when making my decision	6	-	0	-	3	-
Base (N)	602	499	612	580	1,214	1,079

Note: Questions were: 'When making up your mind about whether or not to apply to study for a qualification such as a degree, and where you might study, did you use any of the following sources of information?' and 'Which of these was most helpful to you, when making your decision?'

Note: Multiple response question.

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011

Table 9.4: Use of potential sources of information about HE, and source considered to be the most helpful: Feeder Institution Survey

	% used	% most helpful
University and college prospectus(es)	77	37
UCAS handbook	23	3
Book(s) about universities and colleges	20	2
Newspaper article(s) about higher education	10	1
University league table(s)	32	4
University and college website(s)	62	23
University and college open day(s)/visit(s)	46	27
Higher education fair(s)	26	3
Used at least one information source	89	-
I didn't use any of the above when making my decision	11	-
Base (N)	819	666

Note: Questions were: 'When making up your mind about whether or not to apply to study for a qualification such as a degree, and where you might study, did you use any of the following sources of information?' and 'Which of these was most helpful to you, when making your decision?'

Note: Multiple response question.

Source: Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

Potential channels for institutions to influence

The **follow-up interviews** with young potential HE students highlight the importance of self-directed research, particularly using the internet, in supporting individuals' decisions about HE. They also confirm the influence of family and friends on decisions and the perceived helpfulness of formal careers advisers at school or Connexions.

'I have discussed it with friends and family and an Aim Higher careers adviser at my school. I also spoke to two other school careers advisers - one was an Economic Wellbeing Co-ordinator and the other was from Connexions. The Economic Wellbeing Adviser was the most useful because she was really honest. She laid out all the options and talked about outcomes and with no pressure to go or not to go into HE. She kept reminding me it was my choice and was really balanced and neutral.'

[Young potential HE student]

It would appear that those studying in or working in HE have a lower potential to inform or influence potential students about part-time study than students' families and their tutors and advisers in FE. In order to encourage part-time study, it may be better to focus marketing on these wider stakeholders. If parents and FE staff perceive part-time study as an option for HE participation, they may in turn present this to potential students.

The key channels for informing and potentially influencing students are the prospectus, the institution website and the open day or visit, and these are very much within the control of the institution. This means that to encourage part-time study, it needs to feature prominently in universities' and colleges' prospectuses and websites, and to be presented during open days and visits.

There were clear differences in the use of information and in consulting with potential sources of advice when making decision about HE, by age of respondent, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. Thus if institutions want to target the part-time message towards particular groups of young people, they may need to opt for a particular channel to deliver it.

Wider research on the decisions of part-time students (i.e. not specifically young part-time students) identified in the literature review found that part-time students tend not to seek careers advice before starting a course of study (Callender et al., 2010c). This was because most reported that they knew what they wanted to do and therefore did not need any advice, or because they had the experience and knowledge to decide about their career options without additional support. Those that did seek advice most commonly sought it from social networks at home and work and not from professional careers advisers (Callender et al., 2010c).

9.2 Awareness of the part-time option

Despite the range of sources of information and advice used by young people about HE, the evidence from the **case studies** strongly suggests that young HE students have very limited awareness of part-time study – both before arriving at HE but also during their time in HE. As several staff commented, part-time study is just '*not on their radar*'. Staff in HE who have contact with potential students, particularly young individuals, noted how part-time study does not tend to come up in any discussions or questions, and is not something they are interested in knowing more about, and that institutions receive very few enquiries about part-time study. They feel this situation is perhaps not helped by the advice or lack of advice from schools and colleges. HE staff feel that the message given to prospective students by these stakeholders focuses heavily on full-time study and students are not given any advice about alternative routes or models of HE study.

'I think it is a very good idea that [part-time study] is up as an option, it's just not offered as an option at the moment. It is hidden and you have to dig it out and really want to do part-time. If you are an 18-year-old, no one is going to come and suggest it to you. You have to come up with that idea by yourself.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

They recognise that the blame, however, cannot fall on the shoulders of advisors, as there is an expectation among young people that it is normal for people like themselves to move on to full-time study in HE after school or college, and a perception that part-time study is of less value (only something you do if you cannot study full-time). To tackle the established model of HE participation and overcome the negative image of part-time study would take substantial effort, and there is a feeling that this needs to be done at a national policy level.

Feedback from the HE students interviewed as part of the case studies also indicates that full-time students tended not to have considered part-time study when making their HE choices, and that they had little or only vague awareness of this form of study. Some young people noted how it was never presented to them as an option:

'My school was very much you go to university, you get a good job, and you didn't get any other options – vocational studies, FE things or part-time courses or whatever.'

[Full-time student, large-scale provider]

'With the people our age ... it is like the next step. You are a student, you live away from home, whereas part-time wasn't ever offered at our school. I think if it was a college that had older students there, maybe part-time is more of an offer.'

[Full-time student, large-scale provider]

For others, part-time study was felt to be not available because the course they wanted to do was only offered in full-time mode. However, many of the full-time students consulted felt that the change in fees for full-time undergraduate study might encourage more individuals like themselves to study part-time to avoid building up considerable debt. The part-time students consulted also felt that the planned increase in fee levels might make young people more willing to consider part-time study:

'I am sure when it comes to young people and part-time degrees; the market is going to filter down because this thing about the £9,000, in time people are going to make their view "actually is it worth me investing on a full-time course or a part-time course to fund myself?"'

[Part-time student, large-scale provider]

It is also interesting to note that even part-time students found it challenging to find information about potential courses:

'I wanted to know about part-time study but there was no centralised information on part-time courses. I wanted something like UCAS does for full-time courses.'

[Part-time student, large-scale provider]

The review of **research literature** found there has been little work about the decision-making of young people when choosing whether to study full- or part-time. The research that does exist indicates that the dominant model of anticipated HE participation is full-time (Bates et al., 2009). It suggests that there is little demand for part-time study among young potential entrants because these individuals lack an awareness of part-time study (and with hindsight would have liked better information about the range of options) or feel it is something for older students. The research found that much of the information young people had received from careers advisers focused on school to college to full-time HE

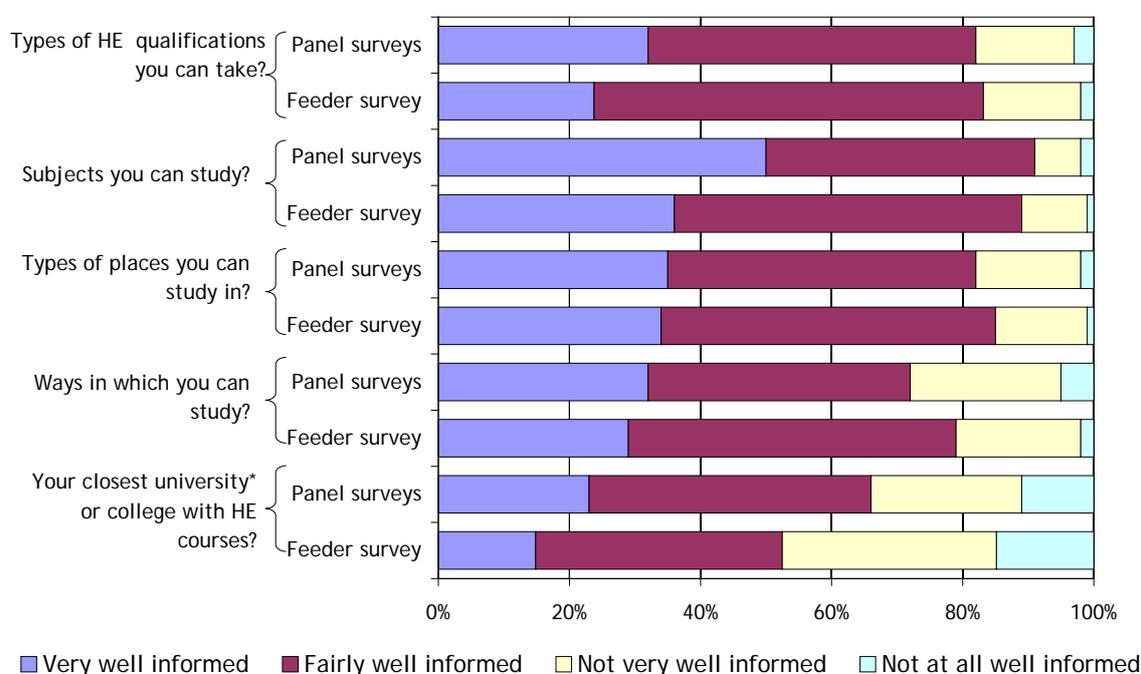
routes and did not include information about other possible routes such as part-time higher education (MORI, 2005; ASW, 2003).

9.2.1 Perceived understanding of HE options

In contrast to the institutional perspective and feedback from current full-time HE students in the case study institutions, young potential HE entrants tended to feel that they were aware of the range of HE options open to them, including part-time study and distance learning. The **surveys** found that, in general, respondents felt they knew about the various aspects of HE, feeling at least fairly well informed (see Figure 9.1 and Table 9.5).

Young potential HE students appear to feel most informed about the subjects you can study, with 50 per cent of panel survey respondents and 36 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents feeling very well informed about this aspect of HE, and a further 41 per cent and 53 per cent respectively feeling fairly well informed. Only nine per cent and 11 per cent felt less well informed or not informed at all about the types of subjects that can be studied in HE. This pattern would fit with wider research on the decision-making process that finds that subject choice is one of the first decisions to be made, followed by institution. We would therefore expect potential HE students, particularly those expecting to go on to HE, to have researched this aspect. Respondents were also confident about their knowledge of the types of qualifications for which they could study (82 per cent of panel survey respondents and 84 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents felt very or fairly well informed) and the places they could study (82 per cent and 85 per cent).

Figure 9.1: How well informed are students about ...?



Note*: In the panel surveys, individuals were asked to name their closest institution, whereas in the Feeder Institution Survey (which were linked to case study institutions) individuals were provided with the name of their local institution.

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011

Young potential HE students also feel relatively confident that they know about the ways in which you can study in HE – in terms of study modes (full- and part-time) and learning delivery (including distance learning). Almost one-third (32 per cent of panel survey respondents and 29 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents) felt very well informed about the ways in which you can study, and a further 40 per cent of panel survey respondents and 50 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents felt fairly well informed about this aspect of HE. Very few potential students (five per cent and two per cent respectively) felt not at all informed about these options for HE.

The oldest group of respondents (those aged 19 to 22) were most likely to feel very well informed about ways in which they could study. This could reflect a greater interest in this aspect of HE but it is difficult to determine the direction of causality – is it knowledge that determines interest or interest that determines knowledge?

Table 9.5: Perceived awareness of HE options: ‘How well informed, if at all, do you feel about each of the following things to do with higher education...?’

	Learner Panel	Future Panel	All panels		Feeder Institution Survey	
	%	%	N	%	N	%
Types of HE qualifications you can take?						
Very well informed	28	36	387	32	198	24
Fairly well informed	48	52	611	50	496	60
Not very well informed	20	9	178	15	121	15
Not at all well informed	4	2	38	3	17	2
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	832	100
Subjects you can study?						
Very well informed	45	55	606	50	302	36
Fairly well informed	41	41	499	41	441	53
Not very well informed	11	4	88	7	80	10
Not at all well informed	2	1	21	2	6	1
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	829	100
Types of places you can study in?						
Very well informed	34	36	423	35	283	34
Fairly well informed	45	49	568	47	416	51
Not very well informed	18	15	197	16	117	14
Not at all well informed	3	1	26	2	7	1
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	823	100
Ways in which you can study?						
Very well informed	30	33	388	32	237	29
Fairly well informed	37	43	484	40	411	50
Not very well informed	26	21	282	23	159	19
Not at all well informed	7	2	60	5	19	2
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	826	100

Source: Young Learners’ Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011; and Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

The **follow-up interviews** confirm the confidence felt by young potential HE students about their understanding of the HE options. However, of those who had considered part-time study, when asked if they would have liked any additional information or advice, particularly about the range of options open to them, gave various suggestions. These students said they would have liked more information about the alternatives to HE such as apprenticeships, or the alternative models of HE such as other types of HE courses or studying abroad. They also noted that they might have made different choices if they had had this broader information.

'There wasn't much about studying abroad or apprenticeships - it was too heavily focused on university. I would have preferred to do an apprenticeship...because I'm a more practical person who just likes to get on with things.'

[Young potential HE student]

Other information or support interviewees felt would have been helpful had no direct link to study mode. The suggestions included more support with the application process (particularly with the personal statement), more information about the financial aspects of HE ('about student finance and how that will actually work') and more about employability outcomes:

'I'd like to know about people who've been to university...what jobs do they actually get, what is their level of pay and stuff like that.'

[Young potential HE student]

9.2.2 Are students aware of their local options?

The **surveys** indicated that young potential HE students also perceive themselves as being aware of their local HE provision (see Figure 9.1). In the panel surveys, when asked to name their closest provider of HE (university or college), virtually all did so⁶⁷ (although the veracity of their answers could not be checked). These local providers were spread across England (as were respondents themselves) and spread across mission groups.

When considering their closest university or college, almost a quarter (23 per cent) felt very well informed and two in five (43 per cent) felt fairly well informed about what it is like to study there and what courses it offers. However, half (54 per cent) were unsure whether or not their local institution offered part-time study, and the vast majority (86 per cent) didn't know whether it offered online or distance learning (see Table 9.6). So although potential students regard themselves as well informed about possible study modes and delivery methods, they appear to be less sure about local options for part-time study or distance learning.

⁶⁷ The veracity of their answers was not checked, as the intention was to gauge whether young people felt they were aware of their local provision.

Table 9.6: Perceived awareness of local HE options

	Learner Panel	Future Panel	All panels		Feeder Institution Survey	
	%	%	N	%	N	%
How well informed, if at all, do you feel about your closest university or college with HE courses?						
Very well informed	21	25	280	23	120	15
Fairly well informed	45	42	525	43	313	38
Not very well informed	23	22	275	23	270	33
Not at all well informed	11	11	134	11	125	15
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	828	100
Does this local university/college offer part-time courses?						
Yes	47	42	544	45	288	35
No	2	1	19	2	17	2
Don't know	51	57	651	54	514	63
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	819	100
Does this local university/college offer online or distance learning courses?						
Yes	8	6	84	7	83	10
No	7	7	86	7	19	2
Don't know	85	87	1,044	86	715	88
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	817	100

Note: For the Feeder Institution Survey the local (case study) institution was given, but for the panel surveys, respondents were asked to name their local institution offering HE courses, and then to answer questions about this institution.

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011; Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

Those more likely to have an idea about whether their local university or college offers part-time study or not were those who were studying in a FE college (rather than a school sixth form or a sixth form college), older respondents, those from less advantaged backgrounds, and those in Year 13 (closest to HE entry).

In general, local institutions were regarded positively and, for many, these local options were also considered to be part of their HE choice set. Indeed, almost half of respondents (44 per cent), had either applied or would consider applying to their local institution (see Table 9.7).

For the Feeder Institution Survey the local HE provider (the linked case study institution) was named in the questionnaire, and respondents were asked questions about this institution. Respondents tended to feel informed about their named local institution, in terms of what it is like to study there and the courses it offers, with 15 per cent feeling very well informed and a further 38 per cent fairly well informed (see Table 9.6). Overall, they appeared to feel less well informed than respondents to the panel surveys, who were asked to choose a local institution for themselves and describe it rather than be prompted with a named institution. This may have had an influence on the extent to which the

Feeder Institution Survey respondents felt informed about their local provider. This lower awareness was also reflected in the Feeder Institution Survey responses to questions about the courses available at the given local institution. Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) did not know whether their named local institution offered part-time courses, and only one-third (35 per cent) correctly identified that part-time courses were available (all of the case study institutions named in the survey did indeed offer at least some part-time provision). Also, four in five (88 per cent) did not know whether online or distance learning was available (see Table 9.6).

Again these local institutions tended to be regarded positively and regarded as part of respondents' HE choice set. Two in five (42 per cent, a very similar proportion to that found for the panel surveys) had either applied or would consider applying to this institution now or in the near future (see Table 9.7).

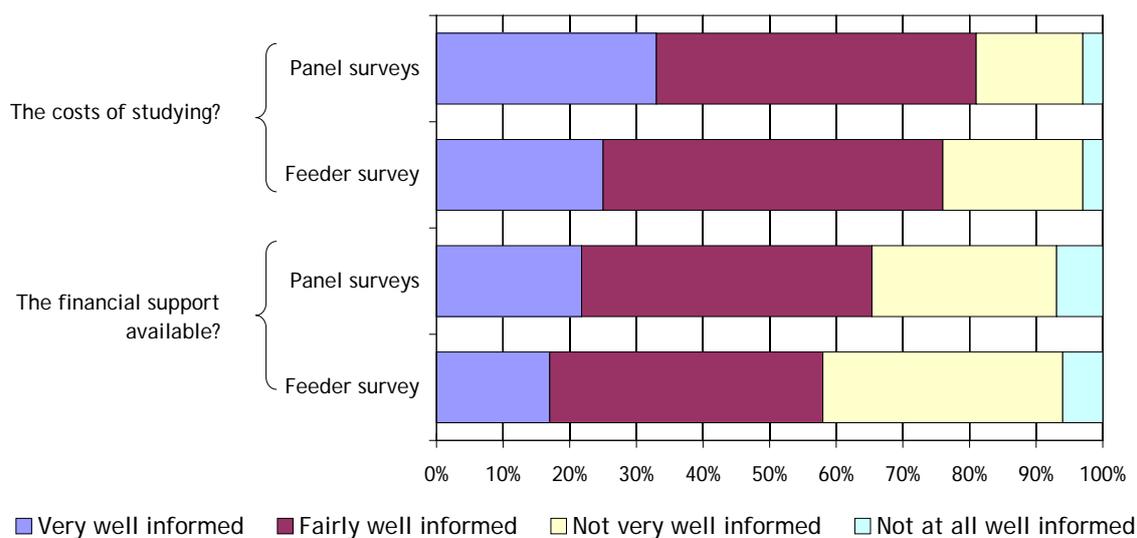
Table 9.7: Would consider local HE option

	Learner Panel	Future Panel	All panels		Feeder Institution Survey	
	%	%	N	%	N	%
Have already applied	14	18	195	16	23	3
Will be applying	12	14	154	13	113	14
Would consider applying some time in the future	17	13	178	15	204	25
No, would not apply there	50	51	610	50	285	35
Don't know	8	5	77	6	198	24
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	823	100

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011; and Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

9.2.3 Are students aware of the financial aspects of part-time study?

Figure 9.2: How well informed are students about ...?



Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011

The **surveys** indicate that young potential HE students also appear to feel well informed about the financial aspects of HE, although more informed about costs than the financial support available (see Figure 9.2). This is likely to reflect the recent media attention surrounding the increase of tuition fees planned for 2012/13. Over three quarters (81 per cent of panel survey respondents and 76 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents) felt informed about the costs involved such as tuition fees and living expenses. Fewer, though still the majority, felt informed about the financial support available to HE students such as student loans, grants and bursaries: 66 per cent of panel survey respondents and 58 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents (see Table 9.8).

Very few potential students (six to seven per cent) felt not at all informed about the financial aspects of HE. Those furthest from HE entry, such as young students (16 years old at the time of the survey), and to some extent those in the Learner Panel, were more likely to feel not at all informed. Although there was no real difference in perceived awareness of costs between the cohorts (Year 12 and Year 13), those in Year 12 tended to feel less well informed about the financial support available to them than those in Year 13 – this may reflect the confused picture of student support from 2012 onwards (as student support arrangements at national level and at institutional level are yet to be finalised) or that Year 12 students have not yet looked into this aspect of HE study.

Male students are more likely to feel very well informed about the financial aspects of HE compared with female respondents. There was no real difference, however, when looking at socio-economic background.

Table 9.8: Perceived awareness of financial aspects of HE: ‘How well informed, if at all, do you feel about the financial aspects of studying for a qualification such as a degree...?’

	Learner Panel	Future Panel	All panels		Feeder Institution Survey	
	%	%	N	%	N	%
The costs of studying – including tuition fees and living expenses?						
Very well informed	28	39	405	33	206	25
Fairly well informed	48	48	580	48	420	51
Not very well informed	18	13	189	16	178	21
Not at all well informed	6	1	40	3	28	3
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	832	100
The financial support available - such as student loans, grants and bursaries?						
Very well informed	20	24	264	22	139	17
Fairly well informed	41	47	533	44	332	41
Not very well informed	29	26	336	28	297	36
Not at all well informed	10	4	81	7	52	6
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	820	100

Source: Young Learners’ Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011; and Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

The follow-up interviews with young potential HE students explored perceived awareness of the costs of and support for HE, and the sources of information and advice available to young people about the financial issues of HE study. Again the interviews confirm that on the whole, potential HE students feel confident that they know about HE finance, particularly the increase in fees (and how much they were likely to pay in fees). Yet they appeared to be less confident about the amounts they would need per year to cover their living expenses.

Some appeared to have had specific sessions focused at school or college on HE finance, and/or support from their college careers adviser, whereas others relied on their own research mainly through the internet to find all they needed to know (via the directgov website, UCAS website or individual university websites).

‘We had a series of talks at sixth form, various talks on education, including some from guest speakers. The most useful one was a guest speaker, a bank manager, who told us all about costs and how to budget and everything.’

[Young potential HE student]

However, one interviewee felt very unsure about HE finance: *‘We were given one leaflet on student finance and that was it’*; and another felt that the situation was too complex and changeable to keep up: *‘I thought I knew but everything keeps changing’*.

The interviews also explored the extent to which the financial implications of HE study played a part in potential HE students' decisions. There was a clear split between those who felt the increase in fees had affected their decisions (whether to go into HE and when to go) and those who felt it had not had an impact. Living costs also had an impact on some, affecting their choice of where to study.

'Tuition fees played a very big part. Raising them made me consider other non-university options because of the all the media attention. But living costs didn't play a big part because I am living at home. If I had chosen to go to university I think I would have chosen one that wasn't too far from home but still would want to live in halls to get the full university experience.'

[Young potential HE student]

'I had planned to have a gap year but when the fees went up, I decided it was going to happen this year or not at all. I was hoping living costs would be covered by the loan but I'm about £100 short each month. I only knew about student loans when I applied for university but decided to go for it without being sure whether or not finances would be manageable.'

[Young potential HE student]

'Personally I haven't been comparing prices. They are all mostly £9,000 a year. I think it is more important to get the right course. I wouldn't say living costs were part of my decision but I'd quite like to save up this year for living costs.'

[Young potential HE student]

'Tuition fees haven't put me off. I need my degree to do the job I want but I'm not exactly happy about it'

[Young Potential HE Student]

'It made me stop and pause because tuition fees have gone up but I should get a better job with more pay, so it didn't stop me. Living costs didn't really play a part in my decisions because there is a mountain of debt, so a little bit more on it won't matter!'

[Young potential HE student]

'I've not let tuition fees put me off. I can't afford any of them so it makes no difference. I looked at London but can't afford it because living costs are something you experience physically, the hardship of having no money in your wallet.'

[Young potential HE student]

10 Benefits, Motivations and Orientations to Part-time Study

Key points

- Part-time study is seen to have some positives or advantages, even by young potential HE students, but they do not tend to see it as appropriate for them at their stage in life. Part-time study is regarded as something a young person could do but not something they should do, as it will enable an individual to earn while they learn, although not without challenges in juggling priorities, and is perceived as being offered in a range of universities and colleges.
- There is confusion around the relative cost of part-time study. However, on balance, young people felt part-time study to be a cheaper way to go to university or college.
- Young people were unconvinced that employers viewed part-time study positively, and the vast majority felt part-time study took too long and somehow provided a lesser experience than full-time study.
- Young people planning to go on to HE had a very clear idea about what they wanted to study, where they wanted to study and how they wanted to study – and there was a distinct preference for first degree programmes, and to study somewhere away from their home.
- Very few, only three per cent, intended to study part-time. However, 21 per cent of all young people surveyed might consider studying part-time rather than full-time at some point in the near future, and 78 per cent could consider studying part-time if it could deliver certain benefits.
- Older individuals tended to have more positive attitudes to part-time study, and were more likely to plan to study part-time or consider it as an option for the future. Those who had studied in a FE college rather than school sixth form or sixth form college, and those from less advantaged backgrounds, were also more positively predisposed to part-time study.
- Positive attitudes to part-time study were associated with a willingness to consider part-time study. Those most likely to consider studying part-time in the near future were those who felt young people should consider part-time study, were unconcerned about the potential additional time commitment involved in part-time study, felt that employers valued part-time students and their work experience, and/or felt there was no difference in the HE experience for full- and part-time students.
- Motivations for HE study are similar among those planning to study full-time and those planning to study part-time. It is primarily about anticipated employment benefits followed by personal development.

- Reflecting motivators to study, part-time study is perceived to bring a range of benefits most commonly employment related. Studying part-time allows individuals to keep a good (career) job or to get a part-time paid job to help with study costs.
- Other perceived benefits include flexibility to tailor the learning experience (speed and size of learning) and to fit study around other commitments and interests. It enables individuals to earn as they learn and manage study costs, and it is felt to be an easy, less pressured option.
- Among institutions there is uncertainty about the current size of the demand among potential HE students for part-time study, and even greater uncertainty about the level of future demand with the planned changes to tuition fees and financial support.

The previous chapter outlined the background and study patterns of part-time students and how they differ from full-time students. In this chapter we dig deeper to understand individuals' choices about part-time study (for and against). We explore the motivations of those who choose to study part-time, set within broader drivers to HE study. We also look at the perceptions and attitudes to part-time study among potential HE students, and how these influence choices. We then explore perceived advantages, as these can become motivators for part-time study, and aspects the sector could promote to encourage an alternative model of HE participation.

10.1 Attitudes to part-time study

Our **surveys of young potential HE students** indicate that part-time study is in many respects viewed positively. However, as noted earlier, young people tended to feel that although part-time was available to individuals of all ages, it was not something that would be appropriate for them.

In the surveys of young potential HE students (panel surveys and Feeder Institution Survey), respondents were asked to consider a number of statements about part-time study and to note the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with these. Some statements about part-time study were worded positively and others negatively, but for ease of interpretation and comparison the negative statements have been reversed.

Young potential HE students were most positive about the potential to earn money while studying part-time, but they tended to acknowledge the difficulties or challenges in studying while working full-time. Over three-quarters of respondents (79 per cent of panel survey respondents and 77 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents) agreed with the statement that part-time study means you can earn money while you are studying, but a similar proportion (71 per cent of panel survey and 63 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents) agreed that it is difficult to study when you are working full-time (see Tables 10.1 and 10.2).

Table 10.1: Extent of agreement with statements about PT study (per cent): panel surveys

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Base (N)
Part-time study is something young people should consider	5	15	45	32	4	1,214
It doesn't take too long to get your qualification if you study part-time*	14	49	26	9	1	1,214
Part-time study is a cheaper way to go to university or college	4	16	48	29	4	1,214
Part-time study is not only for older people*	2	15	27	41	16	1,214
Employers prefer people who have studied part-time	9	32	46	12	1	1,214
It is not only poor quality universities that offer part-time courses*	2	9	29	41	19	1,214
Part-time study means you can earn money while you are studying	1	5	15	60	19	1,214
If you are studying part-time you do feel like a real student*	8	36	33	18	5	1,214
It is not difficult to study when you are working full-time*	21	50	19	8	3	1,214
There is no real difference between part-time study and full-time study	23	40	31	6	1	1,214

Note: * Indicates that statement has been reversed.

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011

Table 10.2: Extent of agreement with statements about PT study (per cent): Feeder Institution Survey

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Base (N)
Part-time study is something young people should consider	6	13	51	28	2	800
It doesn't take too long to get your qualification if you study part-time*	10	47	32	10	2	797
Part-time study is a cheaper way to go to university or college	2	13	48	35	2	794
Part-time study is not only for older people*	1	9	34	41	15	796
Employers prefer people who have studied part-time	6	26	53	12	2	798
It is not only poor quality universities that offer part-time courses*	1	6	31	42	20	796
Part-time study means you can earn money while you are studying	1	3	20	61	16	797
If you are studying part-time you do feel like a real student*	5	23	36	31	6	798
It is not difficult to study when you	17	46	23	10	3	794

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Base (N)
are working full-time*						
There is no real difference between part-time study and full-time study	17	42	35	7	1	794

Note: * Indicates that statement has been reversed.

Source: Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

They were also positive about the applicability or suitability of part-time study, in that well over half felt part-time study was not just for older people (16 and 15 per cent strongly agreed and a further 41 per cent in both surveys agreed with this statement). However, fewer, approximately one-third (36 and 30 per cent), felt it was something young people should actively consider. Part-time study was also seen as something that was not just offered by poor-quality universities (with 60 per cent of panel survey respondents and 62 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents agreeing with this statement). So part-time study is regarded as something a young person can do but not something they should do, will enable an individual to earn while they learn but will present challenges, and is offered in a range of universities and colleges.

Individuals were less sure of the relative costs of part-time study and employers' views on part-time study. Approximately half had no opinion on these potential benefits of part-time study (48 and 46 per cent respectively of panel survey respondents, and 48 and 53 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents). However, on balance part-time study was felt to be a cheaper way to go to university or college (33 and 37 per cent agreed with this statement while 20 and 15 per cent disagreed), but employers did not prefer people who had studied part-time (only 13 and 14 per cent agreed that employers did prefer part-time students and 41 and 32 per cent disagreed).

Finally, part-time study tended to be seen as lengthy – taking too long to get a qualification (63 and 57 per cent felt it took too long), and both different and somehow lacking in terms of 'the student experience'. Indeed, 63 and 59 per cent felt that there was a real difference between part-time study and full-time study (compared with only seven and eight per cent who disagreed). Panel survey respondents also felt that if you are studying part-time you do not feel like a real student (44 per cent agreed compared with 23 per cent who disagreed). This pattern was not found among Feeder Institution Survey respondents, where a larger proportion felt that you would feel like a real student than not (37 per cent compared with 28 per cent).

Older respondents tended to have more positive attitudes to part-time study. They were relatively more likely than their younger peers (particularly those from school sixth forms) to feel that employers prefer part-time students as they have work experience, that working full-time while studying is not difficult, or that part-time study does not take too long. However, younger students were relatively more likely than older students to feel that studying part-time means you can earn money while you are studying, as were those from more advantaged (compared with less advantaged) backgrounds. Respondents from white backgrounds were also more positive about part-time study, particularly that it is something young people could consider, it is not just for older students and that it is not just offered by poor-quality universities.

10.2 Interest in part-time study

Feedback from the **case studies** suggests that there is uncertainty about the current size of the demand among potential HE students for part-time study, and even greater uncertainty about the level of future demand with the planned changes to tuition fees and financial support. These external shocks could lead to an overall change in the level of demand for HE or a change in the preference for study mode.

Some staff in the case study institutions felt that there could be latent demand for part-time study but that this remains un-tapped because potential students are largely unaware of this alternative model of HE participation and that it could be an attractive option for them. Reported in a couple of case studies was how individuals only became aware of the potential for part-time study when they had already made their HE decisions and had started their courses:

‘Students often say in hindsight that “if only they had had another year” they might have done better or coped better.’

[Staff, large-scale provider]

In one of the case studies (a small-scale provider) a number of full-time students in a department were able to transfer to the part-time mode to enable them to continue with their studies (and avoid dropping out). A staff member noted that perhaps this group may well have chosen to start part-time at the outset had they known that this option was available to them.

Other staff had very strong views that demand was limited, particularly among young people. In one case study (large-scale provider), it was found that even when part-time study was offered as an option once there were no full-time places left (to enable a student to access HE), very few students chose to do this. Staff felt this suggested that there was little latent demand outside their existing part-time cohort. Those who apply for full-time study want to study full-time, and part-time is not viewed as an acceptable alternative. This was also noticed in another large-scale provider case study, when there was no interest in an employer-sponsored degree course that was being promoted by the university. The programme would have enabled students to work for a prestigious employer and earn a good salary while studying part-time. This attitude may be driven by the ‘deficit model’ of part-time study, where it is viewed as a ‘second best’ option, rather than a positive choice.

10.2.1 HE decisions and the intention to study part-time

In our **surveys of young potential HE students** we were able to gauge demand for part-time HE. We explored decisions about and plans for HE – looking at whether young individuals planned to go on to HE, when they were planning to go, where they planned to study, what they planned to study and how they would most like to study (particularly whether they wanted to study full- or part-time or had no preference). We also explored willingness to consider part-time study rather than full-time study and the factors that might encourage potential students to consider the part-time mode. Looking at the potential demand for part-time study among this group of individuals is particularly interesting, as we are effectively exploring the attractiveness of part-time study to those who could

choose to study full-time, and are beginning to assess the strength of the deficit model of part-time study and the extent to which individuals can be persuaded to switch modes.

HE decisions

Almost half (47 per cent) of the panel survey respondents had already applied to HE when they were surveyed and so had made their decisions about HE under the existing fee regime and arrangements for student support. A further 37 per cent of panel survey respondents planned to apply for 2012 entry and seven per cent planned to apply some other time in the future, and so would be affected by the planned changes in fees and financial support. Five per cent had not yet made up their mind about HE and only four per cent had no plans to go on to HE, either immediately or later on (see Table 10.3). This latter group tended to be older, and had studied in a FE college rather than a school sixth form or sixth form college, but there was no real difference in HE intention by other respondent characteristics including socio-economic background.

Among the Feeder Institution Survey respondents, who were in the main Year 12 or equivalent students, a much smaller group had already applied (six per cent) to HE. However, a further 44 per cent were planning to make an application to UCAS in 2011, 24 per cent were planning to do so in 2012 and four per cent planned to do so some other time in the future. A larger group than found for panel survey respondents were still undecided about HE (14 per cent), and almost one in 10 (nine per cent) had no plans to go to HE (see Table 10.3).

Table 10.3: Plans for HE

	Learner Panel	Future Panel	All panels		Feeder Institution Survey	
	%	%	N	%	N	%
Planning to apply to university or college to study for a qualification such as a degree						
Have already applied/will apply this year (2010/11)	41	53	574	47	416	50
Will apply next academic year (2011/12)	34	40	451	37	197	24
Will apply some other time in the future	9	5	87	7	31	4
Haven't yet made up my mind	8	1	55	5	118	14
Don't want to go	8	0	47	4	71	9
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	833	100

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011; and Making Choices about Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

Across the young people surveyed, the group intending to go on to HE made up the vast majority of respondents (91 per cent of panel survey respondents and 77 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents), and these individuals had clear plans for the type of qualification they intended to study, the subject they wanted to study (although those in the Year 12 cohort were less decided than those in the Year 13 cohort, which is reflected in the Feeder Institution Survey responses), and where they wanted to study. There was a

definite preference among young applicants for first degree programmes, and to study somewhere away from their home (see Table 10.4).

Looking at the plans of those who intend to go on to HE we find that only seven per cent of panel survey respondents said they did not know what qualification they planned to study, but a much greater proportion, 19 per cent, of Feeder Institution Survey respondents were still unsure. However, the vast majority of those planning to go on to HE (72 per cent of panel survey respondents and 61 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents) planned to study for a first degree (e.g. bachelors' degree). A relatively small group planned to study for other undergraduate qualifications such as a HND or HNC (three and five per cent), a diploma or certificate of HE (five and six per cent), or foundation degree (five and six per cent) (see Table 10.4). A small group reported they planned to study for other types of qualification; these tended to be masters level qualifications.

Those planning to study at other undergraduate level (rather than first degree) tended to be older (19 or older), from a less advantaged background, or had studied in a FE college, but the majority in these groups of respondents planned to study at first degree level.

Respondents had applied or planned to apply to a wide range of institutions, and for many these were not within daily commuting distance. In terms of study location, just over one in 10 (11 per cent of panel survey respondents and 15 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents) had no real preference for whether they studied close to, or far from, their home. Almost a quarter (22 per cent for both surveys) were planning to go to a university or college where they could live at home during term time. However, almost three times as many (67 and 58 per cent) planned to go away to study, to a place where they could live away from home during term-time (see Table 10.4). Those planning to study at a local institution were more likely to be older (at least 19 years old), from a black or minority ethnic background, or had studied in a FE college (particularly in contrast to those who had studied in a school sixth form college). Respondents from these backgrounds, as well those from less advantaged backgrounds, were more likely than others to consider studying nearer home as a way to reduce the personal costs involved in HE study.

Table 10.4: HE choices and preferences (those who have applied or are planning to apply for HE only)

	Learner Panel	Future Panel	All Panels		Feeder Institution Survey	
	%	%	N	%	N	%
Planned type of qualification/level of study						
HNC/HND	3	2	32	3	32	5
Diploma/Certificate of HE	6	4	55	5	34	6
Foundation degree	6	4	54	5	37	6
Bachelors degree	69	75	803	72	377	61
Don't know	8	7	82	7	120	19
Other	7	8	86	8	22	4
Base (N)	509	603	1,112	100	622	100
Preferred study location						
University/college where I could live at home	26	18	243	22	137	22
University/college where I could live away from home	63	69	740	67	371	58
No preference	10	12	120	11	97	15
Don't know	1	1	9	1	32	5
Base (N)	509	603	1,112	100	637	100

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011; and Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

As would be expected, respondents described their preferred institutions positively, and the most often cited adjectives were good facilities, friendly, high standards, fun/lively, and academic. This gives an insight into the aspects of institutions that potential students favour, as two-thirds to three-quarters of those planning to go on to HE described their favourite institutions using these terms. Other commonly cited adjectives were modern, prestigious, safe, large and easy to get to. The patterns here were remarkably similar for panel survey respondents and Feeder Institution Survey respondents (see Tables 10.5 and 10.6).

Table 10.5: Adjectives used to describe preferred HE institution (favourite university or college they have applied, or plan to apply, to): panel surveys

Most common	All panels		Least common	All panels	
	N	%		N	%
Good facilities	863	77	Expensive	218	20
Friendly	712	64	Science-based	216	19
High standards	708	64	Affordable	215	19
Fun/lively	703	63	Middle class	167	15
Academic	690	62	Flexible	166	15
Modern	495	45	Small	124	11
Prestigious	480	43	Vocational	106	10
Safe	457	41	Arts-based	102	9
Large	398	36	Isolated/remote	55	5
Easy to get to	347	31	Second-rate	14	1
Traditional	338	30	Desperate to get students	14	1
Difficult to get a place	338	30	Poor facilities	9	1
Cultural	338	30	Unsafe	7	1
Sporty	304	27	Dull	6	<1
Base (N)	1,112	100	Base (N)	1,112	100

Note: Adjectives that could be regarded as negative descriptors are shaded grey.

Note: Multiple response question.

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011

Table 10.6: Adjectives used to describe preferred HE institution (favourite university or college they have applied, or plan to apply, to): Feeder Institution Survey

Most common	N	%	Least common	N	%
Good facilities	457	78	Affordable	116	20
Friendly	401	69	Flexible	105	18
Fun/lively	382	65	Expensive	103	18
High standards	364	62	Science-based	87	15
Academic	341	58	Middle class	73	13
Modern	290	50	Vocational	54	9
Large	239	41	Arts-based	52	9
Safe	238	41	Small	34	6
Easy to get to	197	34	Isolated/remote	19	3
Prestigious	181	31	Second-rate	3	1
Cultural	160	27	Desperate to get students	8	1
Sporty	144	25	Poor facilities	5	1
Difficult to get a place	128	22	Unsafe	3	1
Traditional	128	22	Dull	3	1
Base (N)	584	100	Base (N)	584	100

Note: Adjectives that could be regarded as negative descriptors are shaded grey.

Note: Multiple response question.

Source: Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

Intention to study part-time

In our surveys of young potential HE students there were a number of points at which we measured individuals' interest in part-time study. The most definite indicator was the expressed intention to study part-time. Here we asked all those planning to go to HE in the near future (the majority of respondents) how they would most like to study in terms of hours – either full-time or part-time or no preference. We also explored the preferred mode of delivery and asked whether they would prefer classroom-based teaching, online or distance learning, or blended learning (a mixture of the two).

Among those planning to go on to HE, there was an overwhelming preference for full-time study delivered face-to-face. Almost all (93 per cent of panel survey respondents and 87 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents) said they would like to study full-time. Only a very small proportion (three and four per cent) planned to study part-time (see Table 10.7). This fits with wider research (Bates et al., 2009) and with the size of the young part-time cohort identified in our analysis of national student data (reported above). Our surveys found that potential students are very clear about their preferred mode of study, as only a small proportion (three and five per cent) said they had no preference in this respect.

In addition, three-quarters of respondents (74 per cent in both surveys) wanted to study in a classroom with a tutor, and 14 per cent wanted a mix of classroom teaching with some online or distance learning. Only a very small group (two and one per cent) wanted purely online or distance learning, which can often be regarded as part-time study. Less than one in 10 (nine and seven per cent) had no preference for mode of delivery (see Table 10.7).

Table 10.7: Interest in part-time study (those who have applied or are planning to apply for HE only)

	Learner Panel	Future Panel	All panels		Feeder Institution Survey	
	%	%	N	%	N	%
Preferred study mode						
Full-time	89	96	1,036	93	553	87
Part-time	5	1	31	3	28	4
No preference	4	2	31	3	30	5
Don't know	2	1	14	1	24	4
Base (N)	509	603	1,112	100	635	100
Preferred delivery						
In a classroom with a tutor	72	76	827	74	467	74
Online or distance learning	2	1	18	2	3	1
Mix of classroom and online/distance learning	16	12	156	14	85	14
No preference	8	9	96	9	45	7
Don't know	2	1	15	1	29	5
Base (N)	509	603	1,112	100	629	100

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011; and Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

Those more likely to prefer part-time study or some degree of online provision were older (19 or older), had studied in a FE college (rather than sixth form colleges, separate or attached to schools), or were from less advantaged backgrounds⁶⁸. This group were more commonly found among the sample of respondents drawn from the broader Learner Panel.

Other research into student choices identified in the review of literature indicates that the young people most interested in the part-time study options were those who wanted to earn money when they left FE, those that were most worried about getting into debt, and those that were less interested in going to university for social reasons (MORI, 2005; Bates et al., 2009).

⁶⁸ This is indicated by socio-economic background (C2DE), receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and/or no family experience of HE.

10.2.2 Willingness to consider part-time study

A second indicator against which to measure interest in part-time study was respondents' willingness to consider part-time study. In the surveys of young potential HE students we asked all respondents, those who were planning to apply to HE and those who were undecided or were not intending to go, whether studying part-time rather than full-time would be something they would consider now or in the near future.

Although only a very small proportion of those planning to go on to HE had a preference for part-time study, a greater proportion (across all respondents) – 22 per cent of those in the panel surveys and 21 per cent of those in the Feeder Institution Survey – said they might consider studying part-time either now or in the near future. Again, those more likely to consider studying part-time rather than full-time were older and had studied in FE colleges, and were more commonly found among the sample drawn from the Learner Panel. There remained a large group (44 and 37 per cent) who felt that part-time study was something they would definitely not consider (see Table 10.8).

Table 10.8: Potential interest in part-time study: 'Would studying part-time rather than full-time be something you would consider now or in the near future?'

	Learner Panel	Future Panel	All panels		Feeder Institution Survey	
	%	%	N	%	N	%
Definitely yes	5	2	43	4	31	4
Possibly yes	22	13	213	18	138	17
Possibly not	26	28	328	27	196	24
Definitely not	38	50	539	44	299	37
Don't know	8	7	91	8	144	18
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	808	100

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011; Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

10.2.3 Exploring factors associated with willingness to consider part-time study

To explore which factors are associated with willingness to consider part-time rather than full-time study now or in the near future, we undertook multivariate analysis using the panel survey responses and then the Feeder Institution Survey responses. The analysis was undertaken separately, as additional background variables were available for the panel survey respondents (and slight differences in the coding of responses).

Multivariate statistical models simultaneously test whether a range of potential explanatory factors (independent variables) significantly affect an outcome, in this case the willingness to consider part-time study. A range of variables were tested in the model to see whether they had an effect on willingness and to explore whether they had a positive or negative effect (all other factors being equal). For each data set, two different logistic regression

models were explored. The first model explored the influence of personal and educational characteristics including age, gender, ethnicity, receipt of means-tested student financial support, type of institution previously attended, cohort (whether Year 12 or Year 13) and plans for HE; and for the panel survey respondents also disability, family experience of HE, and socio-economic background. The second model explored personal and educational background, general attitudes to part-time study, and perceived knowledge of HE options.

The outcomes of the models show the most important (observed) factors driving willingness to consider part-time study in the place of full-time study (potential switching behaviour). These are indicated by the size of the odds ratio and whether they have statistical significance.

Using data from the surveys of young potential HE students, the findings from the models (see Tables 10.9 and 10.11) are that:

- those who had made the decision to apply to HE were less likely to consider part-time study (it would appear that their preferences for full-time study were already fixed), or, conversely, those who had not yet made up their minds about HE study were more likely to consider part-time study
- those in Year 13 or equivalent, were more likely than those in Year 12 (who would be making decisions under the new fee regime) to be willing to consider part-time study (panel surveys); similarly, those who were older (at the time of the survey), aged 18 to 22, were more likely than those aged 16 to 17 to consider part-time study (Feeder Institution Survey)
- those who studied in a FE college rather than a school sixth form college were more likely to consider part-time study
- those from less advantaged backgrounds were more likely to consider part-time rather than full-time study (panel surveys only).

Some attitudes to part-time study were associated with willingness to consider studying part-time (see Tables 10.10 and 10.12):

- Where individuals felt there is no difference in the HE experience (feeling like a real student if you study part-time, or that there is no difference between full and part-time study), they were much more willing to study part-time.
- Where young people felt part-time study was something young people should consider, they were more willing to consider part-time study.
- Where individuals were unconcerned about the length of part-time study (neither agreeing nor disagreeing that part-time study takes too long), they were more willing to consider part-time study

- When individuals felt convinced that employers valued part-time study (agreeing that employers preferred people who had studied part-time), they were more likely to consider part-time study.

Table 10.9: Logistic regression model exploring factors associated with willingness to consider part-time study (Model 1 – personal and educational background): panel survey respondents

Model 1	Beta value (standard error)	Odds ratio	Lower CI	Upper CI	Significance
Constant	-0.703				
HE decision (yes)	-1.271	0.281	0.121	0.653	Yes **
Cohort 13	0.635	1.887	1.084	3.282	Yes *
Social grade (C2/D/E)	0.416	1.516	1.057	2.176	Yes*

Notes: * significant at 0.05; ** significant at 0.01; *** significant at 0.001

Model statistics: Pseudo R2= 0.08 (Homer & Lemershow), 0.07 (Cox & Snell), 0.11 (Nagelkerke); chi2=76.45; Prob chi2 <0.001

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011

Table 10.10: Logistic regression model exploring factors associated with willingness to consider part-time study (Model 2 – personal and educational background, and attitudes to part-time study): panel survey respondents

Model 2	Beta value (standard error)	Odds ratio	Lower CI	Upper CI	Significance
Constant	-3.614				
If you study part-time, you feel like a real student (agree)	1.256	3.511	1.020	12.094	Yes*
There is no real difference between part-time and full-time study (agree)	1.999	7.382	1.565	34.793	Yes*

Notes: * significant at 0.05; ** significant at 0.01; *** significant at 0.001

Model statistics: Pseudo R2= 0.20 (Homer & Lemershow), 0.18 (Cox & Snell), 0.28 (Nagelkerke); chi2=16.60; Prob chi2 <0.01

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011

Table 10.11: Logistic regression model exploring factors associated with willingness to consider part-time study (Model 1 – personal and educational background): Feeder Institution Survey respondents

Model 1	Beta value (standard error)	Odds ratio	Lower CI	Upper CI	Significance
Constant	-2.25				
FE college	0.832	2.30	1.307	4.043	Yes**
HE decision (not yet made up mind)	1.215	3.37	2.004	5.673	Yes***
HE decision (no)	0.846	2.33	1.202	4.518	Yes**

Notes: * significant at 0.05; ** significant at 0.01; *** significant at 0.001

Model statistics: Pseudo R²= 0.06 (Homer & Lemershow), 0.05 (Cox & Snell), 0.08 (Nagelkerke); chi²=39.11; Prob chi² <0.001

Source: Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

Table 10.12: Logistic regression model exploring factors associated with willingness to consider part-time study (Model 2 – personal and educational background, and attitudes to part-time study): Feeder Institution Survey respondents

Model 2	Beta value (standard error)	Odds ratio	Lower CI	Upper CI	Significance
Constant	-4.087				
Age (18 to 22)	0.861	2.364	1.399	3.997	Yes***
HE decision (not yet made up mind)	0.977	2.655	1.449	4.868	Yes**
Part-time study is something young people should consider (agree)	1.785	5.957	2.632	13.479	Yes***
It does not take too long to get your qualification if you study part-time (neither agree nor disagree)	0.948	2.581	1.596	4.175	Yes***
Employers prefer people who have studied part-time as they have work experience (agree)	0.979	2.661	1.359	5.210	Yes**
If you study part-time, you feel like a real student (agree)	0.827	2.285	1.207	4.328	Yes*
If you study part-time, you feel like a real student (neither agree nor disagree)	0.800	2.226	1.156	4.288	Yes*

Notes: * significant at 0.05; ** significant at 0.01; *** significant at 0.001

Model statistics: Pseudo R²= 0.205 (Homer & Lemershow), 0.185 (Cox & Snell), 0.293 (Nagelkerke); chi²=137.34; Prob chi² <0.001

Source: Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

The perceived benefits of part-time study are discussed below but the **follow-up interviews** with those young people who had expressed an interest in, or preference for, part-time study explored why these individuals felt that part-time study might be for them. The interviews indicated that, although none of these individuals had, in the end, actually

applied to study part-time, part-time study was felt to be a good option because it would allow them to work at the same time, and so gain wider experience, and ensure a smooth transition into the labour market or an actual job at the end of the course.

'I could have done some part-time work at the same time. It is not just about the money, I would have enjoyed the stimulation and social opportunities of having a range of work environments.'

[Young potential HE student]

'If I can get a job whilst doing it, I'd feel more secure. You can get a contract with the banks that means they have to employ you for a few years once you've done your training. It's good if you can work in the field of interest and earn money at the same time, and then you can plan how to repay your debts without worrying you won't be able to.'

[Young potential HE student]

'From a practical point of view, part-time study is better as it provides a more smooth integration between study and work.'

[Young potential HE student]

Of the 30 young people with an interest in, or willingness to consider, part-time, only one was still considering applying for part-time study (to apply in 2013 at the earliest). For this young person the desire to study part-time was driven by concerns over costs:

'I want to study part-time due to the fees and living costs...it will give me time to work whilst doing it and make the costs more manageable...part-time would mean an extra year of tuition fees but that's considered good debt now.'

[Young potential HE student]

In our **surveys of young potential HE students** the third indicator against which to gauge interest in part-time study is whether there are any factors that could encourage young people to consider studying part-time. Here we asked all respondents to indicate which, if any, of a given list of 11 factors might make them consider studying part-time rather than full-time.

Overall, 79 per cent of panel survey respondents and 77 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents said that at least one of the given factors could encourage them. Another question, targeted at those planning to go to HE, also explored the influence of costs on decisions. Part-time study was given as one of 13 potential cost-reduction strategies that individuals were asked if they had considered when making their HE decisions. As only three per cent of panel survey respondents and five per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents had considered this as a way to manage costs, it appears to have no real significance in this respect. More details on these findings are presented in the next chapter (see Tables 11.2 and 11.1).

10.3 Motivations to study

10.3.1 Why go on to higher education?

In the **surveys of young potential HE students**, we find that the most important reasons for wanting to go to HE were related to employment and interest. The most commonly cited motivators were:

- it would lead to a good/better paid job than I would get otherwise
- it gives you better opportunities in life
- I want to carry on learning something I am good at/interested in
- it will lead to a well-paid job
- it is essential for the career I want to go into.

Many of those planning to go on to HE also cited personal development reasons such as 'it makes you independent/better able to cope on your own' and 'it gives you more confidence', and student experience reasons such as to take advantage of the social life, to meet new people and to leave home/get away from the local area. These motivators, however, tended to be secondary factors as they were very rarely cited as the most important factors (eg generally by only about one or two per cent) (see Tables 10.13 and 10.14).

Table 10.13: Main reasons for wanting to go on to HE: panel surveys

	Learner Panel		Future Panel		All panels	
	%	% most important	%	% most important	%	% most important
Leads to a good/better paid job than I would get otherwise	80	24	82	20	81	20
Will lead to a well paid job	57	10	62	8	59	8
Gives you better opportunities in life	76	19	77	21	77	19
Essential for the career I want to go into	54	25	55	25	55	23
Shows that you have certain skills	37	1	41	0	39	<1
Gives me time to decide on a career	25	2	33	3	29	2
Want to carry on learning something I am good at/interested in	59	13	62	15	61	13
Take advantage of the social life such as meeting new people	43	1	45	3	44	2
Leave home/get away from the local area	36	1	35	1	36	1
Makes you independent/better able to cope on your own	50	1	58	1	54	1

	Learner Panel		Future Panel		All panels	
	%	% most important	%	% most important	%	% most important
Gives you more confidence	47	0	48	1	48	<1
People respect you more	17	0	19	0	18	<1
Expected of me by my teachers/tutors	17	0	16	0	17	<1
Expected of me by my family/friends	28	2	28	2	28	2
Other	2	1	1	1	2	1
Base (N)	509	471	603	572	1,112	1043

Note: Questions were: 'What are your MAIN reasons for wanting to go on to higher education?' and 'Which of these was the MOST important reason to you when making your decision?'

Note: Multiple response question.

Source: Young Learners' Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011

Table 10.14: Main reasons for wanting to go on to HE: Feeder Institution Survey

	%	% most important
Leads to a good/better paid job than I would get otherwise	82	28
Will lead to a well paid job	65	8
Gives you better opportunities in life	83	17
Essential for the career I want to go into	58	17
Shows that you have certain skills	38	1
Gives me time to decide on a career	24	1
Want to carry on learning something I am good at/interested in	63	20
Take advantage of the social life such as meeting new people	52	2
Leave home/get away from the local area	38	2
Makes you independent/better able to cope on your own	57	2
Gives you more confidence	50	1
People respect you more	18	1
Expected of me by my teachers/tutors	14	<1
Expected of me by my family/friends	24	1
Base (N)	644	537

Note: Questions were: 'What are your MAIN reasons for wanting to go on to higher education?' and 'Which of these was the MOST important reason to you when making your decision?'

Note: Multiple response question.

Source: Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

The follow-up interviews confirm the desire for increased employability that is driving many individuals to want to go to HE: *'There is no point doing it, if it doesn't get you a better job'*. Interviewees talked about having to get a degree to get into their chosen career, wanting to improve or enhance their job prospects and to stand out, and wanting to earn more. The chance to carry on studying something they enjoyed or were passionate about was also mentioned, as was the experience of leaving home. One interviewee talked about her decision to study for a languages degree which she felt would be in high demand in the jobs market:

'Because of the current state of the economy - everyone with money is currently investing in China and so Chinese will be the language to speak for at least the next 10 years. Russian is just a beautiful language and if you speak Russian you can basically talk to anyone from Eastern Europe too.'

It is interesting to note that younger potential students were more likely to want to go on to HE because they felt it would lead to a well paid job and better opportunities in life than those aged 19 or older (which is also reflected in the higher proportions citing these reasons among Feeder Institution Survey respondents compared with panel survey respondents). Female respondents were more likely than males to be motivated to HE study to achieve better opportunities in life, to carry on studying something they are interested in and/or good at to be able to access the career they want to become more independent and because they felt it was expected of them. One young female, planning to study computer science at university, who was interviewed in the follow-up to the survey talked about this expectation:

'There was a careers adviser at school but I was more influenced by my friends. One friend didn't want to go at all [to university] and other people didn't think much of her for that, so I was sort of scared into wanting to go really.'

[Young potential HE student]

Those from white backgrounds were relatively more likely than those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds to be motivated by their interest in a subject and a desire to leave home. In comparison, those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds were considerably more likely than those from white backgrounds to feel that HE study was expected of them. Those from more advantaged backgrounds (and also those from school sixth forms or sixth form colleges) were more likely than others to be motivated by an interest in a subject; or by a desire to take advantage of the social life, to leave home and to gain independence. Those from families with a history of HE participation were also more likely to feel that going on to HE was expected of them.

10.3.2 What motivates part-time students?

Deciding to go on to HE

Feedback from the part-time students in the **case studies** highlights the importance of career reasons for deciding to go on to HE. Motivations are primarily related to career progression *'to open job opportunities and career paths'* or *'to gain qualifications to support practical experience'*. Some students appeared to have opportunities for progression within their employing organisations but felt they needed higher-level qualifications to access these. For example, one part-time student had been applying for jobs/promotion without success and felt that his part-time course and the qualification it would give him would give him the edge he needed. Similarly, another noted:

'Where I am currently working I am getting to the stage where if I am interviewing for higher positions a first degree is a requirement of it.'

[Part-time student, large-scale provider]

The content of the course is, therefore, particularly important to part-time students. One student noted how the course had been *'targeted at people working in a relevant field and sufficiently in-depth'*.

Part-time students also talked about going on to HE to help them change career direction or to help them improve or at least maintain their employability more generally in the challenging economic climate. One older part-time student talked about having to change career due to health issues, and how HE study was helping with the new start. Another noted:

'I wanted to change my job. I was teaching adult literacy and I wanted to move into a different field. I haven't got a first degree so that's why I decided to go to university. It wasn't so much that I had any goals in mind.'

[Part-time student, large-scale provider]

Another spoke of taking up study in order to make himself redundancy-proof or better able to survive the restructuring taking place in his organisation.

Students reported that encouragement and support from employers often acted as the incentive to study at higher level. Support could come in the form of paid fees and day release or a loan for fees. Although students reported that they appreciated this support, there were some potential drawbacks. The employee often had to commit to remain with the employer for a set period of time after completing their studies, and so some students had preferred to fund their studies themselves. In addition, there was a feeling that employers might not support all types of study – particularly that they wouldn't sponsor long courses (those lasting more than two years). Also, students noted that when they were sponsored, they tended to feel under pressure to work hard and do well at their course.

The **literature review** also identified that part-time students want to go on to HE for a variety of reasons, and that there is no such thing as a typical part-time student (Universities UK, 2006). Demand for part-time undergraduate study comes from individuals in a range of circumstances, with different motivations to study in HE and to study on a part-time basis. These include people wanting to develop careers (upskilling and retraining), people seeking their first access to HE ('second chance'), the retired who want to 'fill up free time', and people in employment undertaking continuing professional development (CPD) (Boorman et al., 2006).

However, the research that exists tends to focus on mature students only and so many of the motivations elicited reflect those for adult participation in learning more generally (St. Clair, 2006). A small-scale qualitative study found that part-time HE students were motivated to study in order to manage workplace change, such as retraining for a different type of work, and securing their position in an uncertain labour market (Fuller, 2001). Personal development was also identified as a motivation for studying (ibid). A survey of working adults in England found that adults felt that going to university improves employability and career prospects, and these were identified as key motivators to consider applying to university (Pollard et al., 2008). These motivations to study were also found in Feinstein et al.'s (2007) survey with OU and Birkbeck part-time students, and a more recent and large-scale online survey of over 2,600 part-time students drawn from 25

HEIs⁶⁹. This found that students' reasons for doing a course were largely associated with their desire to gain a qualification and to improve their labour-market prospects and career aspirations: 69 per cent studied to gain a qualification, 61 per cent studied because of interest in the subject, 53 per cent studied to get on in a job/career, and 49 per cent studied to change jobs/ career (Callender et al., 2006).

As part of the recent Futuretrack study Callender et al., (2010b) identified three key triggers for a part-time student's decision to study for a foundation degree: career and employment related, change related (wanting to do something different), and family related (being a role model for children).

Deciding to study part-time

Part-time students in the **case studies** noted how, once they had decided to go to HE, part-time study had really been the only option open to them. The majority were in well-paid career jobs and so could not afford to give these up or put them on hold for the period of their course. They felt that part-time study enabled them to continue working without interrupting their career and without compromising their income, and enabled them to continue to meet their financial commitments and to manage potential debt.

'I couldn't afford to study full-time. We all have mortgages as a result of having worked for a number of years and there is no source of funding to support payment of these if I study full-time.'

[Part-time student, large-scale provider]

Others had family responsibilities, often in addition to work commitments, which meant they could not study full-time. All those interviewed talked of the importance of balancing or juggling commitments and how studying part-time allowed them to be able to do so.

Part-time students also spoke of other advantages to part-time study such as more flexible entry requirements than found for full-time study, and how part-time study rather than full-time study was a better fit for them in terms of lifestyle and study experience. Some of the part-time students interviewed had previously studied full-time but had not enjoyed this experience. One young part-time student talked about how she had been very homesick, felt that she didn't fit in and how she didn't like the large classes and lack of contact with tutors. Another student had started a full-time course but had had to change to part-time study due to health reasons; also one student talked about how the flexibility afforded by part-time study allowed her to have greater control over her course experience:

⁶⁹ The sample was not representative of all part-time undergraduates in the UK, and over-represents students undertaking a first degree.

'I can make better use of my time as a part-time student and have more control over my study choices through the modular approach. My experience as a full-time student was that there was a lot of hanging about and as the course was more tightly structured I had to take modules that I was not really interested in.'

[Part-time student, specialist provider]

The **literature review** of existing research indicates that once individuals have decided to study for a HE qualification, they need to make a decision about whether to study on a full- or part-time basis. Adults tend to want a different experience of HE from the traditional model, preferring to study part-time, in evenings and weekends and at a university close to home (Pollard et al., 2008). Reflecting the findings in our case studies, the wider research suggests that people choose to study part-time rather than full-time because it offers greater convenience and flexibility (Callender et al., 2006; Callender et al., 2010b; Yorke and Longdon 2008). They do so primarily because it is more affordable, and enables them to continue to work on a full-time basis and therefore meet existing financial commitments (Callender et al., 2006; Pollard et al., 2008; Yorke and Longdon, 2008; Callender et al., 2010b). However, as found in our case studies, part-time study may be the only option available. In a study of part-time students at FECs, most reported that full-time study was not a viable option and they would not have been able to study their course if it was not offered on a part-time basis (Linacre and Kinnear, 2009). This gives a sense that there are clear benefits of this mode of study for mature students and that part-time study is the only option for many part-time students.

In choosing a part-time course, part-time students tend to select an institution on the basis of the timing of the course (suitability of delivery) and its proximity to their work or home (suitability of location). Choices are largely dictated by practical considerations rather than academic ones, such as the academic reputation of the institution (Callender et al., 2006). Choices may also be governed by considerations of outcomes. Indeed workshops with institutions undertaken for the recent SPA good practice guidance in part-time admissions, found that institutions felt part-time students had a greater focus on outcomes, and 'value-for money' in employment terms, and were less interested in building new social networks and being part of an institution community than full-time students (SPA, 2010). Consequently, part-time students may be seeking a different learner experience from that of full-time students and there may be different expectations within segments of the part-time market.

Potential drivers to part-time study are also explored in the next section, which looks at the perceived benefits of part-time study, particularly among young students.

10.4 Perceived benefits of part-time study

'They [a part-time student] could earn some money while they are doing it, so they don't have to live in poverty for three years, then end up with £60,000 of debt. It's more relaxed and gives them more time for activities they enjoy, whether it's volunteering, or personal hobbies (sports, music etc.) or just socialising. Part-time study may not be quite as painfully expensive as full-time study at an English university. It allows time for work experience or any other training.'

[Young potential HE student]

Part-time study is acknowledged to have a variety of benefits. These were discussed in the case studies with staff and current students (both part-time and full-time students) and also elicited in the surveys of young potential HE students.

In the surveys, potential students were asked to think about why someone might want to study part-time with a university or college, and to write down all of the benefits for this person in studying part-time rather than full-time⁷⁰. All respondents were able to note at least one benefit, and the majority listed several benefits. The feedback gives a fascinating insight into the views or perceptions of part-time study among potential students, and in most cases indicate that, although it was felt to have benefits, it was not something that would benefit someone like them (at this stage in their life). It is interesting to note how closely these benefits correspond to those noted by HE staff and current HE students. These perceived benefits are explored in the following sections.

10.4.1 Employment benefits

Evidence from the **case studies** clearly highlights the employment benefits of part-time study. Staff and students interviewed stressed that a key benefit or attraction of part-time study is being able to keep, and progress in, a good job or indeed a career, and to be able to link study to this work. In these cases, the part-time courses taken are closely linked to the student's area of employment, and so will tend to be vocational subjects rather than those perhaps regarded as academic (e.g. humanities). However, it was noted in one case study (a large-scale provider) that not all part-time students were in full-time and/or career jobs. There were examples of part-time students in poor-quality jobs, unrelated to their study or career plans, who were essentially working to support their study costs. These individuals may choose to study part-time due to other commitments, rather than a commitment to their existing job or career, and may also choose to study part-time as it allows them to study at their own speed.

⁷⁰ This was an open question, requiring respondents to write in or type in their answers, and the verbatim responses have been analysed. This question and the question asking respondents to note potential disadvantages of part-time study were asked before any closed questions about factors that could encourage or discourage part-time study. The ordering of questions meant that respondents would provide their responses without any unintentional steer or prompting.

It would appear that part-time study is a career progression strategy, or a way to change career direction, rather than a career entry strategy (see below, where full-time study seems to be about gaining a head start at the beginning of a career).

It is interesting to note the subtle difference in the perceived employment benefits of part-time study noted by young people who are in the middle of making their decisions about HE. Feedback from the **surveys of young potential HE students** indicates that this group also perceived part-time study as having positive employment benefits. They felt that studying part-time could allow individuals to get a job and gain valuable work experience and work-related skills while studying, and so increase their employability. A less often mentioned benefit was that it could enable individuals to stay on with their existing employer and use their study experience and subsequent qualification to gain promotion within the company. Again a selection of responses highlight the perceived labour market benefits:

'Get a chance to work at the same time to improve employment opportunities. Make contacts outside of university to help career opportunities. Greater time to decide final career choice while still earning money.'

[Young potential HE student]

'Part-time study would mean you could complement your learning with hands on experience, or at least earn while you learn so that debt at the end of your course is less.'

[Young potential HE student]

'You don't have to put your career on hold if you're a mature student.'

[Young potential HE student]

'If they have a job they would like to keep then they will be able to keep it. Especially if it is a well-paid job, stable job, or just a job they enjoy working in. Regardless, it will bring them additional income.'

[Young potential HE student]

10.4.2 Greater flexibility to tailor the learning to suit the learner

Flexible delivery

Another benefit or advantage of part-time study that was raised in the **case study** interviews was the flexibility it offers, allowing individuals to fit study around their lives and other commitments. It was highlighted that in many cases it is the individual's circumstances that are driving the mode decision, and flexibility is therefore critical, and this flexibility can become important if an individual's situation or circumstances change during their studies. There were examples noted in the case studies of students switching from full-time to part-time due to health reasons, or indeed switching from part-time to full-time due to redundancy. Indeed, feedback from part-time students themselves (across the

case studies) indicated that part-time study can provide a supportive learning model for those with health problems or disabilities.

Flexibility is linked to the employment benefits of part-time study. It was suggested in the case studies that part-time study allows individuals to gain or keep a better quality of employment. If students can study in the evenings and weekends rather than in normal working hours, they can keep or access a better quality job to do alongside their studies. For example, if a student was studying during the week and in daytime they may only be able to get relatively poor-quality work (in terms of pay, and progression opportunities) such as bar work.

This notion of flexibility centres on flexibility of delivery times (e.g. evenings and weekends) and to a certain extent flexibility of locations (local centres of learning or online), and to work effectively also requires flexibility of access to facilities and flexible assessment (see Chapter 12 on supporting students). It can also involve flexible entry points (rather than the traditional September/October annual enrolment found in full-time study).

The flexibility offered by part-time was also perceived to be a major advantage by young people making decisions about HE. In the **surveys of young potential HE students**, the most commonly cited perceived benefit of part-time study was to be able to work (at least part-time) and earn money at the same time as studying. This was considered to be a positive aspect of part-time study because these earnings could be used to pay towards study costs and so reduce the potential debt burden of HE. Another commonly cited benefit of part-time study was the ability to fit study around childcare and other family and caring responsibilities and commitments. For many respondents, part-time study was seen as a flexible way to study, providing individuals with time to engage in other activities – mainly work and caring for the family – but also social and leisure activities such as spending time with friends, engaging in wider interests, hobbies and doing voluntary work. A selection of responses from the survey illustrate the idea of being able to engage in other activities when studying part-time:

'Would be able to make money if they had to pay for university costs and living costs and were unable to get financial help. Perhaps they had a family to look after and could not spend a large amount of time away. Could fit the course in, around their work, which they may need to keep for financial reasons or for family reasons. Maybe doing the course for their job benefit and so need to do it around and outside of their working hours.'

[Young potential HE student]

'Studying part-time would allow the person to have a job on the side to make money to put towards the university fees. It would also allow them to see friends and family more or take up in a hobby or have time to focus on something else that interests them.'

[Young potential HE student]

'It means that they can have a job whilst studying something that they find interesting without feeling an obligation to study something that will give them a good job.'

[Young potential HE student]

'Students who have a young family, i.e. a child, and want to get a higher education may need to look after their child therefore can only benefit from part-time education.'

[Young potential HE student]

These views were confirmed in the **follow-up interviews**. Here potential HE students talked of having time to do other things such as hobbies, but critically time to be able to earn money – to get or stay in a job – to be able to pay as you go and avoid the debts.

Flexible length

Flexibility could also mean flexible length of study – the time taken to complete. As discussed in the **case studies**, this type of flexibility allows individuals to study at their own speed and intensity (as noted above), and possibly interrupt their studies – although perhaps within some boundaries. As noted in one case study, it may be important to set some time limits to programmes, to establish deadlines, in order to sustain motivation, commitment and momentum: *'as part-time students can become distracted and let their work take priority over their studies'*. This may be particularly important when there is little face-to-face contact with learners, for example on distance learning programmes. For many part-time students this flexibility will involve extending their study period, but for others it might involve accelerated study. However, it should be acknowledged that accelerated study can cause challenges to institutions as there can be a blurring of boundaries – e.g. when does an accelerated part-time degree become in effect a full-time degree? – and there will be guidelines setting limits to the amount of study a part-time student can do in order to access a student loan, which one interviewee felt would not be helpful:

'The offer to part-timers not to pay up-front is good, but to cap the amount of study anyone can do in any one year in order to draw down loans is not helpful – what it cuts across is the idea of accelerated degree programmes or extended studies. There is a rationale for a minimum amount of study but a cap is very unhelpful. What could be attractive to a young person might be to study a degree programme more intensively (say over 48 weeks) part-time over a three-year period.'

[Staff, large-scale provider]

This flexibility is evident in the statistics on expected length of programme presented in Chapter 9, where a considerable group of part-time students have no recorded (normal) study length.

This time-based notion of flexibility was also mentioned by young potential HE students in the surveys, but this tended to be coupled with the idea that part-time study was an easier, less pressured option allowing individuals a longer time and slower pace to study.

Case study feedback also indicates that this type of flexibility allows individuals to build their programme of study over time – progressing from one module to another. This may be particularly important to part-time students who, as the data analysis indicates, are in the main studying at sub-degree level. Linked to this notion of flexibility is the idea of portability – moving between modes of study or locations and taking part qualifications with you. Here a student might be able to build a programme of study across institutions and even countries.

However, in reality can part-time students study as quickly or slowly as they want? Can they take a pick-and-mix approach to their studies, and ultimately, are institutions able or willing to embrace this aspect of flexibility? In one of the case studies (a large-scale provider), they did offer an accelerated part-time first degree course. However, the institution had to impose a cap on the amount of study an individual could do and still achieve the qualification (no more than 75 per cent of the full-time equivalent). This was driven by the current funding system, and the money the institution could draw from HEFCE (which was a maximum of 75 per cent of the funding for a full-time place).

10.4.3 A potentially cheaper way to study

There appears to be a lack of clarity around the relative costs of part-time study, costs to the institution (see Chapter 5) but also costs to the individual. There is a feeling that under the current system, where part-time students pay tuition fees upfront and have only limited financial support from the government (see Chapter 1), it is a more expensive way to study. However, moving forward there are differing views on the relative costs of part-time study compared with full-time study. Under the new system (see Chapter 1), where no part-time students will be expected to pay for their learning upfront and at least some will be able to access Student Loans to pay for their fees, part-time study will be put on a level playing field with full-time study. This may make the part-time option more attractive (and, at the very least, a more legitimate option). However, will it be a cheaper option? It may be a smaller annual cost but spread over a greater number of years – and so in effect cost the same. What perhaps makes part-time study a cheaper option is that you can reduce the other costs associated with HE study. Accommodation and travel costs are likely to be cheaper (or at least little different to students' existing commitments) as part-time students are unlikely to move away from their home or commute too far to study. Also, individuals can use their earnings to pay towards their costs as they study (rather than waiting to the end of their studies to start repayments).

In the **surveys of young potential HE students**, some respondents saw part-time study as a potentially cheaper way to study, either because the fees were perceived to be relatively lower or spread across a longer time for repayment, or because students could access financial support. However, respondents were suitably vague, giving no precise indications of how much cheaper, or the nature or level of financial support that could be accessed. Potential students also talked of being able to study locally or even at home and so having less distance to travel and not having to pay for university accommodation, therefore saving time and expenses. As noted by one respondent:

'They wouldn't necessarily need to stay at university so there may be no accommodation fees.'

[Young potential HE student]

Again the views were reiterated in the **follow-up interviews**. The interviewees did not really know how the financial costs of studying part-time compared with studying full-time, but there was the view that part-time study could in effect be cheaper as you could work while you were studying and so pay for it out of your earnings.

10.4.4 A less pressured option

The feedback from the **surveys of young potential HE students** suggests that young people may have an unrealistic picture of the commitment required for part-time study. Here young people perceive part-time study as having very low levels of study input and providing substantial free time. Indeed, when asked about the number of hours a week a part-time HE student would study, the most common answer was 15 hours (half that of a full-time student), but very few (only six per cent) felt that part-time students spent five hours or less a week on their studies. Part-time study was perceived as being the easy option – less formal and pressured and so less stressful than full-time study. This is clearly at odds with the real experience of part-time study, which is described by current students in the case studies as rewarding but challenging. Part-time students talked about intense periods of study which could be overwhelming, difficulties finding time for independent study due to their wider responsibilities, and challenges to maintaining commitment over time (see Chapter 12).

Some young people in the survey saw part-time study as an option for those unable to cope with the pressures of full-time study. As noted above, respondents talked about having longer to study, a longer time to complete and submit assignments and having a slower pace of study or less intense study. A more positive view, however, was that studying over a longer period would enable a person to really engage with their subject. A selection of responses from the survey illustrates these views of part-time study:

'It is not as strict and time-consuming as a full-time degree.'

[Young potential HE student]

'They would have more time to revise and do the work, therefore it would be less intense – good for anyone who would struggle with the speed of a full-time course.'

[Young potential HE student]

'Beneficial for less academically-able students (slower pace).'

[Young potential HE student]

'Some benefits of studying part-time would mean that you have more time to focus on your studies and have time to absorb the information that you have'

been given by tutors/teachers. It enables you to have more time to reflect on life and more time to relax rather than studying full-time.'

[Young potential HE student]

11 Disincentives to Part-time Study

Key points

- Part-time study is not really regarded as something a young person would be interested in, as full-time study is the accepted and dominant model of HE participation. Full-time study is perceived by young people to be the best option for them, giving them a unique life experience (which they value) and offering them a head start in their careers.
- The part-time study route is felt to offer limited or no opportunities to socialise, meet new people, study with others, receive sufficient time and support from teaching staff, and to leave home.
- Part-time study is perceived to be of less value than full-time study, offering a poorer experience and delaying (or at worse damaging) career entry, as young people are unconvinced that employers viewed part-time study positively. Part-time study is also felt to take too long, and so difficult to maintain over time, and is not regarded as a potential career entry strategy.
- If part-time study is pitched against full-time study, full-time study will invariably be the most attractive option – at least among young people considering their HE choices. However, if part-time study is considered in isolation, it may offer a way to participate in HE.
- Young people could be encouraged to consider part-time study, but they may not consider it as an obvious option to manage the costs of studying. This could be due to general confusion over the true costs of part-time study. It would appear that young people are extremely reluctant to compromise their plans for the course they want to follow – they are unlikely to alter the level of study, length of study, focus (subject area) of study, or mode of study.
- Instead, to manage costs, young people would consider changing the location of their study to save money – studying close(r) to home, in a location with a lower cost of living and/or good employment opportunities, or at an institution offering financial support. They would also prefer to save before studying, and do (low-value) part-time work and try to spend wisely while studying.
- Although working part-time while studying is accepted as a normal part of life in HE, this involves working in a short-term job with part-time hours that requires no real long-term commitment. Changing the balance of study and work is perceived to be a step too far. Young students want to study full-time and may work part-time but they do not want to work full-time and study part-time.
- However, the findings suggest that the employment benefits of part-time study could encourage young people to consider part-time study. If students were

convinced that they could earn money and build work experience, they could consider studying part-time rather than full-time. Other factors that could encourage young people would be if part-time study was a cheaper option, or if they were sponsored by an employer.

- Young people might be encouraged to consider part-time study if institutions offered part-time options in subjects they are interested in, and could tailor the delivery to suit their needs and expectations. It would appear that young students want something that is not too dissimilar to the full-time programme.
- There are a range of actions that institutions could take to encourage young entrants to part-time study. They need to offer them the right course, at the right price, which delivers the right experience and outcome. However, will institutions be able, or indeed be willing, to take action?

In this chapter we look at the perceived disadvantages of part-time study to individuals, and how these may influence choices. These factors (real or perceived) can in effect act as barriers to part-time study and present challenges to recruiting part-time students. We then look at how intractable decisions and choices are made about part-time study and what could encourage young people in particular to consider part-time study as an option. This could suggest a range of actions that institutions could take to stimulate demand and improve take-up of part-time courses.

11.1 Individual barriers to part-time study

'They are with tutors less, may receive less support. It will take longer to complete the course, meaning that jobs may be harder to get once they have finished. You have more time to yourself which means that you become less motivated. Because the course will be longer, you will find it more difficult to hold concentration.'

[Young Potential HE Student]

'The course would take longer to complete, balancing work and studying could make life stressful, it may make the work confusing and hard to keep track of, they may not be able to get much help from teachers and lecturers, they will not be able to get into full-time work for longer, it takes away the atmosphere of being at university and making new friends.'

[Young potential HE student]

After thinking about the potential benefits or positive aspects of part-time study, young potential HE students in the **surveys** were asked to think about the disadvantages for someone studying part-time rather than full-time. Again, virtually all were able to note at least one disadvantage or negative aspect of part-time study, and the majority listed several. This feedback highlights that part-time study was considered to be lengthy, difficult to maintain in the face of competing work and life priorities without self-motivation and strong time-management skills, and of a poorer quality in terms of experience and outcome than full-time study.

11.1.1 Full-time is the best way to study

Feedback from across the **case studies** highlights that the full-time model of HE participation is the dominant model for HE and as such is the cultural norm which is very hard to break. The careers advisers in feeder schools that were interviewed reported that potential students have an image or model of HE that involves undertaking a three-year full-time degree and that this model is very hard to challenge, particularly with high-achieving/academic students where the model is firmly entrenched. Young people view HE as a linear pathway to work; they immerse themselves in study to get a qualification before going out and getting a job, and they would not want to combine the two.

Full-time study is viewed as the best, the quickest or only way to study, and part-time study has a somewhat negative image among potential HE students and current full-time HE students. It is often viewed as something older people do, or it is for people who do not have the commitment and motivation to undertake full-time study. Indeed, current full-time HE students in the case studies often had quite derogatory views of part-time study and indeed part-time students, regarding it as a lazy or less committed option. They were also unconvinced that potential employers would value part-time study as highly as full-time study.

There is a perception that part-time study is only taken if there is no alternative (i.e. part-time study or nothing). So if young people could instead study full-time or indeed they could work and gain a professional qualification and not need to participate in HE at all (or wait until later in their career and perhaps top up) why would they choose to study part-time? It would appear that if part-time study is pitched against full-time study, full-time study will invariably be the most attractive option – at least among young people considering their HE choices. As noted earlier, this was tested in case study institutions who offered part-time study as an alternative to full-time study when their full-time courses were over-subscribed, but no one took this up. However, if part-time study is considered in isolation, it may offer a way to participate in HE.

11.1.2 Part-time study provides a second-class experience and a second-class outcome

Staff in the **case studies** stressed that the student experience is very important to young students and acts as a key motivator to engaging in HE (although the results of the survey of young potential HE students suggests this is a secondary factor driving HE decisions; see Chapter 10). There is a feeling among students and staff that an individual would not get this 'experience' if they studied part-time, so they are uncertain of what the benefits of part-time study would be for a young person. However, in this difficult economic climate and with increasing emphasis on employability and outcomes of study, it was debated whether the need for the student experience or the traditional type of experience has diminished, and whether the business of HE is about studying and not having fun: *'with the need to work to pay for their costs, they don't have time to have fun'*.

The **surveys of young potential HE students** found that a commonly reported disadvantage of part-time study was that part-time students would not enjoy the full experience of being at university. Some respondents just talked about the lack of experience but others provided details about what it was that part-time students would lack. Here respondents talked about part-time students having less time to socialise and being less able to meet new people and make friends, not being able to study with others

(or at the same speed/pace) and having less contact time with tutors and less support from teaching staff, thus requiring more independent study. For some, the experience that was lacking for part-time students was not leaving home to go to university.

'Miss out on independence miss out on new experiences. Don't meet new people, don't go to new places, don't get as valuable a degree, don't get contact time with experts, don't get the benefits of university societies. Harder to find motivation, and harder to access resources.'

[Young potential HE student]

'Takes you a lot longer to get to where you want to be – might not be able to meet people on a frequent basis – if you are not able to get along with the people you are studying with because of the lack of time you spend with them, group tasks could be hard to overcome.'

[Young potential HE student]

'You aren't as fully immersed in university life, you may not live with or share the same experiences as your friends who study full-time, it will take you longer to complete your course so it will take longer for you to reach graduate level employment.'

[Young potential HE student]

'They would not get as much tutor to student time and get less feedback.'

[Young potential HE student]

There were also a cluster of negative perceptions centring on the notion that part-time study was of a poorer quality or lower value than full-time study. Here respondents variously spoke of a poor or delayed start in a career; of employers having a negative view of part-time study or students; of a part-time course, or the university providing it, of being of lower quality; and of part-time students learning less and gaining lower grades.

'Prestigious universities tend not to offer part-time courses. Could be considered by employers as a lazy approach, as it does not show an ability to cope with academic stress.'

[Young potential HE student]

Quality of course is worse since good unis don't offer part-time.'

[Young potential HE student]

'You wouldn't be able to learn everything that you might need to learn for your course. It is also not looked on as a full degree by employers.'

[Young potential HE student]

'Takes a lot longer obviously, so it will take longer to get a job and start paying off that debt or just moving onto a better and more enjoyable job that is more enjoyable for the person.'

[Young potential HE student]

'Classes will be dragged out over time so if focusing on one particular topic it will take longer for students to gain all information needed. Or lessons will be squashed, meaning that some information which could be useful may not get mentioned.'

[Young potential HE student]

These views were reflected in the **follow-up interviews** with respondents. Here they talked about part-time study not allowing you to leave home and get the full university experience, and were concerned that a part-time student might not get the contact time and resources they needed, and that they might be difficult (and distracting) juggling work and study at same time.

'I might get distracted and lose focus, and end up not doing so well.'

[Young potential HE student]

The **literature review** identified previous research which also found that when young people were presented with the option of studying part-time for a HE qualification, they did not find it as attractive as studying full-time. In this research young people felt part-time study was a bigger commitment than full-time study because of the need to balance work and study and that it would compromise the social experience of being a student (MORI, 2005). Young people see their time as a full-time student, both academically and socially, as a key part of their life experience (HECSU, 2010; Bates et al., 2009) and there is some evidence that students living at home while studying have more limited opportunities for extra-curricular activities and social networking (HECSU, 2010).

11.1.3 Part-time study delays labour market entry

It takes too long

Feedback from across the **case studies** is that there is a perception among potential students and current full-time students that part-time study takes a long time and that it is too long a time to commit to. Young people are felt to have a very short time horizon: *'three years is also a very long time for an 18-year-old'* (careers adviser in a feeder institution to a large-scale provider). However, for some people, having the flexibility to study and complete their studies at their own pace and in their own time frame can be a benefit (see Chapter 10).

The **surveys of young potential HE students** found that the most commonly cited disadvantage, mentioned by almost all respondents, was that part-time study takes longer, perhaps too long. The longer time period spent studying could mean it had the potential to become boring, and was seen by a few respondents as wasting time. It was often perceived to be more expensive than full-time study because of the extended period of

study involved (i.e. a greater number of years of fees to pay), and a few respondents mentioned the lack of financial support for part-time study. There were also concerns that studying over a long period could be difficult. Various difficulties were cited: the periods between assessments may be longer and therefore it could be difficult to retain the learning; students' responsibilities and circumstances may change and so they may not be able to continue with their studies; and maintaining their commitment and interest over several years would require good time-management skills and self-motivation.

'Takes longer to gain the qualification, could end up spending more money in the long-term. Might get a few years down the line and decide that it's taking too long.'

[Young potential HE student]

'It takes longer so you can't earn as quickly. Forget things before exams. Outdated qualification as the start of course was so long ago.'

[Young potential HE student]

'It might hinder their ability to develop a coherent understanding of their subject. The person may become frustrated if they feel that progress is sluggish.'

[Young potential HE student]

'Costs more if you are working before you start, you may have to take a cut in hours and therefore pay.'

[Young potential HE student]

'You might lose interest as it won't be as intense as full-time. You might make friends with people that are doing full-time and then they might leave and you will have another couple of years.'

[Young potential HE student]

Again, these views are reflected in the **follow-up interviews**. The main disadvantage noted, echoing that identified in the survey, was that it takes too long. Interviewees spoke of wanting to get study over quickly to reduce the cost and to be able to get out into the labour market as quickly as possible.

'It takes longer to get the qualification. If you were studying medicine part-time you'd be about 40 before you could actually get a job.'

[Young potential HE student]

It will delay labour market entry

The notion of a longer period of study, coupled with the perception that it is better to study and then get a job (rather than combine the two), leads young people to perceive that part-time study would delay their entry to the labour market. Feedback from staff in the **case**

studies was that students have a perception that a full-time degree is a fast-track entry route to a good career. They noted how potential students see a degree (or HE study) as providing them with a way to leapfrog into a career, overtaking those who entered a company with a lower-level qualification and have been working their way up. They also feel that as full-time students they can overtake those who study for HE qualifications while working. In their experience, students have a strong belief (rightly or wrongly) that employers favour graduates, rather than non-graduates with work experience, and that employers regard part-time students rather negatively. Our interviews with employers would suggest that this is not necessarily the case. Employers may instead prefer part-time study as a learning model, and can be critical of the lack of work-readiness of full-time graduates (see Chapter 7).

It is interesting to note the potential incongruity here, as many full-time students do undertake paid work and are prepared to do so while studying. This is an issue of identity of the individual and the value attached to the work. Students are making a distinction between the type of work that it is acceptable to do while studying: a short-term job with part-time hours that they have no real long-term commitment to; and the type of work they aspire to achieve at the end of their studies – essentially a career job offering development opportunities, progression and a good salary, one that is suitable for a graduate. Students are also firmly identifying themselves as students (students who perhaps may work) rather than workers (who study).

It would appear then that part-time study is not regarded as a potential career entry strategy. The option to work in a career job and learn may, therefore, be overlooked or dismissed, or need attention to counter false perceptions about its utility in the labour market. Indeed, feedback from one case study (a large-scale provider) is that, although students increasingly want links with real work and employers on their HE courses, and want a vocational aspect to their studies (importance of ‘employability’), part-time study is perhaps a step too far. It was noted by a careers adviser in a feeder institution linked to a case study (limited provider) that he found it difficult to provide evidence of the quality of outcomes for part-time students to enable him to counter young people’s perceptions. Recent research identified in the **literature review** (Callender and Wilkinson, 2011) does, however, indicate that part-time students up to three and a half years after graduation still enjoy a greater graduate premium than that of full-time graduates (although this covers all graduates of all ages).

11.1.4 Part-time study is hard to maintain

In the **surveys of young potential HE students** often the challenges or disadvantages of part-time study identified were the opposites of the potential benefits. On the one hand, respondents acknowledged that studying part-time allows an individual time to devote to their other activities and commitments, but on the other balancing multiple responsibilities could be difficult and stressful.

‘Other commitments may mean that a part-time student cannot concentrate on their studies as much as a full-time student (e.g. if they have a job).’

[Young potential HE student]

'Can be more stressful as you have multiple things to focus on, not just your course (ie work).'

[Young potential HE student]

'Can't fully concentrate on course. Could get distracted. Too demanding on time when juggling different jobs/commitments.'

[Young potential HE student]

'You can't give your full attention to the course because other things may override the importance of university work.'

[Young potential HE student]

11.2 Overcoming individual barriers

As noted earlier (in Chapter 10), another indicator against which to gauge interest in part-time study is whether there are any factors that could encourage young people to consider studying part-time. In the **surveys of young potential HE students** we asked all respondents to indicate which, if any, of a given list of 11 factors might make them consider studying part-time rather than full-time. Another question, targeted at those planning to go on to HE, also explored the influence of costs on decisions. Part-time study was given as one of 13 potential cost-reduction strategies that individuals were asked if they had considered when making their HE decisions.

11.2.1 Part-time study as a way to reduce costs

Although the majority (92 per cent) of those planning to go to HE had considered at least one of a list of given actions/strategies because of concerns about the costs of studying, part-time study was rarely considered as a way of trying to reduce the impact of costs. Only three per cent of panel survey respondents planning to go on to HE and five per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents had considered a part-time course because of the costs of HE study (see Table 11.1). Those most prepared to consider part-time study as a way to reduce costs were female respondents (who generally considered more cost-cutting actions than males), older respondents, those from white backgrounds, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, or those who had studied in a FE college. These groups were more likely to be found in the Learner Panel.

Instead, individuals would consider working while studying full-time (either during term-time or more commonly during vacations; 41 per cent and 50 per cent respectively for panel survey respondents, and 39 and 49 per cent for Feeder Institution Survey respondents) – so they would be prepared to combine work with study but as a secondary activity (see discussion above). This reflects students' behaviour in FE, as over half had paid work while they were studying (58 per cent of panel survey respondents and 51 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents). Very few had a full-time job (four and two per cent) while studying at school or college (working on average 37 hours per week). A greater proportion had occasional paid work (13 and 11 per cent, working on average five hours a week) but the majority of those working while studying had a regular part-time job (working on average nine hours a week).

They would also consider studying a subject with good employment prospects (46 and 53 per cent), studying nearer to home (41 and 46 per cent) or studying in a location with a lower cost of living (41 and 49 per cent). Over one-third (34 and 41 per cent) would consider applying to university offering financial support and a smaller proportion (22 and 25 per cent) would consider studying at a university charging lower fees. There was less interest in considering a shorter course or vocational course, or taking time off before starting a course in order to save money (among panel survey respondents, respectively 10 per cent, 10 per cent and 17 per cent would consider these actions; the corresponding figures for the Feeder Institution Survey respondents were 10, 16 and 22 per cent). Respondents from the Feeder Institution Survey were more likely to consider each of the given cost reduction options. This may reflect their younger age, that they are earlier in the decision-making process about HE and that the majority will be making decisions about HE under the new funding regime.

Table 11.1: Actions considered due to the costs of HE

	Learner Panel	Future Panel	All panels		Feeder Institution Survey	
	%	%	N	%	N	%
Studying nearer my home	44	38	475	41	285	46
Course taking less time to complete (sub-degree or compressed degree)	10	9	108	10	60	10
Location with a lower cost of living	44	37	451	41	307	49
Deferring/taking a gap year to save up	17	17	188	17	139	22
Vocational course	11	8	107	10	98	16
An institution charging lower fees	26	18	242	22	156	25
An institution offering financial support	35	33	375	34	256	41
Part-time course	5	1	36	3	34	5
Course with a paid work placement	32	27	327	29	241	39
Subject with good employment prospects	44	49	516	46	329	53
Study full-time but work during holidays	48	51	552	50	304	49
Study full-time but work during term-time	42	40	452	41	246	39
Location with good employment opportunities	27	27	297	27	270	43
At least one of the given actions	94	91	1,025	92	594	95
None of the above	6	9	87	8	30	5
Base (N)	509	603	1,112	100	624	100

Note: Question was: ‘Thinking ONLY about the costs of studying for a qualification such as a degree, which, if any, of the following would you consider or have you considered?’

Note: Multiple response question.

Source: Young Learners’ Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011; and Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

The follow up interviews confirm that for many the financial aspects of HE were a concern but one that did not need them to make any alteration to the type of course (eg subject and mode) they planned to study – so part-time study was not really considered as a way to reduce their costs. Instead, some potential students were prepared to live at home to reduce living costs, and most planned to work in the evenings and during holiday periods to contribute towards costs. They also talked about saving up to study, changing their spending habits, and looking into alternative forms of support:

'I plan to shop wisely and get all the provisions and books and things I need before going. And get a part-time job when I'm there if I can get one.'

[Young potential HE student]

'I'm going to live like a student and eat cheap food that's no good for me.'

[Young potential HE student]

'Some universities, if you represent them in a sport, are willing to drop part of the fees. I practice karate so I am looking into this.'

[Young potential HE student]

However, it is worth noting here the reflections of current students in the **case studies**, both part-time and full-time, that the substantial increases in full-time fees to be introduced in 2012/13 may lead to more of them considering part-time study as a way to avoid building up debt (see Section 9.2). Also to note the conclusions of Callender and Wilkinson (2011) in their study of the impacts of part-time HE:

'It is impossible, as yet, to assess the impact of the reforms of student funding outlined in the White Paper on HE participation and the nature of part-time provision. It is possible that in the future part-time study will grow and become a more attractive alternative to full-time study. Some suggest that as a result of higher tuition fees from 2012/13, more school leavers may consider the option of working and studying part-time as a way to finance their studies. An influx of younger students would radically alter the current characteristics of the part-time undergraduate student population to which we now turn.' (p9)

11.2.2 Part-time study as a way to 'earn and learn' and build work experience

A range of other factors were explored in the **surveys of young potential HE students** to see what else, other than cost reduction, might encourage potential students to consider studying part-time rather than full-time. Most respondents felt that at least one of the factors could encourage them to consider studying part-time, but one in five felt that nothing would make them consider part-time study. Of those who might consider part-time, the most commonly cited aspects that could encourage them were being able to earn money while studying (56 per cent of panel survey respondents and 58 per cent of Feeder Institution Survey respondents) and building up work experience at the same time as studying (46 and 47 per cent) (see Table 11.2).

Almost half of respondents would consider part-time study if it was cheaper than studying full-time (44 and 45 per cent), and one-third of panel survey respondents would do so if they were sponsored by an employer (34 per cent; this had a lower influence for Feeder Institution Survey respondents with only 19 per cent citing this as an encouraging factor).

For many, being able to stay on in their current college or in their current job, stay close to home and friends and be able to spend time with (or care for) their family were not major factors that could encourage them to consider studying part-time. The patterns for the panel survey respondents were largely similar to those found among the Feeder Institution Survey respondents. However, it is interesting to note that Feeder Institution Survey respondents (who were younger, earlier on in their HE decision-making and likely to enter HE under the new funding regime) were more likely to be encouraged to consider part-time study through location and network factors: being able to live at home (19 per cent), being able to study closer to home (22 per cent) and staying close to friends (23 per cent).

Cost aspects appeared to be more likely to encourage female respondents to consider part-time study, if part-time study were cheaper or if they could earn money at the same time as studying. They were also more likely than males to consider part-time study if it meant they could build up work experience while studying or look after their family. Older students were relatively more likely to be encouraged if it was a cheaper option, they could stay on at their current college and/or their current job, live at home, or be able to look after their family. White students were more likely to be influenced by earning while learning, being able to build work experience or by employer sponsorship. There appeared to be little difference in the likely factors that could encourage part-time study among those from more and less advantaged backgrounds.

Table 11.2: Factors that could encourage PT study: I would consider studying part-time if...

	Learner Panel	Future Panel	All panels		Feeder Institution Survey	
	%	%	N	%	N	%
It was cheaper than studying full-time	48	41	536	44	356	45
It meant I could stay on at my current college	6	3	57	5	56	7
I could earn money at the same time as studying	59	53	684	56	463	58
I could study closer to home	18	10	174	14	171	22
It meant I could spend more time with my family	17	14	189	16	154	19
It meant I could stay close to my friends	19	14	204	17	184	23
I could build work experience at the same time	47	45	560	46	370	47
It meant I could stay in my current job	14	9	141	12	126	16
I was sponsored by an employer	32	36	413	34	147	19
I could live at home	14	6	126	10	147	19
I could study and continue looking after my family	6	4	58	8	41	5
At least one of the given factors	82	76	956	79	611	77

	Learner Panel	Future Panel	All panels		Feeder Institution Survey	
	%	%	N	%	N	%
Nothing would make me consider part-time study	18	24	258	21	185	23
Base (N)	602	612	1,214	100	796	100

Note: Question was: ‘Which of the following could make you consider studying part-time rather than full-time?’

Note: Multiple response question.

Source: Young Learners’ Attitudes Towards Higher Education Survey, IES, 2011; and Making Choices About Higher Education, survey of young learners in feeder institutions, IES, 2011

11.2.3 Part-time study as a tailored learning experience

Subject choice is one of the first decisions made by students about HE, so it is the course that will first attract a student. Institutions therefore need to ensure that they offer the subjects that potential students want. The way a part-time course is designed and delivered might also attract or discourage individuals.

The **follow-up interviews** provided an opportunity to explore with young potential HE students how they would design their own part-time course – in terms of where they would study, how long the course would be, how many hours’ study it would involve, when the learning would be delivered and how. Interviewees described a range of ideal designs but there were some consistent factors:

- It should not be too long – ideally the same number of years or only slightly longer than the full-time equivalent (FTE) (perhaps one extra year, and no more than five years study in total).
- There should be sufficient study hours – at least 10 hours’ contact time a week (up to maximum of about 20).
- It should be largely classroom-based (possibly with some degree of immersion or intense period of study).

Interviewees also appeared to prefer daytime delivery (when they would be most able to concentrate) or a combination of some daytime study and some evening study (that would allow them to work during the day) rather than studying at the weekends. There was no clear preference in terms of the best place to deliver part-time courses, with interviewees proposing university, college and the Open University. Overall, this suggests that a young part-time student might want a different type of part-time course to an older (traditional) part-time student.

11.3 Encouraging part-time study

The research suggests that to encourage young entrants to part-time study, institutions could consider undertaking a range of actions. To persuade young people of the value of part-time study, institutions need to offer them the right course, at the right price, that delivers the right experience and outcome. However, whether institutions would be able to do any of these, or are willing do so, is a different issue.

Get the course right: Institutions need to understand the potential market, what needs and expectations of these potential students are, and then design the curricula accordingly. Offering the subjects that people want to study is critical. Institutions also need to think about delivery. Young people want a part-time programme that is not too different to full-time study, particularly in terms of length.

Present the right images: Image is important. Young people think part-time study is for older people in career work and with families. In their marketing and outreach work, institutions should present images of, and give real examples of, young part-time students to counter the perceptions that part-time study is not for them.

Sell the employment benefits: Institutions (and indeed the wider sector) should promote the employability benefits of part-time study, in particular demonstrate the positive career outcomes of part-time study, highlight positive employer perceptions of the work-based learning route, and, if possible, help students to gain quality work to do alongside their studies. It is important to differentiate this type of work from the part-time work that full-time students do. Part-time study needs to be seen as a potential career entry strategy (not just a career progression strategy) that is on an equal footing with full-time study.

Make it cheaper: Part-time study should be made cheaper than full-time study (not just cheaper because a student can earn money through paid work while they are studying). Institutions then need to clarify the costs involved and show where and how part-time study is cheaper than full-time.

Clarify the offer: Individuals need to be made aware of what part-time study involves – how it works in practice. This is not just about how the course is delivered but also clarifying the commitment required from students (as young people have unrealistic expectations about the commitment required). Here institutions need to strike a delicate balance between showing that sufficient commitment is required to indicate that it is a quality learning experience (not the easy option for the academically less able) and not overwhelming students and putting them off part-time study. Institutions also need to stress the level of input and support that learners can expect from staff. This support should not only cover learning support but also support for students to help them to maintain their commitment and engagement with study over time and to manage their responsibilities. Young people acknowledge that part-time study requires good time-management skills and self-motivation.

Improve the experience: Young people want a social experience from their HE study, so institutions should provide part-time learners with a social environment (physical or virtual) to meet new people and develop a peer group of learners. This could involve a period of residential study that would provide part-time students with the opportunity to immerse themselves in their studies and to get away from home (at least for a short period of time).

Make it valued and visible: Arguably the most critical action is to present part-time study as a viable and valuable option for HE study, but this will require a substantial cultural shift. This is not just an action for individual institutions to take forward, but if this is an important policy for government, it needs to be undertaken across the education sector – in the schools and in the FE and HE sectors. Young people need to be informed about part-time study early on in their school life, as HE decisions tend to be made early, and teachers, careers advisers and parents also need to be made aware of part-time study. The main

hurdle to expanding demand for part-time study among young people is the dominance of the full-time model of HE participation, followed by the negative (deficit) image of part-time study. This will be extremely difficult to tackle and will take time to erode, so any movement towards part-time study is likely to be slow and small-scale.

The **review of literature** found that existing research similarly concluded that demand among young people for part-time HE would be contingent on building and improving the student experience for part-time undergraduates, providing courses with a vocational relevance, increasing awareness of part-time options, and demonstrating the value of part-time study in higher education for young people (MORI, 2005). However, undertaking this to increase demand for part-time opportunities from young entrants would be challenging and also require a shift in the way that young people think about HE and the student experience (HECSU, 2010).

12 The Part-time Experience

Key points

- Part-time students are largely satisfied with their HE experience; 87 per cent are satisfied with the overall quality of their course and appear to be more satisfied than full-time students. They have higher satisfaction ratings on many of the aspects measured in the National Student Survey (NSS) including access to advice, support, and teaching staff; and experience of course administration and institution communication. They are perhaps less satisfied than full-time students with access to resources (e.g. library, IT and specialist equipment). It could be argued that the NSS is too crude a measure to be able to accurately compare the satisfaction of full- and part-time students.
- Part-time students appear less successful in their studies. A direct comparison between those studying full- and part-time for a first degree suggests that those studying part-time are more likely to get a lower classification of degree than their full-time counterparts. Multivariate analysis indicates that – controlling for other personal, study and institutional characteristics – part-time students have a 15 per cent reduced probability of obtaining an upper second class/first class degree. Many other unobserved factors could be at work, so better data would be required in order to estimate an unbiased part-time effect on educational achievements.
- Part-time students achieve better labour market outcomes. They are more likely than their full-time peers to be in paid full-time work, in stable employment (ie permanent or long-term contracts), in high-level occupations, and to earn higher salaries. This premium continues for at least several years, but salaries of part-time graduates grow at a slower pace than found for full-time graduates.
- The favourable labour market outcomes of part-time graduates are maintained even when focusing on young (aged 18 to 24) part-time graduates, at least in the short term (up to six months after graduating). This is contrary to the perceptions of potential HE students, who believe that employers do not value part-time study, and full-time study is the best career entry strategy. However, further work may be needed to explore the longer-term outcomes of young part-time graduates as there is currently no evidence that points to the sustainability of these better outcomes.
- Institutions are developing their support provision. Much of this has been driven by the needs of full-time and international students, but part-time students are often the indirect beneficiaries of these developments. There are indications that institutions need to do more, as part-time students rarely make use of centrally provided student support. This suggests that either the services are not applicable to part-time students (they may need something else) or that they are not accessible to part-time students (they may need extended opening hours or virtual access).
- Part-time students have different support needs from full-time students. They need flexible learning delivery and so also flexible assessment. They need online support as they are less likely to be on campus. They need consistency and clear

communication in order to fit study around their other commitments. They need educational guidance to build their study programmes, and they need peer support – a group of individuals to share their experiences with.

In this chapter we explore what it is like to study part-time, and contrast the HE experience of part-time students with that of full-time students, and that expected for full-time study. We look at potential statistical indicators of the quality of the part-time experience, in terms of satisfaction and outcomes. We then turn to the needs of part-time students and the range of actions institutions could take to support part-time students and enhance the part-time student experience.

12.1 What is it like to study part-time?

'[University is an] invaluable second chance... I chose not to go to university at a conventional age. I didn't know what I wanted to study and I didn't know where I wanted to go. All my friends went off to university and I didn't and I thought perhaps one day I will do a degree and it has happened. I am nearly there at the end of the tunnel. I am enjoying it and will be sad when it is finished but I will be pleased when it is finished. The fact that it is there and affordable and the fact that it is a supportive atmosphere.'

[Part-time student, large-scale provider]

12.1.1 The part-time experience can be varied

As noted above, the **surveys of young potential HE students** found there was a strong belief that part-time students would not enjoy the full experience of being at university. Part-time students were thought to have less time to socialise and so would be less able to meet new people, make friends and study with others; and would have less contact time with tutors and less support from teaching staff.

Feedback from the **case studies** suggests that the HE experience of part-time students is indeed a very different one to that enjoyed by full-time students. This can be affected by an individual's circumstances. Part-time students indicated that studying part-time is a positive experience and a satisfying one but is hard-work and so definitely not an easy option. Students spoke about how it was hard to find time for independent study, and most had experienced tension or conflict between studying and their other commitments. They did not feel able to study during work hours and found it difficult to study during evenings and weekends due to family responsibilities. Some felt that, due to the additional pressures and responsibilities in their lives, studying part-time was harder than studying full-time, requiring skills in time-management and self-motivation and necessitating some degree of compromise.

'It is exceptionally challenging to combine work, study and family life, and I feel torn between my responsibilities. Many full-time students don't have any other commitments and I am quite envious of them.'

[Part-time student, small-scale provider]

'Part-time study is more challenging, it is a hard slog. You get home after doing nine to five at work and you have your tea and sit down and then you to get onto your studies – who wants to study after that? I have to be more motivated, dedicated and have better time management to juggle all my responsibilities.'

[Part-time student, small-scale provider]

'They are trying to cram a lot of information into the five hours of teaching time. It sometimes feels as if they are rushing things. I wonder whether full-time courses might feel less pressured and intense.'

[Part-time student, small-scale provider]

The **literature review** also found evidence that the student experience can be affected by the relatively more complicated individual and family circumstances of part-time students when compared with full-time students, including their financial and social circumstances. The support of family and friends was found to be important in the part-time learner experience as collective effort is required by families to support a part-time learner, including ensuring they have time to study, money for course fees, childcare, proof-reading assignments, study support, and providing a workspace in the home (Callender and Feldman, 2009). Part-time students often have conflicting demands on their time, and they report that a challenge they face is a lack of time (Callender et al., 2006).

Institutional impact on the part-time experience

Case study feedback also indicates that the HE experience of part-time students can be affected by the actions and culture of the institution. Indeed, the experience can vary between and within institutions depending on how (model of delivery) and where (on the main campus, on satellite campuses or in partner FE colleges) courses are delivered, and the institutions' approach to part-time study (and essentially the value and importance they place on this aspect of their provision). Students experiencing an infill model of part-time study, sitting alongside full-time students, will have a different experience to those on dedicated bespoke part-time courses.

The nature and level of support provided to part-time students can also greatly influence the HE experience. Part-time students were often very positive about their study institutions. Some were praised for being well organised and having well-structured courses, for the flexible and personalised delivery, and for the accessibility of tutors and other personal support. This indicates the aspects of the experience that are important to part-time students. As noted by one student:

'My tutor is really good and happy to listen and help. The library is good, there is always someone there to help. There aren't enough books but there are some provisions to help. You can phone or email to reserve a book so that it is there when you next come in'

[Part-time student, small-scale provider]

In one case study (a large-scale provider), part-time students reported how they felt very supported. As a small group they felt special, and had more support than perhaps full-time

students. However, part-time students also had some criticisms about part-time study and about the support provided by their institutions. For example, in another case study (similarly a large-scale provider with a large part-time student body spread across subject disciplines), the part-time students in one of the departments felt unsupported, and the support they did receive was disorganised and ill-considered. They gave as an example the way in which the induction process that covered how to use the virtual learning environment (VLE) took place some time after they actually needed to use it. Indeed, the importance of getting a good start was mentioned by several part-time students – in terms of the application and induction process, and in terms of familiarising themselves with the study environment and process – and how this had not always gone smoothly. Some part-time students found the application process daunting and others felt there had been a lack of information about initial registration and induction. Others spoke about finding it difficult to get back into study, and they noted how institutions can often assume that students have relevant background or introductory knowledge and study skills but this may not be case.

Other criticisms focused on access to resources. Here part-time students talked about having limited time to see their tutors, to use the library or use other facilities as they are on campus for only a short period of time. Some part-time students also found the experience somewhat isolating, particularly if they were on the in-fill model of provision or were distance learners. For example, in one case study (a limited provider), part-time students spoke of how they felt isolated and different from the rest of the students at the university, largely because they were on a different computer system but also because they had no access to support outside of normal term-time working hours (ie Monday to Friday, 9 am to 6 pm). These students wanted more opportunities to interact with other part-time learners but also with full-time students.

The **review of research literature** also found evidence that institutions could affect the part-time student experience, in particular through their delivery model. A survey of over 2,800 part-time students in 11 post-1992 universities found that where the delivery model combined teaching full- and part-time students in the same setting (the infill model), part-time students felt that insufficient attention was given to their needs in the way the programme was implemented. Examples included the length of time between assignments being announced and the delivery deadline, availability to participate in group discussions and not being given a long enough lead-in time for the provision of information (Yorke and Longdon, 2008).

This is supported by Linacre and Kinnear's (2009) study of part-time HE students in FECs. They found part-time students working alongside full-time students reported that there were times when they did not receive crucial information as it was distributed when they were not attending. Part-time students in FECs also discussed how their access to some college services was limited by the opening hours, but overall they were generally positive about their courses and felt well-supported by tutors.

Other research, using the National Student Survey (NSS), found differences in the student experience depending on their place of learning. Students at FECs were found to be relatively more positive about assessment and feedback and less positive about their access to learning resources (SurrIDGE, 2008). FECs have been noted as providing more face-to-face contact for their foundation degree students than HEIs (Harvey, 2009; 157 Group, 2010), which may explain this difference.

12.1.2 But it can be satisfying

Feedback from the **case studies** suggests that, despite the challenges in juggling work, family and study commitments, part-time students were finding their studies rewarding. They felt that they were learning and developing a range of knowledge and skills, some of which were unexpected. For example, they spoke about: *'making my brain tick a little more'*, *'[gaining] greater political awareness and interest in politics'* and about how *'HE opens your mind and makes you think differently. I already question things more'*. They particularly enjoyed meeting and mixing with other highly motivated people and there was a general feeling that part-time students are more motivated or keen than full-time students:

'Everybody that goes to university straight after school does have a bit of a devil may care attitude. Whereas all of us here are working so we appreciate it, there is a lot more commitment here...everyone's got a vested interest to make it succeed.'

[Part-time student, large-scale provider]

'The part-time group more quickly sets about work because we don't have the luxury of time.'

[Part-time student, small-scale provider]

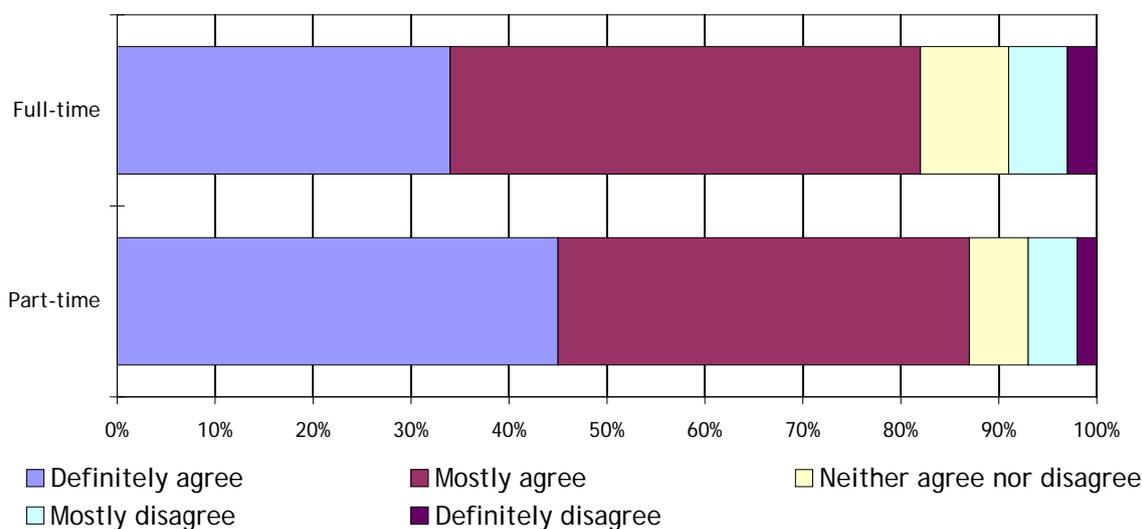
We can use the NSS to quantify satisfaction and compare the satisfaction of full- and part-time students. This large-scale online survey has been running for seven years and asks final-year students about their experiences and opinions of studying at HE institutions. The findings are used by prospective students and their advisers when deciding where to study and by institutions to enhance the student learning experience.

The findings from the **analysis of the NSS data** for 2009⁷¹ show that, overall, part-time students are marginally more satisfied with their HE experience than full-time students.⁷² When looking at feedback on the satisfaction with the quality of their course, 87 per cent of part-time students either 'definitely' or 'mostly' agreed that they were satisfied, compared with 82 per cent of full-time students (45 per cent of part-time students definitely agreed compared with 34 per cent) (see Figure 12.1).

⁷¹ For final-year students on first degree and other undergraduate programmes, using aggregated HEI-level data.

⁷² The analysis includes feedback from Open University students.

Figure 12.1: NSS student feedback (2009) 'Overall satisfied with quality of the course' (by mode of study) (per cent)

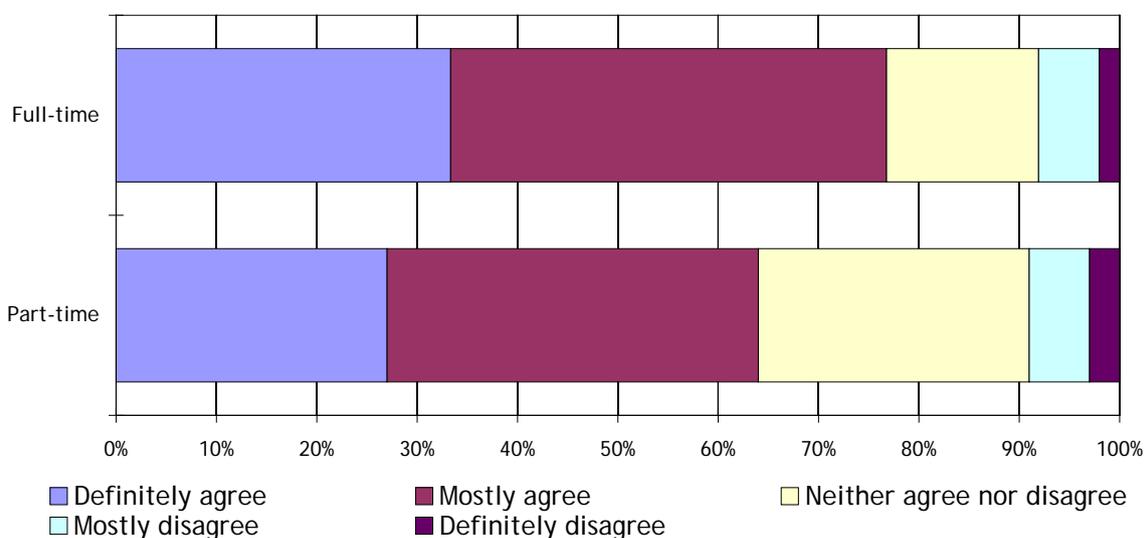


Source: NSS, totals calculated by IES based on JACS level 1 data, bases: FT = 224,909, PT = 13,565

Other questions in NSS which highlighted possible differences between part- and full-time students included satisfaction with advice and support provided with studies, being able to contact staff when needed, good advice available when needed, timetabling working efficiently, changes in course or teaching communicated effectively, and the organisation and smooth running of the course. The feedback shows that part-time students are more satisfied in these areas than their full-time counterparts (although the differences are not great).

However, there are some areas in which part-time students are less satisfied (or perhaps less concerned) and these relate to access to resources. Although generally satisfied, part-time students are marginally less likely than full-time students to agree that library resources and services are good enough, or that they are able to access IT when needed. Considerably fewer part-time students than full-time students agreed that they were able to access specialised equipment, facilities or rooms when needed (see Figure 12.2). However, it is worth noting that over a quarter of part-time students neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement, indicating that for many this was not a concern. This pattern may be influenced by Open University (OU) students who, in the main, study at a distance rather than on campus.

Figure 12.2: NSS student feedback (2009) 'Able to access specialised equipment, facilities or rooms when needed' (by FT/PT) (per cent)



Source: NSS, totals calculated by IES based on JACS level 1 data, bases: FT = 209,383, PT = 9,098

Other research using the NSS also suggests that part-time students are generally more satisfied than full-time students, although the authors note that the rate of increase in satisfaction has been slower than for full-time students (SurrIDGE, 2008).

A cautionary note

It could be argued, however, that the NSS is perhaps a weak source or too crude a measure to explore difference in the experiences of part- and full-time students. First, there may be a selection bias in the results which is likely to particularly affect part-time students. As noted earlier, a challenge or disadvantage with part-time study is that it can be difficult to maintain commitment to study over the longer time period involved, given the complexities and competing responsibilities of part-time students' lives. Part-time students are, therefore, less likely to continue to the final year of their course than full-time students and this is the year in which they are surveyed. This means that the part-time students who remain on their courses and so are included in the survey are arguably those who have been most satisfied with their experiences. The NSS fails to capture the opinions of those who leave their courses. Second, the part-time student cohort will be dominated by the OU, which accounts for over one-third of all part-time students, so one institution may be skewing the results (which would not happen for the full-time cohort). The OU is consistently one of highest scoring institutions in the NSS. Third, the demographics, motivations and expectations of part-time students vary from those of full-time students (and are not captured by the survey) and these may affect the comparability of results for the two groups.

12.2 What are the outcomes of part-time study?

We can also look at the quality of the HE experience in terms of the outcomes achieved. There are three measures or indicators that we can explore: completion of study (or

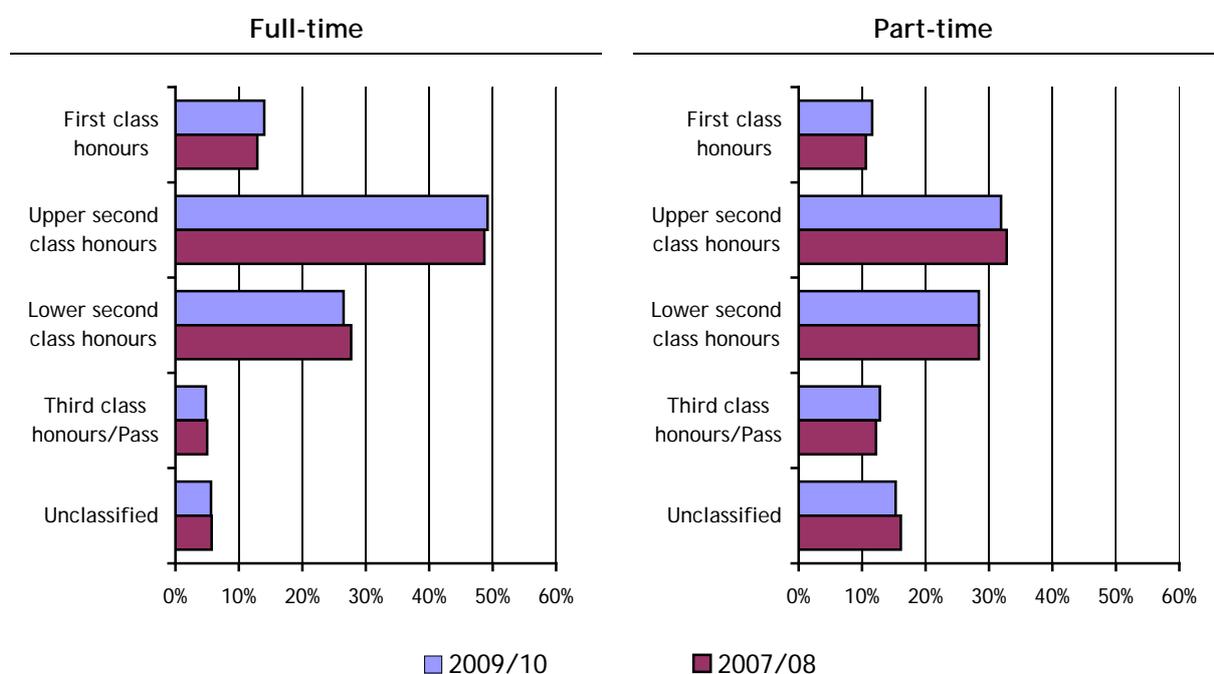
retention); achievement of a qualification (and, where appropriate, the classification of the award achieved); and destination after completion of the course, particularly the quality of employment achieved. These aspects are captured in national data sources. Institutions may also do their own monitoring, or use the national statistics to better understand the outcomes for their part-time students, which may be driven by student expectations. Students themselves are placing increasing focus on the employment outcomes of HE study, and with the planned increases in tuition fees and the proposed Key Information Set (KIS) which will make data on the outcomes for different courses and institutions more accessible and comparable, this will only increase.

12.2.1 Retention and achievement

An **analysis of national data** on student outcomes shows that in keeping with the pattern of study aims, those who study part-time are much more likely to qualify with a sub-degree (or other undergraduate) qualification rather than a first degree. Those who study full-time are much more likely to qualify with a first degree.

A direct comparison between those studying full- and part-time for a first degree suggests that those studying part-time are more likely to get a lower classification of degree than their full-time counterparts. Almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of those studying full-time receive either a first class honours degree or upper second-class honours degree, while 43 per cent of those studying part-time receive first degrees with these classifications. This pattern remains unchanged between 2007/08 and 2009/10 (see Figure 12.3).

Figure 12.3: Degree classification of UK undergraduate qualifiers by mode (first degree qualifiers only, for 2007/08 and 2009/10)(per cent)



Source: HESA Student Record 2007/08 and 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

It is important to understand that there are multiple factors that may affect attainment and may therefore be driving this apparent pattern of differential achievement of full- and part-time students.

To try to explore this a little further, we used multivariate analysis to estimate a model to explore the effect of part-time studies on educational achievement (in this case the probability of achieving an upper second class/first class award or other – the dependent variable). We used a binary probit model, and limited the analysis to qualifiers with a first degree only⁷³. A range of potential explanatory factors (independent variables) were entered into the model⁷⁴. These included age and qualifications on entry (as bivariate analysis indicates these are likely to affect degree class), and also subject studied and institution type (based on mission group).

A number of other important characteristics that could have an effect on achievement could not be accounted for as we have no data for these, such as unobservable ability, family characteristics and complementary financial resources. Similarly, we cannot sufficiently control for selection bias – potential non-completion before graduation or mode changes of weak full-time students to part-time (eg as module retrievers), who then eventually graduate with lower achievement from part-time studies. Therefore the models explaining the award class lack total explanatory power, which is indicated by the relatively low Psuedo-R2.

Our final model estimates the effects of the independent variables (including mode of study) and shows these as marginal effects on probabilities – essentially the increase or decrease in probability of obtaining an upper second class/first class honours degree relative to the base category. The model indicates that, controlling for other personal characteristics and the subject and place of the course, part-time students have a 15 per cent reduced probability of obtaining an upper second class/first class degree (see Table 12.1). However, as noted above, better data would be required in order to estimate an unbiased part-time effect on educational achievements, controlling for important characteristics – particularly mode changes of weak full-time students to part-time as module retrievers (which is endogenous).

⁷³ This could be estimated in principle as an ordered Probit model across all award classes, but it was decided to restrict the analysis to the probability of achieving an upper second class honours or better in the first degree. The choice of the particular link function of the Probit model (instead of a logistic model) resulted from the higher share of correct predictions of the Probit models and identical explanatory power relative to the Logit model.

⁷⁴ The specific choice of the model, eg with respect to the independent variables, resulted from tests on the joint significance of parameter estimates for the included independent variables with usual Wald-Tests/X2 tests. X2 tests indicate that the variables chosen have explanatory power.

Table 12.1: Part-time effect on upper second class or better qualification (first degree qualifiers, only 2009/10)

	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P>z
Full-time/part-time (left-out: full-time)				
Part-time	-0.146	0.004	-36.620	0.000
Gender (left-out: male)				
Female	0.060	0.002	28.780	0.000
Ethnic group (left-out: white or unknown)				
Asian	-0.167	0.004	-47.570	0.000
Black	-0.260	0.005	-56.520	0.000
Other (including mixed)	-0.086	0.005	-16.150	0.000
Disability (left-out: no known disability or unknown)				
Disabled	-0.053	0.003	-16.240	0.000
Age (left-out: under 20)				
20 to under 23	0.141	0.016	8.930	0.000
23 to under 25	0.066	0.015	4.360	0.000
25+	0.157	0.014	11.060	0.000
Entry qualification (left-out: GCE A level, SQA Highers & equiv, Access, GCSE/O level, SQA)				
Postgraduate and PGCE	0.022	0.012	1.870	0.061
First degree, other graduate, HE credits, other HE and professional	-0.028	0.003	-8.590	0.000
Other and no formal qualifications	-0.015	0.005	-3.180	0.001
Low participation area (left-out: not from low participation area)				
Low participation area	-0.052	0.003	-16.100	0.000
Subject area (left-out: Business and Administrative Studies)				
Medicine/Dentistry	-0.562	0.003	-207.740	0.000
Subjects Allied to Medicine	-0.071	0.004	-16.380	0.000
Biological Sciences	-0.038	0.004	-9.110	0.000
Veterinary Sciences/Agriculture	-0.223	0.010	-22.440	0.000
Physical Sciences	-0.061	0.006	-10.900	0.000
Mathematical/Computer Sciences	-0.042	0.005	-8.410	0.000
Engineering	0.017	0.005	3.080	0.002
Technologies	-0.003	0.011	-0.240	0.811
Architecture/Building and Planning	0.013	0.006	2.210	0.027
Social Studies	-0.030	0.004	-7.110	0.000
Law	-0.046	0.005	-8.680	0.000
Mass Comm./Documentation	0.028	0.006	4.580	0.000

	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P>z
Linguistics/Classics	0.075	0.005	14.120	0.000
European Languages/Literature	0.029	0.008	3.490	0.000
Other Languages	0.017	0.016	1.050	0.294
Historical and Philosophical Studies	0.061	0.005	12.050	0.000
Creative Arts and Design	0.030	0.004	7.570	0.000
Education	-0.055	0.005	-10.620	0.000
Combined/Unspecified	-0.408	0.008	-54.190	0.000
Mission group (left-out: Universities Alliance)				
No mission group	-0.010	0.003	-2.870	0.004
Million +	-0.076	0.003	-22.800	0.000
Members of Guild HE	-0.067	0.005	-12.410	0.000
Russell Group	0.165	0.003	56.200	0.000
1994 Group	0.127	0.003	37.390	0.000
Region of HEI (left-out: South East)				
North East	0.006	0.005	1.180	0.236
North West	-0.028	0.004	-6.810	0.000
Yorkshire and The Humber	-0.020	0.004	-4.750	0.000
East Midlands	-0.017	0.005	-3.650	0.000
West Midlands	0.046	0.005	10.160	0.000
East of England	0.014	0.005	2.750	0.006
London	0.068	0.004	17.620	0.000
South West	0.043	0.005	9.640	0.000
Wales	-0.074	0.005	-14.590	0.000
Scotland	-0.127	0.004	-28.260	0.000
Northern Ireland	-0.026	0.007	-3.880	0.000
Institution (left-out: OU)				
Open University	-0.032	0.008	-3.890	0.000
Number of observations	289,795.000			
LR chi2(48)	37,825.320			
Prob > chi2	0.000			
Pseudo R2	0.097			
Log likelihood	-176,310.54			

Source: HESA Student Record 2009/10, IES analysis 2011

The wider **research literature** also notes that it is difficult to compare the retention and achievement of part-time to full-time students because the flexibility offered by part-time provision means that completion may be deferred and/or take a long period of time (NAO, 2007; Boorman et al., 2006). Indeed, part-time students may have different study intentions and not set out to complete a whole qualification (Williams, 2010; HEFCE, 2009).

This research tends to focus on retention rather than achievement, and indicates that retention and progression rates for part-time students are typically lower than for full-time students, across a range of qualifications (Boorman et al., 2006; Harvey, 2009). A full-time student is more likely to continue into a second year of a course than a part-time student (77 per cent compared with 62 per cent). This may be explained by the different characteristics of part-time students, for example they tend to come from lower socio-economic groups, rather than be a reflection of the part-time mode of delivery (Williams, 2010). Retention rates also vary by institution: 48 per cent to 94 per cent of part-time students were retained between their first and second year of study, depending on the institution. Those part-time students registered with a HEI for a course which is taught through a FEC are more likely to continue than those in HEIs (the opposite is true for full-time students) (NAO, 2007).

A recent HEFCE (2009) study explored the completion rates of a cohort of part-time students who began their study in 1996/97. It found that the first degree completion rates varied substantially according to a student's intensity of study in the first year of their programme: the higher the intensity of study the greater the completion rate. It found that a key rate of study was 30 per cent of the programme of a full-time student per year, as students with this workload or more were more likely to complete the qualification within seven academic years: 22 per cent of students studying below 30 per cent completed, compared with 48 per cent of students studying at 30 per cent or higher. Increasing the rate of study during the lifetime of a course was found to affect completion rates. For part-time students who were studying at a high intensity in the first year, moving to a full-time degree programme was associated with a higher level of completion (74 per cent completed their degree). Rather than reflecting the mode of study, this difference could be attributed to student motivation and personal circumstances. It is not simply accelerating the rate of study that increases completion rates; the same study also found that part-time students who took a break in their study were more likely to complete than those that did not (81 per cent compared with 55 per cent).

This evidence has led to different recommendations to increase the retention and achievement of part-time students.

- First, the retention of part-time students should be monitored and measured. The difficulties in measuring the retention and achievement of part-time students have meant that generally HEIs struggle to gather meaningful data. Williams (2010) recommends that institutions collect the learning aims of part-time students at the outset of their study as a basis against which to benchmark retention and achievement. Williams also notes that this was rarely done in the Welsh institutions that took part in that study.
- Second, HECSU (2010) suggest that HEIs should try to concentrate on part-time provision that is studied at 50 per cent or more of full-time provision (ie 60 or more credits a year) as the retention and completion rate is likely to be higher.
- Third, the NAO (2007) review of student retention concluded that institutions could increase retention by getting to know their students and how they feel about their particular course, and developing a positive approach towards retention. They could do this by, for example, reviewing management information, having a strategic

commitment to retention, ensuring there is a commitment from students, and providing support such as tutoring and specialist support.

12.2.2 Destinations (labour market outcomes)

National data can be analysed to explore the destinations of those who had studied part-time at undergraduate level (termed part-time graduates) in terms of employment and further study or training, and compare them to outcomes achieved by those who had studied full-time at undergraduate level (termed full-time graduates). Destinations data is collected annually by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for UK- and other EU-domiciled students who qualified from a UK HE institution, at a point approximately six months after completion. The latest data available (aggregate) focuses on those graduating in the academic year 2008/09, capturing their outcomes in January 2010.

Analysis of the national data shows that part-time students achieve better labour market outcomes. They are more likely than their full-time peers to be in paid full-time work, in stable employment (i.e. permanent or long-term contracts), in high-level occupations and to earn higher salaries. Recent research using longitudinal data suggests that this premium continues for at least several years, but salaries of part-time graduates grow at a slower pace than found for full-time graduates.

First degree employment destinations

If we focus on UK-domiciled individuals who have studied at first degree level, we find that the destinations differ for part-time graduates compared with full-time graduates, and arguably part-time students have better labour market outcomes which is perhaps understandable given their employment status while studying and their greater age (see Section 12.2.3 for an analysis of the outcomes of young part-time graduates). The most common destinations or outcomes for both full-time and part-time graduates are full-time paid work (including self employment), followed by further study and then part-time work. The vast majority of graduates (full- and part-time) remained in the UK after their studies.

The key differences in short-term outcomes (six months after graduating) in terms of employment were that part-time graduates were more likely than full-time graduates to gain full-time paid employment (54 per cent compared with 47 per cent), and were correspondingly less likely to be unemployed (six per cent compared with 10 per cent) (see Table 12.2). Of those in work, part-time graduates were more likely than full-time graduates to be working full-time, and less likely to be working part-time. Part-time graduates were also relatively more likely to be in a permanent job or on a longer fixed-term contract (84 per cent compared with 70 per cent of full-time graduates) rather than in temporary employment (four per cent compared with 16 per cent of full-time graduates). Finally, a greater proportion of part-time graduates were in higher-level occupations⁷⁵ (78 per cent compared with 62 per cent of full-time graduates). Conversely, part-time graduates were much less likely than full-time graduates to go into sales-related or elementary occupations.

⁷⁵ Higher-level occupations are often regarded as those in the top three Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC) of managers and senior officials, professional occupations, and associate professional and technical occupations.

The key differences in terms of further study were that, overall, part-time graduates were less likely to continue with further study than full-time graduates. Where part-time graduates did go on to continue their studies, they were considerably more likely to combine this study with work rather than to focus on further study alone (14 per cent combined further study with work and six per cent were in further study only, compared with eight per cent and 17 per cent respectively for full-time graduates). Of those continuing with their studies, part-time graduates were relatively less likely to go on to a higher degree programme (either research or taught), but were instead more likely to study for another first degree, any other diploma or certificate (below first degree level) or any other qualification. They were also relatively more likely than full-time graduates to study a course that does not result in a qualification.

Table 12.2: Destination activity by mode of study (UK-domiciled first degree undergraduates only, 2008/09) (per cent)

	Overall	Full-time	Part-time
Full-time paid work only (incl. self-employed)	48	47	54
Part-time paid work only	12	12	11
Voluntary/unpaid work only	2	2	1
Work & further study	8	8	14
Further study only	16	17	6
Assumed to be unemployed	9	10	6
Not available for employment	4	4	5
Other	1	1	2
Base (N)	217,350	195,935	21,415

Note: Bases may be different due to rounding. Numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest multiple of 5.

Source: Adapted from HESA, *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Institutions, 2008/09*

Other undergraduate employment destinations

Focusing on UK-domiciled individuals who graduated from other undergraduate programmes – such as Diplomas and Certificates of HE, foundation degrees, HNDs and HNCs – we again find that destinations differ for part-time graduates compared with full-time graduates. The patterns here closely follow those found for first degree graduates, in that part-time graduates are relatively more likely than full-time graduates six months after graduating to be in full-time paid work (50 per cent compared with 44 per cent) (see Table 12.3), in stable work (permanent or long-term fixed contract, 83 per cent compared with 76 per cent), and in higher-level occupations (81 per cent compared with 77 per cent).

A key difference of note, however, for part-time other undergraduates is the marked tendency to continue with part-time study, which perhaps suggests a preference among part-time students to build programmes over time. Part-time graduates from other undergraduate programmes were considerably more likely to be in further study six months on than part-time graduates from first degree programmes. Indeed, over one-third (35 per cent) of part-time graduates from other undergraduate programmes go on to further study, generally combined with work, compared with 20 per cent of part-time graduates from first degree programmes (see Tables 12.2 and 12.3).

Table 12.3: Destination activity by mode of study (UK-domiciled other undergraduates only, 2008/09) (per cent)

	Overall	Full-time	Part-time
Full-time paid work only (incl. self-employed)	47	44	50
Part-time paid work only	9	8	9
Voluntary/unpaid work only	0	0	1
Work & further study	17	12	25
Further study only	20	27	10
Assumed to be unemployed	4	5	2
Not available for employment	2	2	2
Other	1	1	1
Base (N)	48,305	28,925	19,380

Note: Bases may be different due to rounding. Numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest multiple of 5.

Source: Adapted from HESA, Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Institutions, 2008/09

Generally, the further study destinations of full-time graduates from other undergraduate courses differ considerably to those found for graduates from first degree programmes (the latter most commonly go on to study higher degrees). Those from other undergraduate programmes going on to further study most commonly go on to top up their qualification to study for a first degree, but the study destinations of part-time graduates are more varied: 58 per cent move on to study for a first degree, 16 per cent go on to postgraduate level study, and 13 per cent move on to study for other diplomas or certificates (see Table 12.4).

Table 12.4: Study destinations by mode and level of study (UK-domiciled graduates in further study only, 2008/09)(per cent)

	First degree			Other undergraduate		
	Overall	Full-time	Part-time	Overall	Full-time	Part-time
Higher degree (research)	8	9	2	1	1	1
Higher degree (taught)	38	38	29	6	4	8
Postgraduate diploma or certificate	22	22	21	4	3	7
First degree	5	4	10	71	78	58
Other diploma or certificate	5	4	9	8	6	13
Professional qualification	14	14	11	4	4	5
Other qualification	6	5	11	5	3	7
Not aiming for a qualification	4	3	6	1	1	2
Base (N)	52,665	48,290	4,375	18,150	11,410	6,740

Note: Bases may be different due to rounding. Numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest multiple of 5.

Source: Adapted from HESA, Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Institutions, 2008/09

Wider research recently published has undertaken a comprehensive exploration of the employment impacts of part-time study – looking not only at employment destinations and salaries six months after completion of studies but at outcomes three and a half years on (for those who graduated in 2004/05). This research (Callender and Wilkinson, 2011)

concluded that there were significant employment advantages to those who upgrade their qualification from below level 3 through part-time study relative to full-time study, and that the contribution to the economy of part-time graduates through their earnings exceeds that of full-time graduates. More specifically, this research identified that three and a half years after graduation, although employment rates are identical for full- and part-time graduates, part-time graduates are more likely than full-time graduates to be in permanent jobs, to be in high level occupations, and to work in the public sector, but they are also relatively more likely to be in part-time work. Part-time graduates (in full-time employment) three and a half years after completing their studies have higher average earnings than full-time graduates in full-time work, but part-time graduates are less likely to see their salaries increase and are more likely to see them stagnate in the first few years after graduating. The study also highlights the importance of employer support for part-time graduates, but only in the short term (six months after graduating). However, the authors sound a cautionary note:

'Part-time study allows for more flexible and diverse HE provision and for employees to combine studying with employment, but there is no evidence that it is particularly beneficial as an alternative to full-time study for young people.'

(Callender and Wilkinson, 2011, p5).

12.2.3 Destinations of young part-time graduates

Analysis of national destinations data for those graduating in the academic year 2008/09 shows the relative labour market outcomes of young part-time graduates (those aged 24 or below when they graduated) in January 2010, approximately six months after they graduated. A number of different comparisons are possible (see Tables 12.5 to 12.8).

Comparing young part-time graduates from first degree courses (N=4,040⁷⁶) with young part-time other undergraduate courses (N=3,560), we find that first degree graduates were relatively more likely to be in paid work – full-time or part-time (66 per cent compared with 46 per cent), considerably less likely to go on to further study (16 per cent compared with 48 per cent), and more likely to be assumed unemployed (11 per cent compared with four per cent). When focusing only on those in employment, those from other undergraduate programmes were more likely to be in full-time work and on permanent or long-term fixed contracts. Focusing only on those in further study, the vast majority of those from other undergraduate programmes went on to study towards a first degree (75 per cent), whereas key study destinations for those from first degree programmes were postgraduate level courses or professional qualifications (52 per cent and 15 per cent).

Comparing young part-time graduates from first degree courses (N=4,040) with the much larger group of young full-time graduates from first degree courses (167,350), we find part-time graduates were marginally more likely to be in paid work – full or part-time work (66 per cent compared with 58 per cent), there were similar levels of unemployment (11 per cent and nine per cent), but part-time graduates were less likely to go on to further study (16 per cent compared with 25 per cent). Among those in work, part-time graduates were more likely to be in permanent work or on longer-term contracts (76 per cent compared

⁷⁶ Of known destination

with 69 per cent), and correspondingly less likely to be on a temporary contract (10 per cent compared with 17 per cent. Among those continuing with their studies, part-time graduates were less likely to progress to postgraduate level study (52 per cent compared with 69 per cent), and were more likely to move on to a level 4 qualification (eg first degree or other HE diploma or certificate, 21 per cent compared with eight per cent).

Comparing young part-time graduates from first degree courses (N=4,040) with the larger group of mature part-time graduates from first degree courses (N=17,370), we find a similar profile of employment outcomes. However, a smaller proportion of young graduates were combining work with further study (eight per cent compared with 16 per cent), and a relatively larger proportion were assumed to be unemployed (11 per cent compared with five per cent). There was no real difference in the type of work achieved but young graduates were relatively less likely to be in permanent jobs or on longer fixed-term contracts (76 per cent compared with 86 per cent) and correspondingly more likely to be on temporary contracts (10 per cent compared with three per cent). Among those continuing with their studies, there was no real difference in level of study undertaken.

Comparing young part-time graduates from other undergraduate courses (N=3,560) with the larger group of young full-time graduates from other undergraduate courses (N=15,590), we find part-time graduates are marginally more likely to be in full-time work (41 per cent compared with 35 per cent). There is no real difference in the likelihood of continuing with studies, but part-time graduates are considerably more likely to combine further study with work (26 per cent compared with 11 per cent), whereas full-time graduates were considerably more likely to focus only on their studies (essentially study full-time, 38 per cent compared with 22 per cent). Focusing only on those in employment, part-time graduates were considerably more likely to be in full-time work and on permanent/long-term fixed contracts (83 and 81 per cent compared with 69 and 73 per cent), and full-time graduates were relatively more likely to be in part-time work (27 per cent compared with 14 per cent). Among those continuing with their studies, there was no real difference in the level of study undertaken.

Finally, comparing young part-time graduates from other undergraduate courses (N=3,560) with the larger group of mature part-time graduates from other undergraduate courses (N=15,805) we find younger graduates were less likely to be in paid work – full- or part-time work (46 per cent compared with 62 per cent); and were more likely to continue with studies (48 per cent compared with 32 per cent), particularly full-time study (22 per cent compared with eight per cent). Among those in employment, young graduates were marginally more likely to be in full-time work (83 per cent compared with 76 per cent). Among those continuing with their studies, younger graduates were more likely to go on to study for a first degree (75 per cent compared with 53 per cent), and were less likely to aim for a postgraduate qualification (nine per cent compared with 19 per cent). It is interesting to note that the group of mature part-time graduates from other undergraduate programmes is of a very similar size to the group of young full-time graduates from other undergraduate programmes.

Table 12.5: Destination activity by age group and level of study (UK-domiciled graduates only, 2008/09) (per cent)

	First degree			Other undergraduate		
	young	young	mature	young	young	mature
	PT	FT	PT	PT	FT	PT
Full-time paid work only (incl. self-employed)	53	46	55	41	35	52
Part-time paid work only	13	12	11	5	7	10
Voluntary/unpaid work only	1	2	1	0	0	1
Work & further study	8	7	16	26	11	24
Further study only	8	18	5	22	38	8
Assumed to be unemployed	11	9	5	4	5	2
Not available for employment	3	4	5	2	2	2
Other	2	1	2	1	1	1
Base (N)	4,040	167,350	17,370	3,560	15,590	15,805

Note: Young = 24 years and under, Mature = 25 years and over.

Note: Bases may be different due to rounding. Numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest multiple of 5.

Source: Adapted from HESA, Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Institutions, 2008/09

Table 12.6: Type of work by age group and level of study (UK-domiciled graduates in employment only, 2008/09) (per cent)

	First degree			Other undergraduate		
	young	young	mature	young	young	mature
	PT	FT	PT	PT	FT	PT
Full-time paid work	75	71	76	83	69	76
Part-time paid work	20	22	17	14	27	18
Self-employed/freelance	3	4	5	2	3	5
Voluntary/unpaid work	2	4	2	0	1	1
Base (N)	3,065	113,235	14,305	2,570	8,445	13,765

Note: Young = 24 years and under, Mature = 25 years and over

Note: Bases may be different due to rounding. Numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest multiple of 5.

Source: Adapted from HESA, Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Institutions, 2008/09

Table 12.7: Full-time job duration by age group and level of study (UK-domiciled graduates in full-time employment only, 2008/09) (per cent)

	First degree			Other undergraduate		
	young PT	young FT	mature PT	young PT	young FT	mature PT
Permanent or fixed-term lasting 12 months or longer	76	69	86	81	73	83
Temporary or fixed-term lasting less than 12 months	10	17	3	3	9	2
Duration not known	15	14	11	16	18	15
Base (N)	2,295	79,895	10,925	2,135	5,810	10,495

Note: Young = 24 years and under, Mature = 25 years and over

Note: bases may be different due to rounding. Numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest multiple of 5.

Source: Adapted from HESA, Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Institutions, 2008/09

Table 12.8: Study destinations by age group and level of study (UK-domiciled graduates in further study only, 2008/09) (per cent)

	First degree			Other undergraduate		
	young PT	young FT	mature PT	young PT	young FT	mature PT
Higher degree (research)	2	9	2	1	0	1
Higher degree (taught)	30	39	28	4	4	10
Postgraduate diploma or certificate	20	21	22	4	2	8
First degree	13	4	10	75	82	53
Other diploma or certificate	8	4	9	9	5	14
Professional qualification	15	15	10	3	3	5
Other qualification	10	5	11	4	2	7
Not aiming for a qualification	3	3	7	0	1	2
Base (N)	655	42,330	3,720	1,700	7,645	5,030

Note: Young = 24 years and under, Mature = 25 years and over

Note: Bases may be different due to rounding. Numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest multiple of 5.

Source: Adapted from HESA, Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Institutions, 2008/09

12.3 What support do part-time students need?

As highlighted in this report, part-time students are different to full-time students in terms of personal characteristics, motivations to study and wider responsibilities and commitments. The type of HE they experience is also different in terms of the level of study, subject of study and programme length, and perhaps most critically, the way in which their learning is delivered. All these aspects will impact upon the support that these students require to ensure that they have a good experience and achieve a good outcome. The findings of the analysis and wider research noted above indicates that part-time students do tend to be satisfied with their experience (at least those who stay on their course until the final year)

and do achieve considerably better labour market outcomes than full-time graduates, but there could be challenges in terms of retention, achieving a higher degree classification, and continuing with further study.

The **case study** discussions with staff and current students enabled a more detailed identification of the support needs of part-time students and also how the institutions were working to meet them (see also Chapter 5).

12.3.1 Need for flexibility

A critical requirement of part-time students is flexibility. It is one of the key attractions to part-time study as flexible provision allows individuals to fit study around their other commitments, and flexible length allows them to study at their own speed and potentially to build their own learning programme. However, part-time students also need flexibility in assessment. For example, a part-time student may not be able to attend a one-off exam, in a controlled classroom environment during the day. One of the case study institutions (a large-scale provider) has an impressive track record in this respect. Here the institution allows students to be able to bank assessment credits undertaken towards a module if their circumstances mean they have to interrupt their studies. The student can then complete the module at a later time.

12.3.2 Need for online support

One case study (a specialist provider) spoke of the unique needs of part-time students who are not studying on a campus, and how this support could be provided online. Many of the case studies noted how there has been a general movement towards greater online provision – both on-line learning and on-line support. This could include providing lectures on-line, and access to on-line library resources. However, it was suggested that this movement had not necessarily been driven by the needs of part-time students but by the expectations of their full-time students.

12.3.3 Need for consistency and communication

It was acknowledged that part-time study can be stressful and pressured as individuals tend to be juggling multiple commitments. To manage their commitments, and specifically to fit study around these other commitments, part-time students need to be able to plan ahead. They therefore rely on sessions delivered on a set day at a regular time (consistency), and need clear communications from institutions about delivery timetabling, with advanced notice of any changes.

12.3.4 Need for educational guidance

As noted, another benefit of part-time study can be the flexible and modular system of study it allows, coupled with the facility to extend or compress the time taken to complete a programme (within boundaries set by the institution). However, with this degree of freedom and tailoring, it can be difficult for part-time students to build their study programme and so they can benefit from educational guidance. In one case study (a specialist provider) they have been working hard to meet this need. They have dedicated advisers providing part-time students with intense support, particularly educational guidance rather than pastoral support, and this helps students to navigate an educational pathway – to flow from one module to another.

12.3.5 Need for peer support

A sense of affiliation and peer support is important to part-time students, and students in the case studies talked about the importance of getting to know other students. It was recognised that establishing a cohort of part-time students so that they are ‘doing it together’ is important, and was enabling students to build or access networks (virtual or physical).

‘I haven’t met any other part-timers. I would like to meet other part-time students; it would be good to have some people to share concerns with.’

[Part-time student, small-scale provider]

‘It is the energy isn’t it? You can help each other along, and if somebody’s a bit low or a bit “I haven’t read this or I haven’t read that”, you can say “don’t worry, you can catch up”, and everybody supports each other. Everyone is in the same situation so it is kind of like a group. It is a really creative environment.’

[Part-time student, large-scale provider]

However, it could be argued that students as a whole, full-time and part-time, may rely less on HE for their social networks as increasingly students study closer to their homes (and to existing networks of friends) and due to the increasing use of online social networking.

Institutions could undertake activities and provide facilities to help part-time students to form networks and cohorts, but students also recognised that they too had a responsibility to make contacts. One part-time student, at a large-scale provider, noted how the institution organised a ‘residential’ which helped everyone to get to know each other. Another part-time student (also at a large-scale provider) spoke about the constantly changing student group, which meant she had to move out of her comfort zone to make contact with other students. She felt that even though this was difficult for her, it was helping to build her confidence and reaping rewards in her paid work and placements.

Part Three: Discussion and Conclusions

The overall purpose of the study was to:

- collect and synthesise evidence on how higher education institutions (HEIs) in England are encouraging and supporting part-time study for undergraduate students of all ages
- analyse the evidence to help determine whether it is feasible to introduce policies to increase the numbers of young people who study undergraduate part-time courses, including identifying the barriers to increasing part-time provision and the changes that may be required to overcome them.

In this final part we discuss the extensive range of evidence we have collected and analysed, in an attempt to address these overall aims.

Specifically we:

- explore the key features of the market for part-time higher education (HE), including the main segments of demand and the different ways in which part-time courses are provided
- examine the main factors affecting the supply and demand for part-time higher education
- consider the prospects for expanding part-time higher education, particularly for young career entrants.

13 Discussion and Conclusions

13.1 No simple definition of part-time provision

Our research has confirmed the findings of previous studies (e.g. Callender et al., 2010) that there is a complex pattern of provision of part-time undergraduate higher education (HE). There is no single definition of part-time HE and it is generally defined in residual terms, i.e. provision that is not full-time. Part-time HE involves study of varying intensity and duration towards a wide range of qualifications or part qualifications or credits delivered in a wide variety of different ways. Provision varies enormously by institution and has developed in response to the interplay of a wide variety of factors. This diversity means part-time study plays a key role in opening up HE to a wider range of individuals and opening up the routes to HE.

The implication for policy of this complex pattern of provision is that the effects of any intervention to influence the number of part-time students (however defined) or the way in which they study will not necessarily be clear and may have unintended consequences.

13.2 There are over 600,000 part-time students

There are over 600,000 part-time undergraduate HE students in the UK made up of four groups:

- Well over half are **part-time students in higher education institutions (HEIs) other than the Open University (OU)** – mainly studying other undergraduate courses rather than first degrees.
- Most of the rest are **OU students** – equally split between undergraduate and first degree students.
- It is difficult to accurately estimate⁷⁷ the numbers of **students studying HE in further education colleges (FECs)**, but they are the third biggest group.
- Finally, the data on **students with private providers** are less clear. The available evidence suggests the number of UK-domiciled students studying for part-time undergraduate courses of any type is small at present. This is driven partly by employers' reluctance to support such substantial levels of study, compared with shorter courses, and partly by the focus of private providers on the international student market.

⁷⁷ Estimating the numbers of HE students in FE colleges is difficult due to the two different data recording systems in use. These students are covered in both HESA and ILR data depending on the funding arrangements.

The numbers of part-time students in HEIs, including the OU, rose in the early 2000s on the back of expansion of the OU and have been broadly static since 2004. Only a minority (under one-fifth) of part-time students are aged under 23. There is, perhaps, more potential for growth among the current minority providers in the FE and private sectors.

The implication for policy is that there is potentially more room for expansion of part-time provision among further education (FE) providers (particularly perhaps for younger students) and private providers (for those already in work).

13.3 The market for part-time HE is segmented

There are four broad groups of students and potential students interested in studying HE part-time. They can be segmented in relation to why they want to study and the relationship between their motivation to study and their career.

- The first and second groups involve people who are interested in HE for **career development** reasons. These are people generally in work who want to either *enhance* their existing career by acquiring additional skills and qualifications or *change* their career by acquiring new qualifications in a different field. The distinction between *career enhancers* and *career changers* is important. Overall, this is probably the largest element of the current part-time student cohort and includes people studying employer- or occupational-specific courses – which provide employees with the opportunity to *enhance* their career. Qualifications and, in particular, full degrees may be of less interest to this group, or at least to their employer, unless they need the transferability and external recognition that accreditation provides. This latter sub-group may include individuals with existing qualifications below HE level which they want to top up, or those with considerable work experience that they wish to be formally recognised with a HE qualification. *Career changers* are less likely to be supported by their employer and more interested in qualifications and degrees to help facilitate their change of career.
- Another group are those who are studying for **non-career** related reasons. This group sometimes referred to as ‘leisure learners’, include people who are post-career or people without careers. These *non-career learners* may already be qualified at degree-level but are interested in continuing or developing their education. Some HEIs have a strong tradition of catering for this group of learners through their extra-mural provision. However, generally this group of part-time students is declining in number following the introduction of the policy on equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQs).
- A fourth group are those interested in part-time HE to facilitate their **career entry**. This group includes young people with additional responsibilities, either in the form of employment or caring responsibilities, which take up a significant amount of their time. Another group here are young people wishing to experience a different, more personal and local HE than that perceived to be offered by full-time study. It also includes those who want to start a career in later life, for instance after bringing up children. Together this group of *career entrants* is currently a small group and

similar in some ways to the career changers in that they often have a clear idea of, and commitment to, what they want to study and why. One of the key questions underpinning this study is whether, as a result of the changes to student financial support, more young people will choose to 'earn and learn' at the same time by combining HE with work (whether it be in a career-entry job or otherwise), perhaps driven by a desire to reduce the potential for debt.

Each group itself is heterogeneous with different interests, motivations and needs. Young *career entrants*, for instance, may have different needs from, and expectations of, HE to older *career entrants*.

The implication for policy is that different groups require different approaches to increase their demand for part-time HE. To increase part-time study significantly across all groups will require a highly nuanced policy approach.

13.4 Current provision is unevenly distributed

Only one in five HEIs has a significant interest in part-time provision either as a *large-scale provider* – with relatively high numbers of part-time students across a wide range of subject areas - or as a *specialist provider* – with high proportions of students studying part-time across relatively few subject areas. Most institutions are either *small-scale providers*, with a relatively low level of part-time students across a range of subjects or, the most common group, *limited providers* with few students in a small number of subjects.

Part-time provision is not provided evenly across the country and does not appear to be distributed in line with demand (as measured, for example, by levels of employment or population). Given that most current part-time students tend to want to live close to where they study, there appears to be significant supply shortages in some areas, eg in the South and West. A more even distribution of opportunities to study part-time could be brought about if:

- more HEIs became significant providers
- more HE was provided in FECs (directly or in conjunction with a HEI) or
- there was more flexible provision available, eg involving blended learning opportunities mixing distance and site-based provision (as available from the OU or some private providers).

Different forms of provision may appeal to different groups. For example, career enhancers may be interested in flexible learning whereas career entrants, particularly young entrants, who want the 'full HE experience', may see both educational and social benefits in physically attending institutions.

The implication of the current pattern of supply is that providing more part-time HE opportunities in areas where provision is currently scarce could increase the number of part-time students and the overall size of the student population. However, it will need a big shift in strategy and approach for many more HEIs to become significant providers of part-time provision.

13.5 Spectrum of provision

The way HEIs organise part-time study varies not just between institutions but also within institutions, as different departments with different traditions operate different models. Broadly speaking provision ranges between two main poles:

- At the one end there is the **integrated model** – a more supply-led form of ‘infill’ provision in which part-time students are accommodated within existing full-time provision (generally delivered during normal ‘working hours’ and within the academic term). The actual form depends on the type of full-time provision and, for example, the extent of modularity provided. Generally in this model part-time students ‘stand out from the crowd’ as the form of study is similar but the individual student is different. This model operates particularly among small-scale and limited providers. However, a few do operate a highly flexible model of provision which accommodates both full- and part-time students and the distinction between the two is more blurred.
- At the other end is the **bespoke model** – a more demand-led way of providing learning with more flexibility about the form, timing and location of delivery. However, what people want can vary. In this model, part-time students study with other part-timers and are therefore not differentiated, but their mode of study is different from the full-time model.

Most provision fits on a spectrum between these two models and varies in particular with the degree of flexibility they offer to students to fit in their learning with their other commitments and preferences. Such flexibility also varies with the mode and place of study, the extent to which distance or blended learning techniques are combined with more conventional approaches, the degree to which students can build tailored learning programmes, and how far students can alter their start and finish points and their pace of study.

The implication for policy is that it is difficult to define the form of part-time study. Hard and fast definitions could have the potentially unintended effect of restricting the flexibility of provision – one of the advantages that students identify with the part-time model. Greater flexibility, for instance in the length of course, speed of progression, and entry and exit points, is likely to generate more demand from students who feel, for whatever reason, they are not able to study full-time.

13.6 Factors affecting the supply and demand of part-time HE

The research has identified a wide range of factors which can affect both the demand for and supply of part-time provision. The two are intricately connected. While some HEIs are, for reasons set out below, traditionally not that interested in meeting the demand for part-time study, others will respond to any upsurge in interest. However there is a 'chicken and egg' dilemma here as supply can create its own demand. While some of our case study institutions said that they would promote part-time provision more enthusiastically if they thought the demand was there, we found some evidence that the lack of demand was due to potential part-time students not knowing such provision was available.

Below we look at some of the factors affecting both the demand for and supply of part-time HE. However, a lot of the factors affect both sides of the equation and the direction of influence is unclear.

13.6.1 Factors affecting demand

A number of factors mostly affect the demand for part-time HE.

Economic climate

One key factor is the influence of the economic climate and subdued labour market conditions which can act in a number of ways:

- People are displaced from the labour market – making it harder for them to earn and learn at the same time and so making it more difficult for young people in particular to find jobs that will allow them to study part-time as well. Generally, part-time students need good jobs to earn enough to support them through their studies and ideally career jobs that can enhance their studies.
- Employers are more reluctant to sponsor HE-level training for their employees when funds are scarce, particularly in the public sector. This again potentially suppresses the demand for part-time HE.
- A higher premium is placed on qualifications, which would increase the demand for HE so that job seekers can differentiate themselves from the rest of the labour market when they search for scarce jobs.

Financial support to part-time students

Full-time students have for many years been eligible for subsidised loans and other forms of financial support, whereas, in the past, the support available for part-time students has been limited. This has had the potential to place part-time study as a 'second class' of study in the eyes of potential students. As from September 2012 new part-time students will be able to take out loans to cover their tuition costs. This will place part-time study on a more level playing field compared with full-time study, and make it more likely that potential students will consider the part-time option.

There is the potential that improved state support to part-time students could have a negative substitution effect on employer support (i.e. employers will pay less as the state

pays more). However, this is unlikely to have a major impact on the overall numbers of part-time students, as only a minority (around one-third) of part-time students are likely to be eligible for financial support and much employer-supported provision is for 'other' courses, i.e. less than a degree. On a positive note, such changes may make a part-time option more attractive for younger first degree students.

The implication is that state support for part-time students may not only help them financially but may also have an additional effect of legitimising part-time study and raising the awareness of the option for younger students.

Fee levels

The level of fees for all students, as well as the relative cost of full-time as opposed to part-time provision, can further affect demand. For instance, if part-time study is relatively cheaper (e.g. per unit gained), demand may increase (although the potential income for HEIs may decline). If fee levels rise generally, then demand for part-time study could rise because it offers a better opportunity to supplement income than full-time provision.

Raising part-time fees could push employers to switch to the privately funded market and ease non-career learners out of the market for HE altogether.

Occupational regulation

A range of occupations increasingly demand a certain level of skills and knowledge before someone is 'licensed to practice'. The more that higher-level qualifications are required to enter certain occupations, the greater the demand for part-time HE is likely to be among *career changers* in particular, although some students may want a full-time course if they feel studying part-time will take them too long to get qualified.

Vocationally based courses provide a potentially fertile ground for the privately funded market and providers who are capable of responding quickly to labour market signals.

The more that regular skills and knowledge updating and continuing professional development (CPD) is required, the greater the demand is likely to be for part-time HE among career enhancers. Occupational regulation is most likely to focus demand on certificated courses through which individuals can demonstrate that they have the required knowledge and skills.

Employer competition for talent

Some employers seek to attract young recruits as they leave school and support their acquisition of higher professional qualifications as they work. In some ways this is little different to the traditional sandwich course, although work and study are generally mixed more flexibly.

The more employers seek to adopt this strategy to ensure they recruit and develop the talent they need, the more demand for part-time and flexible provision will rise.

Attitudes to part-time study among young people

Young people in particular know little about the option of studying for a higher qualification part-time. Where they have thought about it, they tend to think of it as a much less attractive option than a full-time course and as only a viable route when for some reason full-time study is not available.

We found that there was very little awareness and understanding about part-time provision, in particular among young people. However, there was some evidence from our surveys that increasing awareness and understanding may increase interest in part-time study among some groups of young people.

Even when prompted, the vast majority of potential HE students did not see part-time study as appropriate for them. Young people generally felt it might provide a different and less attractive experience and not something they were looking for at their particular stage in life. Part-time study was seen as appropriate for people with existing full-time responsibilities, for example a job or caring responsibilities.

Furthermore, young people were not convinced that a part-time degree carried the same weight in the labour market as they thought employers consider that a part-time degree had less value than a full-time degree and a part-time student is less committed than a full-timer. However, this is in contrast to research evidence about employers' views on part-time students (Mason and Hopkin, 2011) which found that employers 'appreciate the skills and knowledge possessed by employees who engage in part-time study as compared with persons with the same qualification that they might recruit from outside'.

Finally, we found that young people thought that studying for a degree part-time takes too long compared with a full-time option and so delays labour market entry.

The implication for policy is that to increase interest in part-time study among most young people will require a significant shift in attitudes. This could be brought about by a range of actions including raising the prominence of part-time study as a viable option, such as through a significant investment in career education targeted at young people but also aimed at teachers and parents.

13.6.2 Factors affecting supply

Control limits

As we found in some of our case studies, the existence of controls of the number of full-time students can affect the extent to which HEIs promote part-time provision as an alternative to full-time provision to young people.

The more restrictive the limits on full-time places, the more likely that HEIs will develop part-time provision as an alternative.

Market regulation

Extending degree-awarding powers to FECs may mean that more colleges offer more HE courses and therefore raise the level of provision in areas where it is currently light. Expanding supply could create greater demand, as long as students continue to see similar value in a degree or other HE qualification awarded by a FEC compared with a conventional HEI.

The implication is that expanding the number of institutions that can award degrees could increase the overall number of students in some areas, by allowing people who would not otherwise study to do so part-time, but may have little effect in other areas where one form of provision (in HEIs) is substituted for another (in FECs).

Expansion of higher-level vocational routes

Currently a relatively small number of students study for higher vocational qualifications, such as higher-level apprenticeships, often with FE providers. An expansion of this route as envisaged in *New Challenges, New Chances* (BIS, 2011) could lead to greater numbers of younger people studying for higher-level qualifications while in work – adding further diversification to the part-time HE population.

The implication for policy is that further development of vocational pathways may be a fruitful way of providing alternative access to higher-level qualifications for some young people.

State subsidies for part-time provision

Some HEIs had become more involved in part-time provision as a result of government initiatives to fund courses co-funded with employers (of particular relevance to *career enhancers*) or focused on non-traditional students (*career entrants*). The perceived withdrawal of such support had deterred their interest in such provision.

HEIs' reaction to such initiatives highlights the extent to which practice can be changed by targeted funding.

Barriers to part-time provision

Institutions can be constrained in expanding their part-time provision because of the following factors:

- **Their history and tradition** – where it is not in the tradition of a HEI to offer part-time provision interviewees felt it could be difficult to change their strategy to appeal to a different market.
- **Their mission** – in particular, research-based universities tend to focus on the full-time student market. Those institutions with a particular focus on teaching appeared to be the ones most interested in part-time provision.
- **Strong demand for full-time study** – many HEIs have found it easy to fill existing places with full-time students (as there is an established demand and the cost of recruiting full-time students, through UCAS, is relatively low). Demand for employer-funded HE was felt to be particularly volatile and HEIs said that they need to see significant and steady local demand for part-time study to warrant the investment required to change their approach to accommodate part-time students on a large-scale.
- **Costs** – most HEIs perceive that to accommodate part-time provision would require a change in staff contracts to pay them to teach out of normal hours, and few think the costs of so doing would be outweighed by the benefits of increased income. Other perceived costs include keeping non-teaching facilities (eg catering and libraries) open out of normal hours. However, overall the evidence is mixed about whether part-time provision costs more than full-time. The actual costs depend on the volume of part-time students and the approach adopted to teaching them (ie integrated or bespoke). Slotting a small number of part-time students into existing provision is relatively low cost. Establishing special facilities and processes to deal with larger numbers of part-time students can have significant set-up costs, but these can then be spread over a large number of students, bringing unit costs down.
- **Part-time completion rates** – for various reasons part-time students tend to have lower completion and achievement rates than full-time students, and some HEIs were concerned that increasing the former would deleteriously affect their performance data which is based on full-time provision.

The net effect of these largely institutional barriers is that for many HEIs the perceived risks of increasing the number of part-time students, e.g. in terms of increased costs and the potential effect on their reputation from lower completion rates, outweigh the potential benefits. The implication for policy is that this risk/reward rationale needs to change, or at least the perception of it needs to change, if more HEIs are to make significantly more part-time provision available.

13.7 Good practice in supporting part-time students

Good practice in supporting part-time students

Good practice varies by type of part-time study, but the evidence from our case studies suggests some or all of the following:

- strategic commitment within the HEI – to ensure that part-time study is seen as a legitimate study pathway by the HEI and not considered as a residual or deficit form of learning
- flexible forms of delivery, including:
 - length of course – so students can build up their own programme
 - speed of progression through the course – so they can accelerate or decelerate
 - forms of assessment
 - entry points – so part-time students do not have to start at a particular point in the year which is designed to fit in with school leaving dates
 - exit points – so a part-timer can leave, albeit temporarily, before fully completing a course but with some credits when they feel they have achieved their learning aims or their circumstances change
 - onward progression opportunities – so they know they can move on if they want to
- flexible opening times for facilities such as the library, cafes and food shops, and IT to allow part-time students access out of normal hours
- systems to track heterogeneous students through heterogeneous courses – e.g. to accommodate different start and end points and late starters and early finishers
- clearly articulated expectations and guidelines for part-time students about timetables and the timing and form of assessment, how students can progress, for example from one course to another. Similarly, part-time students need consistent and early communications in the event of changes to timetables etc. as many have to make complicated arrangements in order to attend lectures or seminars etc.
- ensuring that courses meet local market needs, so that they meet the expectations of employers, employees and other would-be part-time students
- peer support systems (particularly for young people) including systems and spaces for part-time students to network and form their own community

- at the same time, part-time students can also benefit from opportunities to integrate with rest of student body; indeed, this can benefit all students by increasing the diversity of their experience.

13.8 The prospects for expanding part-time HE

This study has examined English part-time HE in depth, partly with the aim of assessing whether it is feasible to increase the numbers of part-time students particularly among younger people, i.e. career entrants. In this final section we draw our conclusions about whether and how this may be possible.

Studying for HE part-time suits some groups of people and provides them with the chance to gain a higher-level qualification, enhance their skills and knowledge and improve their life chances.

If more opportunities were available and awareness of the options was greater, then more people could be interested in studying at HE-level who would not otherwise study at all. Greater flexibility in provision, encompassing part-time, offers the chance to widen participation further and enhance social mobility, for both some career entrants and also later career changes. Greater flexibility is also likely to appeal to people interested in HE study to enhance their careers. However, changes to the financing of HE may continue to deter non-career HE learners

In addition, there is potential for some, mainly younger, people, to opt for part-time study, rather than full-time, which could mean that scarce public funds are spread over a wider group of people. However, part-time HE for this group is currently not a mainstream option for young entrants. Few are aware that studying part-time is a possibility and those that are generally think it a second-best form of provision to the preferred full-time route. To attract more people into HE at all through part-time provision, or to get people to switch from full- to part-time study, will require significant action among a number of stakeholders.

13.8.1 Increasing part-time HE among young career entrants

The study has identified a number of actions, by a range of stakeholders, which could act to persuade young people to take a more favourable view of part-time HE. These include the following:

Universities, colleges and HE providers

- Promoting part-time study as an option to young people and their career advisers and clarifying what is involved and how it works in practice.
- Ensuring that all their facilities are open to part-time students and that the 'student experience' is similar to that enjoyed by full-time students.
- Selling the benefits of being able to work in a career-entry job at the same time as studying (i.e. not delaying labour market entry) – but HEIs may need to support part-time students to get a career job alongside their study, not just any job.

Government

- Subsidising part-time study, to make it a more attractive option than full-time, through enhanced funding to HE providers and/or encouraging providers to charge lower pro rata fees. While this may be difficult in the current financial climate, targeted funding to HE providers can influence the inclination to study part-time among certain groups.
- Maintaining or further tightening control limits on full-time places.
- Encouraging higher-level apprenticeships (see below).

UCAS

- Helping to make a part-time option more visible and legitimate by allowing potential students to search for part-time courses; or more radically by allowing them to apply for part-time courses in the same way as full-time students, while still allowing direct applications, e.g. for older applicants not familiar with the UCAS route. This could also help HE providers better predict demand, and allow for better monitoring of widening participation.

Employers

- Encouraging young people to join them on high-level apprenticeships and professional careerships that combine higher-level study with work-based study. Given that students and trainees following this route are unlikely to avail themselves of existing forms of student financial support, it may be financially neutral to provide them or their employer with partial funding to encourage this pathway further.

Careers advisers

- Encouraging young people to review all options when they first start thinking about HE and being more aware of part-time options when advising career changers.

Student Loans Company

- Providing an electronic procedure for part-time students to apply for loans and make it simpler to receive financial support.

13.8.2 Increasing other forms of part-time HE for career changers

Further occupational licensing and other forms of occupational regulation which require minimum qualifications and/or continual skill development is likely to increase demand for part-time HE among career changers and career enhancers.

Market de-regulation and, for example, allowing FECs to provide more forms of HE and/or making it easier for private providers to enter the HE market and is likely to increase provision, particularly for 'other HE'. By making it easier to study part-time, more career changers and particularly career enhancers are likely to do so.

Expanding provision may also attract a few more on-career part-time learners. However, they are unlikely to increase in number significantly unless the costs of HE are reduced

13.8.3 More flexibility for all?

Finally, one of the key attractions of part-time study is the flexibility it provides for learners to combine study with the rest of their lives. The greater the flexibility that students have in the way they can study, the more likely they are to do so. In some ways the distinctions between full-time and part-time study are becoming even more blurred as full-time students work part-time (although usually in non-career jobs), students (full-time and part-time) engage in accelerated and decelerated forms of study, and there is greater emphasis on work-related learning at higher levels. The more such flexibility is encouraged, generally the less valid the emphasis on part-time study, as such, becomes.

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Appendix 2: Glossary

BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CPD	Continuing professional development
DAP	Degree awarding powers
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
ELQ	Equivalent or lower qualification
FE	Further education
FEC	Further education college
FEI	Further education institution
FT	Full-time
FTE	Full-time equivalence
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IA	The Information Authority
ILR	Individualised Learner Record
JACS	Joint Academic Coding System
KIS	Key Information Set
LAD	Local authority district
LSOA	Lower Layer Super Output Areas
LSYPE	Longitudinal Survey of Young People in England
MI	Management information
NAO	National Audit Office

NSP	National Scholarship Programme
NSS	National Student Survey
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
PT	Part-time
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
SFA	Skills Funding Agency
SPA	Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme
TDA	The Training and Development Agency for Schools
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
VLE	Virtual learning environment
V/MLE	Virtual and managed learning environment
YPLA	Young People's Learning Agency

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