

The experiences of part-time students in higher education

A study from the UK

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with

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Executive summary

Eleven post-1992 universities in the UK participated in a web-based survey of their part-time students on taught programmes which ranged from master's degrees to short courses. The number of valid responses was 2871, of which roughly 40 per cent related to postgraduate programmes, 40 per cent to programmes at bachelor's level, and 15 per cent to programmes below bachelor's level.

Two thirds of all the respondents were female, though the gender imbalance was less where programmes below bachelor's level were concerned. All levels of programme evidenced a wide range of age. Managerial and professional backgrounds characterised the bulk of the postgraduate student respondents, but accounted for only slightly more than half of the undergraduate respondents. Four fifths of respondents across all categories of programme were of white British origin.

The strongly predominant reason given for opting for part-time study over full-time study was that it allowed study to be undertaken alongside other commitments. The flexibility that part-time study allowed, and its relative affordability, were by some distance the second and third most acknowledged reasons. The most frequently-stated reason given for studying was the students' desire to improve their capability in their current job. The possibility of gaining promotion and preparation for a career switch were significant for smaller proportions of respondents. Around one in five respondents gave personal satisfaction as a rationale: this was most marked in those studying at bachelor's level.

Around two thirds of respondents overall said that they had made the choice of programme. Relatively infrequently was the decision solely the choice of an employer: when employers were involved, the decision was more likely to involve both employer and potential student. Where employment-related study was the focus, tuition fees were met by more than two thirds of students' employers: however, the level of employer support for ancillary expenses was considerably lower. A more detailed analysis showed some variation between subject discipline areas as regards the balance between self-funding and employer sponsorship.

Students' responses to 28 items relating to 'the student experience' were generally positive. The items coalesced into five scales with reasonable technical quality. The highest scale scores were found in the areas of programme quality, the engagement with others on the programme, and institutional services (especially library and computing provision). However, feedback was – as has been noted in the National Student Survey – less positively rated. There was a strong tendency to recommend the programme to a friend. Coping with demands elicited less positive responses, as did the ability to attend all of the taught sessions (probably because of the various other calls on students' time). The ratings suggested that worry about funding studies in higher education was a matter of fairly widespread concern to students.

There were, within the five scales, some aspects of provision that elicited responses that were at variance with the general run of responses. Whereas students tended to be positive about coping with academic demands, they were markedly less so where balancing the calls on their time was concerned. Also, whereas programme quality was generally given a positive rating, programme organisation was not. Free-response comments indicated that there were two main aspects to concerns about programme organisation. First, a high proportion of respondents comprised part-time students who were nevertheless 'infilling' on full-time programmes. The main complaint was that insufficient attention was given to their part-time status in the way in which the programme was implemented: as examples, turn-around time on assignments was inconsiderately tight, and it was not always possible for part-time students to join in activities that presented few logistical problems for their full-time counterparts. Second, administrative and other institutional services were not available at the times when the part-time students attended.

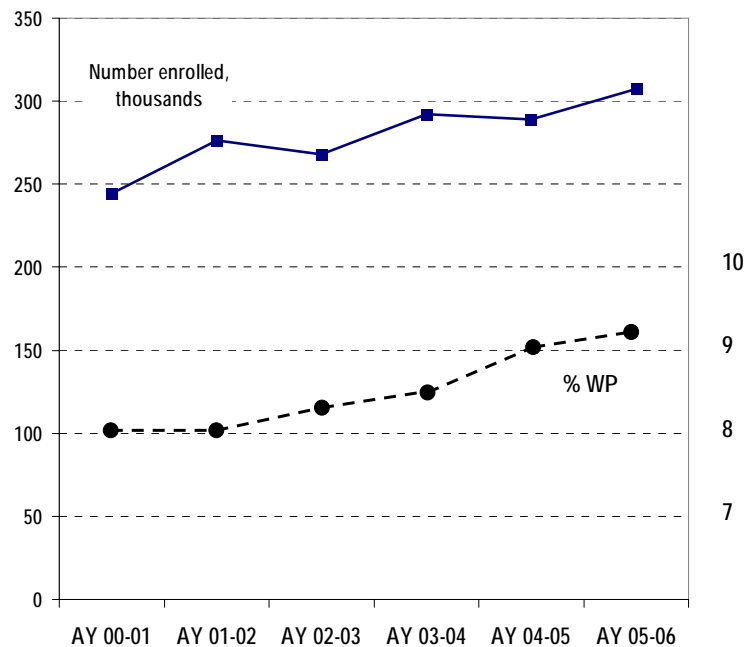
The full report includes a number of analyses relating to various sub-groups of the respondents, and also a number of quotations from the students which flesh out aspects of the statistical data.

The most important issue raised by this study (which has a number of practical ramifications) is whether institutions make provision appropriate to the needs of part-time students, and avoid making the uncritical assumption that part-time students can simply be accommodated on programmes designed for their full-time counterparts. At a time when the policy interest is increasingly focusing on the development of ways in which higher education engages with society, this study offers a number of pointers towards institutional self-analysis and action.

Background

Part-time students constitute a large segment of higher education in the UK. As regards ‘the part-time student experience’, a couple of studies were reported in the 1990s (Bourner et al, 1991; Schuller et al, 1999). More recently, Yorke (2005) reported findings from a survey of students who had embarked on the (then) new foundation degree programmes in England, and Callender et al (2006) conducted a survey for Universities UK, which concentrated on funding issues and left other aspects of ‘the student experience’ to be addressed via the National Student Survey.

The higher education sector has continued to evolve since the 1990s. At undergraduate level, the number of part-time enrolments has risen, as has the percentage of those from low-participation neighbourhoods and lacking previous familial experience of higher education¹.



Part-time undergraduate enrolments, 2000-06.

At taught postgraduate level, the number of enrolments rose from 230,400 in academic year 2001-02 to 260,650 in 2006-07.² Widening participation data are not provided.

¹ Sources: HEFCE and HESA Performance Indicators, Table T2b, for the relevant years (www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/perfind/default.asp and www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php/content/category/2/32/141/). For the academic year 2006-07 the index used for widening participation was changed, disrupting longitudinal comparisons.

² Source: HESA's *heidi* data repository (<https://heidi.hesa.ac.uk/>).

In the UK there have been strengthening policy emphases on part-time study, the widening of participation and employer engagement in higher education. A pair of linked studies has been undertaken in Scotland on the trajectories of students in and after higher education (MORI Scotland et al, 2004; Ipsos MORI et al, 2005), and a longitudinal study of students' career choices and outcomes has been recently funded by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit, under the 'Futuretrack' banner³.

The most recent broadly-based data relating to 'the part-time student experience' derive from the National Student Survey which is conducted annually in the UK with students who are about to graduate. There are consistently high ratings across the six scales of that instrument, together with the 'overall satisfaction' item.

Scale scores for part-time students, NSS	2005 Nmax=13431	2006 Nmax=12283
The teaching and learning on my course	4.13	4.13
Assessment and feedback	3.94	3.94
Academic support	3.89	3.89
Organisation and management	3.89	3.84
Learning resources	3.89	3.88
Personal development	4.03	4.00
Overall satisfaction with course quality	4.20	4.18

Scale scores, for part-time students, from the National Student Surveys of 2005 and 2006. Source: Annex D from Surridge (2007).

For five of the six scales in the 2006 administration the ratings rise with increasing age: the exception is 'Learning resources' for which the opposite trend is observed (see Surridge, 2007: tabulation not provided here).

The scale scores⁴ are very broad indications of the student experience and are of limited use for institutions in seeking to enhance their provision. Hence a more detailed study of the part-time student experience was warranted.

The study

Eleven post-1992 universities (all of which had a broad range of programmes) accepted an invitation to participate in this study. The post-1992 university sector was chosen as the focus of the study because of its high level of commitment to part-time programmes (with their emphasis on programmes below bachelor's degree level being significant in fulfilling policy expectations regarding workforce development), and because of its generally high level of commitment to the widening of participation. Limiting the study

³ See www.hecsu.ac.uk/hecsu.rd/futuretrack_196.htm.

⁴ For part-time students, Surridge does not provide the scores on the 21 items that make up the scales.

to a reasonably homogeneous group of institutions offered the participants the prospect of data that could be useful in benchmarking processes.

The opportunity to benchmark institutional data was a stimulus to the universities' engagement in this study. All of the participating institutions ran in-house surveys but there had hitherto been no opportunity to compare the responses that they were getting to those of other, reasonably cognate, institutions. This opportunity was the *quid pro quo* for their investment of 'in kind' resources (staff time, travel costs, e-mail system).

Each institution received, in addition to its own results, comparable data from the remaining institutions combined, and also the comments that emanated from its own students, with identifiers of students and staff removed.

The survey instrument

The original intention was to run the study as a paper-based operation since this would allow a reasonably large number of questions to be asked without too high a risk of prejudicing the response rate. There seems to be a greater willingness on the part of students in the US and Australia to complete lengthy questionnaires. Bourner et al (1991), who used a lengthy questionnaire, achieved a remarkable response rate of around 70 per cent from part-time students on programmes which led to awards of the then Council for National Academic Awards [CNAA] in the UK. However, survey questionnaires were more of a novelty in those days, and in contemporary higher education in the UK a similar level of response could only be anticipated where an instrument is tightly linked to the target population's interests.

The inability to secure external funding for the research meant that it had to be organised with minimal resources. The preferred option had been to use a paper-based questionnaire, optically scannable, which would have permitted the asking of a considerable number of questions within the limits of four sides of A4 paper, as was the case with the survey of the first year experience run by Yorke and Longden (2007). Under severe resource constraint, the only way in which the survey could proceed was to exploit the potential of electronic methods. Experience with web-based surveys of a broad target population indicated that there was a need to keep the instrument as short as possible. Hence fewer questions were asked than would have been preferred.

There were two main parts to the survey questionnaire (Appendix 1). The first consisted of 28 Likert-type items which were grouped for ease of response⁵, some of which were taken from the survey of the first-year experience (noted above). The second part consisted of demographic and other background items. It was necessarily fairly lengthy because of the wide diversity of both the part-time student body and the kinds of programme on which the students had enrolled. At the end of the survey 'free-response' boxes allowed students to comment (albeit fairly briefly) on the best and worst aspects of their experience, and on anything that important to them that was not covered by the

⁵ There are contrasting views regarding the grouping of items: see Yorke (in press) for discussion.

questionnaire. The final such box allowed for the possibility of a more extended commentary on the student's experience.

The questionnaire was developed collaboratively by those engaged in the survey – first at a meeting held at Liverpool Hope University and subsequently by electronic iteration until a version was produced that all involved 'could live with'. The final version was mounted on an independent website established by Mark Barrett-Baxendale of Liverpool Hope University, and piloted⁶. A couple of institutions asked for a hard-copy variant to be produced for particular groups of students, and this was supplied.

The study spans a spectrum from taught master's programmes to short sub-degree courses. All part-time students in the participating institutions were invited to contribute to the study (save in one university, where those who had been asked to contribute to the National Student Survey in February/March were not included). The survey was open for responses from late April until the end of June 2008.

Results

The survey received 2871 valid responses. Some blank responses were received, and some responses were submitted more than once: these were omitted. Also omitted were the 18 respondents who were on postgraduate research programmes at masters or doctoral level.

The response rate has proved difficult to determine. This is a general problem with electronic surveys. On the nominal number of invitations sent out, the overall response rate was roughly 6.5 per cent, with institutional rates ranging between 2.3 and 20.2 per cent. These figures are likely to underestimate the true response rate, for a number of reasons. It is unclear how many students actually received the invitation to participate or, if it did arrive, left it unopened in their e-mail inbox. A few responses came from students who fell outside the scope of the study, indicating that the students had been erroneously sent the invitation to participate⁷. Two institutions were able to indicate the proportion of responses that 'bounced back' unopened: in each case this figure was close to 1 per cent. Perhaps overlooking the need to select their institution from a list in a drop-down box, 183 respondents did not allow their institution to be identified. It is probably not unreasonable to assume a real response rate of around 10 per cent.

The breakdown of valid responses by the level of the qualification is given below. Some respondents did not indicate their intended qualification and are recorded as missing from the system. For the analyses that follow, the data are presented in terms of the four broad categories of study level: postgraduate taught; bachelor's degree; below the level of the

⁶ Early usage showed that the text-boxes rejected the single inverted comma, which caused the system to crash on a couple of occasions. The problem was quickly recognised and rectified, and few (if any) data were lost.

⁷ These were the students on postgraduate research programmes. It is unclear how many of these were invited to respond, but the numbers will be very low relative to those on taught programmes.

bachelor's degree; and short course (which subsumes a considerable variety of educative experiences). The total number of responses in the tables of results varies because of a scattering of non-responses to particular items. Where percentages are given, they may not total exactly 100 because of rounding.

Qualification aim	N	Per cent	Broad category	N	Per cent
Taught Masters (A)	616	21.5			
PGDip/PGCert (excl PGCE) (B)	271	9.4			
Professional PG programme (C)	129	4.5			
PGCE (D)	114	4.0	Total PGT (A to D)	1130	39.4
Bachelor's degree (E)	1170	40.8	Total Bachelor's (E)	1170	40.8
HND/C or FD (F)	298	10.4			
Cert HE (G)	45	1.6			
Professional UG Programme (H)	100	3.5	Total Below Bachelor's (F to H)	443	15.4
Short course (I)	69	2.4	Short course (I)	69	2.4
Other/Unsure	18	0.6	Other/Unsure	18	0.6
Total valid	2830	98.6	Total valid	2830	98.6
Not known	41	1.4	Not known	41	1.4
Overall Total	2871	100.0	Overall Total	2871	100.0

The main subjects being studied are given below, in order of frequency of the total number of responses.

	Qualification aim in 4 bands				Total
	PGT	Bachelor's	Below Bachelor's	Short course	
Subjects allied to Medicine	184	227	39	26	476
Business & Admin studies	233	167	69	3	472
Education	223	85	56	4	368
Architecture, Building & Planning	121	118	92	2	333
Engineering & Technology	62	119	79	2	262
Social Studies	77	90	19	2	188
Math & Computer Sciences	36	62	21	9	128
Law	30	62	11	3	106
Humanities	45	49	7	2	103
Creative Arts & Design	35	47	15	4	101
Biological Sciences	19	36	7	1	63
Combined Arts, Hum, Soc Sci	18	36	8	0	62
Various other	45	66	19	10	140
Total	1128	1164	442	68	2802

Psychology, for which there were 30 written-in responses where there was an open-response box, has been assimilated into Social Studies in this table. In JACS, Psychology

is treated as a subset of Biological Sciences. Neither is entirely satisfactory as a classification for the subject, since programmes in Psychology may be treated as a science or as a social science.

The modes of study for the four categories of level are given below.

Study mode	Qualification aim in 4 bands				Total
	PGT	Bachelor's	Below Bachelor's	Short course	
PTD	420	494	230	24	1168
PTE	283	273	87	26	669
PTD/E	239	249	79	5	572
Short block	41	10	13	4	68
Distance Learning	145	138	32	10	325
Total	1128	1164	441	69	2802

The demographics of participation, and some related issues, are tabulated in the sub-sections below.

Why choose part-time study?

The dominant reason, for each of the four broad categories of level, for choosing part-time study is that it can be undertaken alongside other commitments. Respondents could opt for as many categories as they felt appropriate: a large majority chose one. Where more than one was chosen, studying alongside other commitments was typically picked along with the liking of the flexibility offered by part-time study and/or financial reservations.

	Qualification aim in 4 bands				Total
	PGT	Bachelor's	Below Bachelor's	Short course	
Study alongside commitments	977	914	352	45	2288
Switch from FT	13	34	1	0	48
No FT course	35	12	7	4	58
Could not afford FT fee	84	145	38	7	274
Did not want loan	31	79	25	2	137
Liked the flexibility	100	149	42	11	302
Other	100	169	69	17	355

Note: Multiple responses were invited in respect of this item, and hence totals exceed those for the numbers of respondents relevant to each column.

The 'other' response option allowed a considerable variety of reasons to be mentioned beyond those listed in the tabulation. Personal circumstances of differing kinds dictated the part-time option for some respondents: health, disability, missing examinations (presumably on a full-time course) and academic failure were all cited. One student who was on benefits because of a physical disability made the point that the benefits would

have been forfeited if the full-time option had been taken up. Two distance learners mentioned that, because of geographical remoteness, it was only in this way that they could enrol. Day-release was the determinant for a few students, and in a handful of instances the engagement in part-time study came as part of their ‘employment package’. In one case, the part-time course ran for 2½ years and was the provider’s deliberate choice instead of the 1-year full-time equivalent because only in this way would sufficient practical experience be accrued.

Socio-economic grouping

SEG	Qualification aim in 4 bands				Total
	PGT	Bachelor’s	Below Bachelor’s	Short course	
Managerial or Professional	891 (79.8%)	655 (56.5%)	234 (53.3%)	42 (62.7%)	1822 (65.5%)
Intermediate occupation	134 (12.0%)	229 (19.8%)	84 (19.1%)	13 (19.4%)	460 (16.5%)
Routine supervisory etc	46 (4.1%)	145 (19.8%)	76 (17.3%)	5 (7.5%)	272 (9.8%)
Long-term unemployed or Never worked	6 (0.5%)	20 (1.7%)	3 (0.7%)	2 (3.0%)	31 (1.1%)
Not sure or Other	40 (3.6%)	110 (9.5%)	42 (9.6%)	5 (7.5%)	197 (7.1%)
Total	1117	1159	439	67	2782

As one would anticipate, students on PGT programmes were predominantly from managerial/professional backgrounds, with the bulk of the remainder coming from ‘intermediate’ backgrounds. The proportions for the other two categories of lengthy programme were more representative of ‘routine supervisory, etc’ backgrounds, with between one fifth and one sixth of respondents on programmes below bachelor’s degree level falling into this category.

Ethnicity

	Qualification aim in 4 bands				Total
	PGT	Bachelor’s	Below Bachelor’s	Short course	
White British	904 (80.6%)	938 (80.6%)	364 (82.9%)	54 (78.3%)	2260 (80.9%)
White other than British	80 (7.1%)	58 (5.0%)	27 (6.2%)	3 (4.3%)	168 (6.0%)
Black or Black British	52 (4.6%)	96 (8.2%)	20 (4.6%)	6 (8.7%)	174 (6.2%)
Asian or Asian British	53 (4.7%)	42 (3.6%)	16 (3.6%)	4 (5.8%)	115 (4.1%)
Chinese	4 (0.4%)	3 (0.3%)	4 (0.9%)	0	11 (0.4%)
Other	29 (2.6%)	27 (2.3%)	8 (1.8%)	2 (2.9%)	66 (2.4%)
Total	1122	1164	439	69	2794

Across the board, around four fifths of respondents were ‘white British’, though the institutional proportion varied from 53.8 to 92.5 per cent. The group ‘White other than British’ was included at the request of one university which had enrolled a substantial number of students from eastern Europe and wanted to gain some indication of how they were experiencing their programmes. In fact, another university had a higher proportion of such students who had responded to the survey (13.4 as opposed to 9.3 per cent).

Amongst those who responded ‘other’ to the item, 16 stated that they were African or Black African (these were included in the Black/Black British data), 13 stated that they were of mixed racial origin (though other self-descriptions were implicitly mixed as well), and five said that they did not wish to respond to the item.

Gender

Gender	Qualification aim in 4 bands				Total
	PGT	Bachelor's	Below Bachelor's	Short course	
Male	350 (31.2%)	410 (35.2%)	195 (44.4%)	15 (21.7%)	970
Female	771 (68.8%)	754 (64.8%)	244 (55.6%)	54 (78.3%)	1823
Total	1121	1164	439	69	2793

The gender balance was roughly 2:1 in favour of females for PGT and bachelor's programmes, but less skewed at 5:4 for programmes below bachelor's level. The difference is probably due to the greater representation, in the ‘below bachelor's’ group, of respondents who indicated that they were following a programme in the areas of Engineering & Technology and Architecture, Building & Planning (the male:female gender ratios were roughly 80:20 and 70:30 in these two broad subject areas, respectively).

Age

Age in 5 bands	Qualification Aim in 4 bands				Total
	PGT	Bachelor's	Below bachelor's	Short course	
U25	119 (10.6%)	184 (15.7%)	130 (29.3%)	5 (7.2%)	438 (15.6%)
26-30	231 (20.5%)	205 (17.5%)	77 (17.4%)	12 (17.4%)	525 (18.7%)
31-40	304 (27.0%)	359 (30.7%)	106 (23.9%)	16 (23.2%)	785 (28.0%)
41-50	335 (29.7%)	315 (26.9%)	97 (21.9%)	23 (33.3%)	770 (27.4%)
51+	138 (12.2%)	106 (9.1%)	33 (7.4%)	13 (18.8%)	290 (10.3%)
Total	1127	1169	443	69	2808

In all of the groups of programmes, there was a wide distribution of age⁸. The relative distributions between the three broad levels are as might be anticipated, and especially so the higher proportion of younger students in the below bachelor's column.

Reason for studying

Students were asked to give the main reason for undertaking their part-time programme. The dominant reason for studying was to improve capability in the current job (around one in two for PGT and below bachelor's students; around two in five for bachelor's students). One in nine overall emphasised preparation for promotion, and around one in five emphasised preparation for a career switch. Personal satisfaction was most strongly

⁸ A coding error meant that there was a gap between U25 and 26-30. However, as far as can be ascertained there is no evidence that this caused a significant problem.

emphasised by bachelor's students (one in four), with the figures for the other two groups being slightly greater than a half of this.

Reason for studying	Qualification aim in 4 bands				Total
	PGT	Bachelor's	Below Bachelor's	Short course	
Personal satisfaction	182 (16.2%)	288 (24.8%)	58 (13.2%)	15 (21.7%)	543 (19.4%)
Improving capability in current job	561 (49.8%)	460 (39.6%)	226 (51.5%)	34 (49.3%)	1281 (45.8%)
Preparation for promotion	149 (13.2%)	111 (9.5%)	63 (14.4%)	8 (11.6%)	331 (11.8%)
Preparation for career switch	194 (17.2%)	252 (21.7%)	73 (16.6%)	7 (10.1%)	526 (18.8%)
Other	40 (3.6%)	52 (4.5%)	19 (4.3%)	5 (7.2%)	116 (4.1%)
Total	1126	1163	439	69	2797

The overwhelming reason for opting for part-time study was because of being able to study alongside other commitments. The lower cost of part-time study was noted by around 10 per cent of undergraduate students, but by roughly half this proportion of PGT students.

'Other' responses included a number of briefly-stated reasons which are categorised below, though it is clear that the categories overlap. The reasons included the following:

- the need for a qualification to enter, or upgrade within, a particular employment (N=29)
- the requirement to study as a condition of employment (N=21)
- career preparation or development (N=14)
- to open up other educational opportunities (N=5)
- updating or upskilling (N=4)
- defensive CV enhancement in case of redundancy (N=1).

A couple of respondents observed that the qualification they had gained outside the UK had not been accepted within the UK, necessitating further study.

Choice of programme

The choice of programme was mainly made by individuals, with joint decision by individual and employer a distant second (save in the case of below bachelor's programmes). Employer choice of programme was most strongly apparent in respect of programmes below bachelor's level and short courses (12.7 and 14.7 per cent, respectively).

Who chose programme?	Qualification aim in 4 bands				Total
	PGT	Bachelor's	Below Bachelor's	Short course	
Self	717 (63.7%)	848 (72.9%)	229 (51.9%)	43 (63.2%)	1837 (65.7%)
Employer	77 (6.8%)	60 (5.2%)	56 (12.7%)	10 (14.7%)	203 (7.3%)
Self + Employer	331 (29.4%)	255 (21.9%)	156 (35.4%)	15 (22.1%)	757 (27.1%)
Total	1125	1163	441	68	2797

Where the employer was involved in the choice of part-time programme, it is not surprising that around four fifths of the time the focus was upon the development of the individual's performance in some respect. Where *individuals* made the choice, around a quarter of the time in each case the rationale was personal satisfaction or preparation for a career switch.

Reason for studying	Who chose programme			Total
	Self	Employer	Self + Employer	
Personal satisfaction	476 (25.8%)	10 (4.9%)	59 (7.8%)	545 (19.5%)
Improving capability in current job	641 (34.8%)	128 (63.1%)	516 (68.3%)	1285 (45.9%)
Preparation for promotion	178 (34.8%)	33 (16.3%)	120 (15.9%)	331 (11.8%)
Preparation for career switch	473 (25.7%)	13 (6.4%)	40 (5.3%)	526 (18.8%)
Other	75 (4.1%)	19 (9.4%)	21 (2.8%)	115 (4.1%)
Total	1843	203	756	2802

Costs of studying

The costs of tuition were almost exclusively divided between individuals and employers with the latter being the more prominent, but when it came to ancillary costs the burden fell to a much greater extent on individuals. Figures in the following table are percentages of respondents: there is some 'double-counting' (particularly in respect of PGT and bachelor's programmes) where the costs are shared, and hence column totals exceed 100 per cent. Individual learning accounts and career development loans hardly figured as sources of funds. A miscellany of funding sources was cited by 168 respondents, with no clear pattern being discernible. Amongst these sources were family, the National Health Service, charities and trusts, the European Social Fund, institutional fee waivers and various sponsoring organisations including churches.

Source of funding	PGT		Bachelor's		Below Bachelor's		Short course	
	Tuition	Ancillary	Tuition	Ancillary	Tuition	Ancillary	Tuition	Ancillary
Self	40.4	84.2	42.3	84.4	28.7	78.6	33.3	87.0
Employer	54.4	18.7	46.2	15.3	56.2	24.8	49.3	10.1
LEA grant	9.0	3.7	14.4	8.5	13.8	5.6	1.4	0
ILA	0.4	0.1	0.6	0.2	0.7	0	7.2	0
Career Dev Loan	1.2	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	1.4	0
Other	4.9	1.2	6.1	2.1	7.7	2.5	11.6	5.8

Note: figures are percentages. The column totals exceed 100 because of the possibility of multiple responses.

When the analysis was restricted to those who were enrolled on longer programmes and who were seeking to improve their performance in their current job, or were preparing for promotion, the general level of support from employers was higher, and the need to self-fund lower.

Source of funding	PGT		Bachelor's		Below Bachelor's	
	Tuition	Ancillary	Tuition	Ancillary	Tuition	Ancillary
Self	29.6	82.8	28.7	82.8	18.7	75.4
Employer	67.2	23.0	69.0	23.1	72.0	31.1

These data are at considerable variance with those of Callender et al (2006, p.35) who found that the tuition fees of their respondents were primarily paid by the students themselves (59 per cent of respondents), with employers being much less likely to provide such funding (35 per cent of respondents). There is a closer alignment between the two studies as regards the funding of ancillary costs, though in the present study the employers appear to have been more forthcoming. Callender et al (2006, p.36) found that ancillary costs were met by 91 per cent of their respondents, and that 14 per cent indicated that their employers contributed in this respect. An examination of Table A2 (p.85) in the report by Callender et al indicates that the two surveys gained responses from different profiles of students. The present study attracted responses which showed a strong vocational bias in subject area, whereas the responses to that of Callender et al tended to come from the less obviously vocational areas. Table A1 (p.83) in the report from Callender et al shows that a large majority of their respondents came from pre-92 universities: in contrast, the present study focused entirely on post-92 universities. The findings of the two studies draw attention to a marked difference between the orientation of part-time study in the two sub-sectoral groups (and, it will be recalled, provided a justification for the present study's concentration on the post-92 sub-sector).

There are marked variations between subject areas as regards the financial arrangements regarding part-time study. Coalescing the various levels of study gave the following, for the larger groupings of respondents by subject area.

	Nmax	Tuition- self, %	Tuition- employer, %	Ancillary expenses- self, %	Ancillary expenses- employer, %
Subjects allied to Medicine	476	29.8	65.5	93.1	16.2
Business & Admin Studies	472	44.1	56.4	86.2	18.4
Education	368	47.3	28.8	89.1	6.0
Architecture, Building & Planning	333	19.2	84.7	73.0	40.5
Engineering & Technology	262	19.5	80.5	76.7	33.2
Social Studies	188	46.8	37.2	81.9	14.4
Math & Computer Sciences	128	57.8	34.4	89.8	12.5
Law	106	62.3	30.2	91.5	11.3
Humanities	103	61.2	19.4	84.5	8.7
Creative Arts & Design	101	72.3	14.9	85.1	5.9
Combined Arts, Hum, Soc Sci	63	54.0	25.4	84.1	11.1
Biological Sciences	62	32.3	54.8	91.9	17.7
Total	2802	40.3	52.1	85.4	18.3

Note: the sums of percentages for self and employer in respect of the two categories of financing studies sometimes exceed 100 because of the possibility of multiple responses.

With the exception of Law, the more vocational the area, the greater is the level of employer support – which occasions no surprise. The figures for Education omit local education authority [LEA] grant funding for tuition and ancillary expenses: 30.4 per cent of Education respondents indicated that the LEA was involved in paying for tuition, and 12.0 per cent indicated the LEA's support for ancillary expenses⁹. LEA support for tuition was a significant feature in Social Studies¹⁰ (20.0 per cent), Law (16.0 per cent) and Business & Administrative Studies (6.8 per cent).

Where applicable, around two-thirds of employers allowed the individual to take time off work to fulfil curricular requirements, such as assessments. The proportion was marginally higher (76.1 per cent) for programmes below bachelor's level, and marginally lower (62.8 per cent) for bachelor's level students. Perhaps a little surprisingly, the proportion of employers allowing time off work for a short course was only 44.7 per cent: however, with a low number of valid respondents (N = 47), much weight cannot be placed on this statistic. Again, the data from the present study are at variance with those from Callender et al (2006, p.37) who reported that, across all their respondents, 35 per cent of 'working students' had been given paid time off work in order to study¹¹.

Aspects of the student experience

Twenty-eight items dealt with aspects of the student experience, with the last dealing with the issue of whether the student would recommend the programme to a friend. The

⁹ Presumably many of these respondents view the educational institution, rather than the LEA, as their employer.

¹⁰ It will be recalled that Psychology is subsumed under this grouping.

¹¹ This could, however, be related to the way in which the relevant questions were posed.

scoring of some items was reversed in order to align a positive rating of the experience with the higher end of the scale.

Exploratory factor analysis (principal components, with varimax rotation) of all but the final ‘recommend’ item suggested a 6-Factor solution for the whole dataset, which accounted for 56.69 per cent of the variance. The PGT and bachelor’s subsets produced factor structures that were very similar indeed, hence providing a justification for treating the dataset as a whole for factor analysis. As was the case with the first-year experience survey, the questionnaire was not designed to produce formal scales along the lines of the Course Experience Questionnaire or the National Student Survey. However, the data reduction possible through factor analysis enables some broad summary outcomes to be presented. Two of the six factors have good reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha); three have reliabilities that are adequate for indicative purposes (if not for psychometrics); and the reliability of the last is very poor, indicating that the two items from which it is formed are better treated as separate items¹².

Details of the factor analysis are provided in Statistical Appendix SA1. The five factors with reasonable reliability, together with three individual items, are given below and are used as the basis for the reporting that follows.

Factor No.	Label or short form of item	Reliability
1	Programme quality (10 items)	0.902
2	Coping with demands (6 Items)	0.683
3	Feedback (3 items)	0.859
4	Services (4 items)	0.653
5	Social engagement (2 items)	0.656
Item	Worry about financing through HE	N/A
Item	Not able to attend all sessions	N/A
Item	Would recommend my PT programme	N/A

Where relevant, mean ratings are given. The percentage assenting to a proposition (in the present case, this would be the percentage indicating a rating more positive than the mid-point of the scale) is often preferred to the mean rating as an index, since it avoids an implicit assumption of equal intervals in the rating scale. However, the two methods correlate +0.98 for the survey’s dataset and it makes little practical difference which is used. Here, the mean has been used as the index since it offers a clearer indication of where the aggregated responses lie on the five-point scale.

Item-by-item analyses, providing greater detail than the analyses by grouped items, are provided in the Statistical Appendices to this report.

The whole dataset has been ‘cut’ in various ways in the analyses that follow. Complex multivariate analyses, and tests of statistical significance for the ‘cuts’ reported below,

¹² A 7-Factor solution (relaxing the eigenvalue > 1 criterion) separated these two items, but at the expense of introducing muddiness elsewhere in the structure.

have not been undertaken because the dataset falls considerably short in respect of the requirements for such tests. Where there are differences, therefore, the possibility has to be entertained that these arise because of interaction effects amongst the variables. Such differences, however, invite investigation beyond the scope of this study as to their robustness.

Level of study

Item group	Level of study	PGT	Bachelor's	Below Bachelor's	Short course
		Nmax=1130	Nmax=1170	Nmax=443	Nmax=69
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Programme quality (10)		3.61	3.59	3.47	3.76
Coping with demands (6)		3.29	3.24	3.18	3.30
Feedback (3)		3.40	3.25	3.22	3.49
Services (4)		3.51	3.44	3.49	3.56
Social engagement (2)		3.51	3.62	3.80	3.40
Worry about financing through HE (1)		3.08	2.94	3.06	3.05
Not able to attend all sessions (1)		3.19	3.15	3.27	3.38
Would recommend my PT prog (1)		3.63	3.70	3.55	3.90

By and large, students across the various programme levels gave positive ratings to the aspects of programme quality captured by the 13 items in Factors 1 and 3, with mean scores for individual items close to, or exceeding, 3.5 on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). The two divergent sets of responses (see Statistical Appendix SA2) related to programme organisation and to feeling a member of an academic grouping, where the mean responses were only marginally above the scale mid-point of 3. Where comparisons can be made, the figures are similar to those recorded on the survey of first-year full-time students (see Yorke and Longden, 2007), with the exception of programme organisation where the mean is markedly lower than that for first-year full-time students.

The 'coping with demand' figures conceal some individual item means that diverge substantially from the scale means. Whereas the means for coping with the academic demands and undertaking background reading were around 3.5, those for balancing the demands of academic and other commitments were around 2.5. The latter set of means, which is to some extent reflected in that for the attendance at sessions, is markedly below those for first-year full-time students, whereas the former sets are rather higher.

The 'social engagement' pair of items pick up an issue that emerged very strongly from the first-year full-time study – the importance to respondents of engaging with others, in terms of both friendship (and implicitly the support that this can afford) and also academic discussion (and implicitly peer learning).

The reaction to institutional services is broadly positive. Computing and library resources attracted ratings of around 3.6, whereas those for catering and support services

were rather lower at around 3.2 (it needs to be noted that there were some 10% fewer responses for these particular items).

Despite some reservations about the organisation of programmes, there was a strong propensity for respondents to recommend their programme to a friend (mean around 3.6: there is no first-year full-time comparator).

Concern about funding their studies in higher education was weaker than for the first-year full-time students. The means for part-time respondents were around 3.0, whereas the mean for the first-year full-time students was less than 2.5.

Age

The positivity of rating increases with age as regards the experience of the programme and the extent to which respondents were able to cope with its demands. However, the opposite trend is apparent in respect of social engagement.

Item group	Age	Under 25	26 to 30	31 to 40	41 to 50	Over 50
		Nmax=440	Nmax=526	Nmax=789	Nmax=777	Nmax=294
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Programme quality (10)		3.43	3.52	3.59	3.65	3.78
Coping with demands (6)		3.13	3.22	3.21	3.31	3.44
Feedback (3)		3.06	3.20	3.33	3.42	3.63
Services (4)		3.51	3.49	3.44	3.47	3.51
Social engagement (2)		3.83	3.82	3.51	3.50	3.34
Worry about financing through HE (1)		3.07	3.07	2.87	3.06	3.15
Not able to attend all sessions (1)		3.22	3.11	3.07	3.27	3.42
Would recommend my PT prog (1)		3.45	3.62	3.64	3.73	3.87

A finer breakdown of the responses is given in Statistical Appendix SA3.

Gender

Gender-related differences are small, save for the greater concern expressed by female students regarding financing their studies.

Item group	Gender	Male	Female
		Nmax=974	Nmax=1837
		Mean	Mean
Programme quality (10)		3.60	3.58
Coping with demands (6)		3.23	3.26
Feedback (3)		3.19	3.38
Services (4)		3.54	3.44
Social engagement (2)		3.62	3.58
Worry about financing through HE (1)		3.22	2.91
Not able to attend all sessions (1)		3.16	3.20
Would recommend my PT prog (1)		3.70	3.63

See Statistical Appendix SA4 for greater detail.

Ethnicity

Disregarding the very small number of Chinese students, whose representativeness is open to question, the only difference of any magnitude again relates to the financing of studies. White other than British, black and black British, and Asian and Asian British all exhibit a higher level of concern than their White British counterparts. Curiously, given the political importance of widening participation, the relatively recent study by Callender et al (2006) only mentions ethnicity, in relation to their response profile, in 'white / not white' terms, and does not pursue this difference analytically.

However, the more detailed analysis in Statistical Appendix SA5 indicates that black and Asian students showed a higher tendency to find academic work harder than expected.

Item group	Ethnicity	White	White, not British	Black or Black British	Asian or Asian British	Chinese
		Nmax=2275	Nmax=171	Nmax=174	Nmax=115	Nmax=11
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Programme quality (10)		3.58	3.59	3.73	3.60	3.89
Coping with demands (6)		3.26	3.23	3.27	3.16	3.07
Feedback (3)		3.31	3.25	3.42	3.30	3.79
Services (4)		3.50	3.42	3.43	3.42	3.67
Social engagement (2)		3.59	3.55	3.65	3.76	3.95
Worry about financing through HE (1)		3.11	2.81	2.64	2.64	2.50
Not able to attend all sessions (1)		3.19	3.19	3.26	3.31	2.73
Would recommend my PT prog (1)		3.63	3.65	4.03	3.78	3.80

Disability

Items relating to the experience of the programme attracted broadly similar ratings from students who had declared a disability and from those who had not. Yet again, concerns

over financing were the aspect of experience that differentiated the two groups. Particular kinds of disability may have had an influence on attendance and on social engagement.

Item group	Disability declared?	
	Yes Nmax=218	No Nmax=2573
Programme quality (10)	Mean 3.50	Mean 3.60
Coping with demands (6)	3.23	3.25
Feedback (3)	3.25	3.32
Services (4)	3.36	3.49
Social engagement (2)	3.46	3.61
Worry about financing through HE (1)	2.78	3.05
Not able to attend all sessions (1)	3.21	3.19
Would recommend my PT prog (1)	3.47	3.67

A more detailed breakdown is given in Statistical Appendix SA6.

Socio-economic group

As was found in the survey of first-year full-time students' experience, the socio-economic group to which the student belonged seems not to have had an impact on their experience of the programme. It is related to financial worries, however, with those from managerial and professional backgrounds, not unexpectedly, evidencing less concern than other groups.

Item group	Socio-economic group				
	Managerial etc Nmax=1833	Intermediate Nmax=465	Supervisory etc Nmax=273	Long term unemployed or never worked Nmax=31	Unsure or other Nmax=198
Programme quality (10)	Mean 3.58	Mean 3.61	Mean 3.59	Mean 3.80	Mean 3.56
Coping with demands (6)	3.28	3.19	3.25	3.03	3.18
Feedback (3)	3.32	3.31	3.33	3.67	3.27
Services (4)	3.48	3.47	3.53	3.72	3.38
Social engagement (2)	3.56	3.67	3.76	3.24	3.56
Worry about financing through HE (1)	3.20	2.70	2.90	2.07	2.55
Not able to attend all sessions (1)	3.15	3.27	3.34	3.41	3.10
Would recommend my PT prog (1)	3.64	3.73	3.61	4.16	3.51

See also Statistical Appendix SA7.

Dependants

Having dependants seems to make no appreciable difference to students' experience of their programmes. The small diminutions in the ratings for social engagement and

attendance make intuitive sense. The largest difference is once more related to financial concern, where the level of concern is – as might be expected – greater for those with dependants.

Responsibility for dependants? Item group	Yes	No
	Nmax=1228 Mean	Nmax=1570 Mean
Programme quality (10)	3.67	3.53
Coping with demands (6)	3.22	3.27
Feedback (3)	3.40	3.25
Services (4)	3.51	3.46
Social engagement (2)	3.53	3.65
Worry about financing through HE (1)	2.89	3.12
Not able to attend all sessions (1)	3.11	3.25
Would recommend my PT prog (1)	3.78	3.56

See the more detailed breakdown in Statistical Appendix SA8.

Previous experience of higher education

Students were asked whether they had had experience of higher education prior to taking up their current programme, irrespective of whether any such prior programme had been completed. As would be expected, the vast majority (88.7 per cent) of students on PGT programmes had had previous experience in higher education. There was however a surprisingly high level of prior experience of higher education amongst those studying at bachelor's level (73.0 per cent) and at a level below this (74.2 per cent). With English governmental policy focusing on giving potential students a first chance in higher education, and the limitation regarding funding for a graduate's subsequent entry into higher education, this finding is worthy of further exploration in order to assess the extent to which the data reflect graduate re-entry or a return to higher education without having completed a first degree.

It seemed to make little difference to the students' experience whether or not they had spent time previously in higher education, save for a greater tendency for those lacking prior experience to find academic work harder than they had expected it to be (see Statistical Appendix SA9). In passing, it is worth noting that Callender et al (2006, p.60) found that a shade over half of their respondents had reported that they had found their coursework to have been more difficult than they had anticipated: the corresponding percentage from the present study (for the totality of respondents) was 45 – i.e. much the same.

Previous experience of HE?	Yes	No
	Nmax=2190	Nmax=607
Item group	Mean	Mean
Programme quality (10)	3.60	3.54
Coping with demands (6)	3.28	3.14
Feedback (3)	3.32	3.29
Services (4)	3.48	3.48
Social engagement (2)	3.57	3.70
Worry about financing through HE (1)	3.04	2.92
Not able to attend all sessions (1)	3.17	3.25
Would recommend my PT prog (1)	3.66	3.62

Main reason for studying

Students whose main reason for studying was preparation for promotion were least positive about their programme and their coping with the demands it made on them. An issue left unexplored was whether the promotion being sought was in their existing organisation or a new one. Those preparing to switch careers were markedly more concerned about the financial aspects of their studying. Of these respondents, 61.6 per cent indicated that they were bearing responsibility for tuition fees, about 6 percentage points more than those whose primary aim was personal satisfaction. In contrast, only around 20 per cent of those who were seeking to improve in their current job or were seeking promotion were bearing responsibility for tuition fees. Social engagement seems to have been marginally less positively rated by those whose primary aim in studying was personal satisfaction, which is intuitively plausible.

Main reason for studying	Personal satisfaction	Improvement in current job	Preparation for promotion	Preparation for career switch	Other
	Nmax=549	Nmax=1290	Nmax=333	Nmax=526	Nmax=117
Item group	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Programme quality (10)	3.66	3.61	3.40	3.58	3.59
Coping with demands (6)	3.37	3.20	3.18	3.28	3.24
Feedback (3)	3.37	3.34	3.13	3.31	3.41
Services (4)	3.50	3.52	3.39	3.44	3.41
Social engagement (2)	3.50	3.61	3.64	3.66	3.50
Worry about financing through HE (1)	3.01	3.23	3.19	2.53	2.76
Not able to attend all sessions (1)	3.28	3.15	3.09	3.24	3.22
Would recommend my PT prog (1)	3.82	3.66	3.40	3.65	3.53

See also Statistical Appendix SA10.

Length of programme and proportion completed

It is difficult, in a short questionnaire, to connect the proportion of a programme completed by a participant and the length of the programme because of the variety of programme lengths in part-time study. The questionnaire asked respondents to state the approximate length of their programme, and the rough proportion they had completed. Data from those who had recently embarked on their programme were discounted because of the respondents' limited experience-base.

Item group	Programme length (approx) Proportion completed	6 mths or less ¼ or more Nmax=140	7-12 mths ¼ or more Nmax=231	2 yrs or more ¼ to ½ Nmax=1050	2 yrs or more ¾ to almost all Nmax=1112
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Programme quality (10)		3.70	3.70	3.56	3.56
Coping with demands (6)		3.30	3.19	3.23	3.28
Feedback (3)		3.47	3.46	3.30	3.27
Services (4)		3.54	3.55	3.48	3.43
Social engagement (2)		3.38	3.51	3.64	3.67
Worry about financing through HE		2.81	3.03	3.09	2.99
Not able to attend all sessions		3.30	3.07	3.30	3.11
Would recommend my PT programme		3.69	3.70	3.67	3.59

For both shorter (up to 12 months) and longer programmes, the ratings remain much the same, save for the greater level of social engagement associated with the longer programmes. Subdividing by level of study made little difference, save for below bachelor's level programmes, where the ratings for programme quality and feedback were noticeably higher for the shorter programmes.

Item group	Programme length (approx) Proportion completed	Up to 12 mths ¼ or more Nmax=125	2 yrs or more More than ¼ Nmax=262
		Mean	Mean
Programme quality (10)		3.81	3.45
Feedback (3)		3.58	3.18

Location of programme

Across all levels of study, the mean ratings for matters relating to the programme tend to be higher away from the universities' main campuses. The effect is more marked in associate or partner colleges, but further analysis shows that this column of results is considerably influenced by the 74 PGT students in these colleges, 49 of whom were following programmes in Education. Nevertheless, feedback (especially in terms of its detail and its value in supporting learning) was consistently rated more highly away from the main university campus.

Location of teaching	Main campus	Subsidiary campus	Associate or partner college
	Nmax=1928	Nmax=312	Nmax=206
Item group	Mean	Mean	Mean
Programme quality (10)	3.55	3.59	3.74
Coping with demands (6)	3.22	3.23	3.41
Feedback (3)	3.20	3.41	3.74
Services (4)	3.50	3.46	3.42
Social engagement (2)	3.72	3.49	3.68
Worry about financing through HE (1)	3.05	3.00	3.04
Not able to attend all sessions (1)	3.22	3.02	3.36
Would recommend my PT prog (1)	3.62	3.61	3.90

A more detailed breakdown of these data can be found in Statistical Appendix SA11.

Relation of personal mode of study to curriculum design

Situation as a student	Qualification aim in 4 bands				Total
	PGT	Bachelor's	Below bachelor's	Short course	
PT student on PT programme	796 (70.6%)	647 (55.9%)	295 (67.0%)	54 (78.3%)	1792 (64.1%)
Studying a FT prog on a PT basis	248 (22.0%)	427 (36.9%)	107 (24.3%)	4 (5.8%)	786 (28.1%)
Not sure	84 (7.4%)	84 (7.3%)	38 (8.6%)	11 (15.9%)	217 (7.8%)
Total	1128	1158	440	69	2795

A substantial minority of students (especially at bachelor's level) had joined full-time programmes, but on a part-time basis. Some of these students commented strongly on the failure of those teaching full-time programmes to appreciate that part-time students might not be able to fulfil requirements as rapidly as was expected of their full-time peers. The comparison of the grouped responses from the two modes of engagement hint at problems in coping with demand. The item-by-item analysis (Statistical Appendix SA12) shows that the difference between the two modes of engagement is concentrated in the areas of programme organisation (a matter that institutions should be able to address) and in the students' inability to attend all sessions (which, for a full-time programme, may be less susceptible to institutional intervention). It is unclear why those studying part-time on a full-time programme should evidence a higher level of worry about financing their studies than those who were studying on a part-time programme.

Item group	PT on PT prog Nmax=1823	PT on FT prog Nmax=804
	Mean	Mean
Programme quality (10)	3.60	3.56
Coping with demands (6)	3.28	3.20
Feedback (3)	3.33	3.27
Services (4)	3.50	3.44
Social engagement (2)	3.61	3.59
Worry about financing through HE	3.10	2.84
Not able to attend all sessions	3.25	3.05
Would recommend my PT prog	3.68	3.59

Computer availability

Across all levels of study, a computer was available at home to 98 per cent of the students. The near-ubiquity of home computers should not blind institutions to the small minority of students (50 respondents to the survey) for whom such a resource is unavailable. Unavailability was linked (albeit weakly) to socio-economic status, and institutions might – on equity grounds – wish to ensure that every student has appropriate access, especially if some of the curriculum and administration is conveyed through electronic media.

What the students said

Surveys with predetermined response categories (especially those that are relatively brief) risk missing out on aspects of their experience that students would wish to communicate. The present survey, like that of the first-year experience, therefore included some open-ended questions:

- What have been the **best** aspects of your experience as a part-time student at this institution?
- What have been the **worst** aspects of your experience as a part-time student at this institution?
- Has this questionnaire left out any important aspects of the experience of being a part-time student? If so, please note them below...
- If you would like to comment at greater length about your experience as a part-time student, please use the space below...

The comments noted below were limited to 100 words maximum and refer to the first two of these questions. They cannot be taken as representative of a very varied group of respondents, though some indication of the prevalence of the issues they raise can be gathered from the totality of the comments. The comments do illustrate – in some cases quite vividly – the kinds of reaction that part-time provision can evoke. The comments reported here exclude those from the small number of students on short courses and

professional programmes at undergraduate level since the level of study in these cases is unclear.

There were relatively few references to employers: where employers were mentioned, it was more often than not in relation to administrative mix-ups (a few comments put it more strongly) regarding the payment of fees.

In the section that follows (which covers the best and worst of times, as perceived by students), it is readily apparent that many of the quotations could have been placed under more than one sub-heading since the points made are interconnected. Hence the organisation of the sub-sections is to some extent arbitrary. Many of the quotations are excerpts from longer comments, and minor typographical errors in the original have been tidied up¹³. References to institutions and individuals have been removed, and no comment has been used where it contained information that could point to the originator.

Regarding the best aspects of the student experience, across all respondents the main two areas of report covered the teaching/tutorial experience and personal development, which figured strongly. Other aspects that were mentioned quite frequently were the possibility of combining employment with study, and the making of friends and sharing experiences. When the data were disaggregated by the three main levels of engagement, the patterns were very similar: the only difference worth mentioning is that, for the relatively small number of those studying on programmes below the level of the bachelor's degree, aspects of personal development were the most frequently mentioned.

Reported 'worst' aspects of experience were more evenly spread amongst categories than were the best aspects. Those that were fairly frequently mentioned related to organisation and administration at various levels, the status of part-time students vis-à-vis their full-time peers, the quality of teaching, matters relating to assessment and feedback, and the quality of support (both pedagogic and administrative).

It should be remembered, however, that the overall picture of provision painted by the respondents is quite strongly positive. Where they are negative, the responses act as a prompt to institutions to consider whether their offerings to part-time students could nevertheless be improved in a number of respects.

The general experience

There were many responses along the lines of the following enthusiastic comments.

1. Very friendly administrative staff and tutors.
2. Well-planned course and very good, knowledgeable tutor who is prepared to help with any problems.
3. Relaxed atmosphere and

¹³ This acknowledges that the speed of the typing fingers sometimes undermines the accuracy of the thought. It may err on the side of generosity.

feeling you are always being encouraged in spite of the intense work sessions. [284: Female; 56-60; PGT; Humanities¹⁴]

Excellent range of teaching and assessment strategies. Excellent support from tutors. Work current and with an industrial bias. [904: Male; 36-40; PGT; Performance Arts]

I have found the programme stimulating and interesting, the facilities are good and easily accessed, the tutors have been approachable and I feel that I could discuss any difficulties with them. [588: Female; 51-55; PGT; Social studies]

(1) Excellent teaching; (2) good resources and exam preparation; (3) variety on the course; and (4) lots of support, encouragement and feedback from my tutors. [2208: female; 36-40; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Excellent tutor support and encouragement. A more individualised approach as compared to other institutions. Minimal time obtaining results following submission, again by comparison to other institutions. [273: Female; 46-50; Bachelor's degree; Subject allied to Medicine]

The commitment of the tutors. I have gained so much knowledge during my studies. Through difficult times the support of my tutors has been so encouraging. All the tutors are vastly experienced in their own fields this gives students confidence. All tutors' doors are always open if you need them for anything. I am grateful of good positive feedback from tutors. I have gained in confidence and raised my self esteem so much since I started my degree at [university]. [370: Male; 51-55; Bachelor's degree; Creative Arts & Design]

First year experience was very good - course tutor had more control over the running of the course and organisation was good. Assignment feedback was prompt, and it was clear what was required in order to obtain good marks on the course. Staff were encouraging and understanding of the difficulties of fitting in studying around a full time job. [18: Female; under 25; below bachelor's level programme; Engineering & technologies]

However, a small minority of students noted that their experiences had been unacceptably poor. The following is a case in point.

Where to begin? Worst learning experience of my life: lack of course management, inexperienced lecturers or lecturers that English is not first language, no feedback on coursework from day one, 95% of time no reply to emails, no support, had one tutorial in four years, course haemorrhaged learners from day one [...]. Disability given lip service. After four years of struggle finally thrown the towel in. Never recommend this to anyone. [1102: Male; 31-35; below bachelor's level programme; Mathematical & Computer Sciences]

Teaching quality

The quality of the teaching is obviously of critical importance. Many respondents (including those in the preceding sub-section) testified to the quality of the teaching that they had received.

¹⁴ In this and the other quotations, the index number is simply a coding in the dataset. It will be noted that some respondents are quoted on more than one occasion.

The tutors are so helpful and really bring out the best in me through their teaching. They are inspirational in their teaching and are also fabulous role models!! [3011: Female; 41-45; PGT; subject allied to Medicine]

I have experienced some really great lecturers who have been really passionate about the subjects they are teaching & this has been really inspiring. [779: Female; 26-30; bachelor's degree; Combined programme in arts, humanities and social sciences]

I enjoyed the mix of face to face and online teaching. [1922: Female; 36-40; PGT; Education]

Many students commented that they had found their experience of part-time study stimulating.

I enjoy the stimulation and the learning experience as I have never had an opportunity like this before. [1959: Female; 46-50; PGT; Combined programme in arts, humanities and social sciences]

Stimulation of my brain, gathering knowledge for myself, increasing my knowledge base, refreshing my knowledge. Being taught by very able tutors whose knowledge was amazing and this allowed the group to explore areas in detail. [1539: Female; 41-45; PGT; Education]

Intellectual stimulation; understanding of professional context; meeting interesting students on my course. [721 Female; over 60; PGT; Social studies]

The sheer enjoyment of learning something new. Seeing the world in a different way. Feeling as if I am being challenged. [756: Male; 31-35; bachelor's degree; Humanities]

I have enjoyed the challenge of studying something completely different to my job [detail withheld]. [798: Female; 41-45; bachelor's degree; subject allied to Medicine]

I have enjoyed the intellectual stimulation and my success at my studies which had increased my self esteem. My work based program has enhanced my professionalism and my subject knowledge making me better at my job. The friends I have made are forever. [1751: Female; 41-45; below bachelor's level programme; Education]

However, other students appear to have been the recipients of teaching that, on the face of it, was unacceptably poor.

I am disappointed with the quality of the teaching and the content of the course. The course is not in the detail that I expected and some of the teaching is out of date. Feedback on assignments has been very slow. [1852: Female; 31-35; PGT; Architecture, Building & Planning]

Poor quality of teaching staff; "retired" and very old and out of date academics being brought in to teach or supervise us - a definite feeling that we are not being given the top team; contradictory and inconsistent feedback from tutors on how to write essays and exam answers. [171: Male; 26-30; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Turning up for a teaching session, for the tutor to read from slides and then finish. 30-40 min total out of the afternoon is not acceptable when taking time off from work. Little guidance on completing the assignment. Ambiguous marking grid. Lack of support. The module could easily be done as distance learning if better paperwork work was involved. [1608: Male; 31-35; PGT; subject allied to Medicine]

Academically shallow. No lectures, just powerpoint monkeys reading the screen. [1590: Male; 41-45; bachelor's degree; Architecture, Building & Planning]

Lecturers that read from handouts and refuse to answer questions. [556: Male; 26-30; below bachelor's level programme; Engineering & technologies]

The second year has been poorly planned. Indeed the last module is a random collection of lectures, with some concept of these being applicable to the future direction of project management, along with an arrogance of [assuming that we are] M-level students who should be able to work [it] out for [our]selves. [2412: Male; 31-35; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Studying with full time students who have not worked in the industry can cause the lecturer to teach as if the whole class is currently not in employment [188: Male; 36-40; PGT; Architecture, Building & Planning]

Distance learning is extremely isolating and can get disheartening. Trying to ask questions of your tutor [as] regards various aspects of the course and getting one line answers. [...] Waiting for supposedly online lectures only for the tutor not to turn up thus the students that have turned up teach each other!!! It can get very frustrating ... [1123: Female; 36-40; PGT; Social studies]

Supportiveness

Good formal teaching is a necessary but insufficient condition for a satisfying student experience. Much learning accrues in less formal circumstances, which is where – in response to individuals' needs – the support of staff across the institution has a major part to play. There were a number of testimonials to the quality of support, from various sources.

University has gone over and above requirements in communication and student support. [1198: Female; 36-40; bachelor's degree; subject allied to Medicine]

The tutors are great easy to contact, very supportive and help in any way they can [15: Female; 51-55; below bachelor's level programme; Law]

The course leader ... has always encouraged me. [2486: Female; 46-50; PGT; subject allied to Medicine]

The support I receive from lecturers and administrative staff when I have a problem whether it be classwork or ill health. [2016: Female; 51-55; PGT; subject area not given]

... all tutors have been more than helpful and willing to listen when problems occur. They also have suggestions to help if personal problems arise. The library staff have been extremely helpful in giving advice and in getting resources. [1141: Female; 46-50; PGT; Education]

The fantastic tutors, the great library staff, how helpful!! [2956: Female; 51-55; PGT; Education]

Amazing computer-based support. [701: Female; 46-50; PGT; Social studies]

Support is closely related to the attitudes that students perceive in staff. As noted earlier, many students found that those with whom they came into contact to be committed to the educative process in all its respects. A further quotation along these lines was as follows:

The library and office staff are so helpful. Everybody works hard together to ensure you are settled. [370: Male; 51-55; bachelor's degree; Creative Arts & Design]

However, some academics seem to have not given the circumstances of their part-time students sufficient consideration. For example:

Tutors etc. place too great demands on part-time students, without appreciating that the majority of them work full-time, and often travel great distances to attend the course. [717: Female; 26-30; PGT; Architecture, Building & Planning]

It is perhaps when part-time students and full-time students are in the same grouping that problems of this sort are accentuated (see later).

In some instances, staff professionalism appeared to have lapsed.

Tutors turning up to lectures late [737: Female; 41-45; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Rude staff. [556: Male; 26-30; below bachelor's level programme; Engineering & technologies]

Customer care is poor. Students are treated as second-class citizens by a large number of non-teaching staff. It seems to be a culture. Students are often denied basic respect and even common civilities (please, thank you, good morning, punctuality, a smile). This has also extended to outright hostility at times. This reflects badly on the staff themselves. As a returner to learning this has been a shock to me. [392: Female; 51-55; PGT; subject allied to Medicine]

One respondent set out a case for specific training in a number of respects:

I have studied part-time on and off. [...] On both occasions I have found the administration staff in the [named] faculty rude and unhelpful. I have experienced a lot of class bias attitude from some members of the teaching staff. The attitude has been backward thinking and low expectations of working class students. I am a senior professional and have worked [...] for over 12 years, but [the] university environment I have found to be the far worst and very oppressive for Black/asian students. It has not been a friendly or encouraging environment for me. Just the basics soughting [*sorting*] out dyslexia support or making queries with admin staff has been stressful. On majority occasions the female white staff I have found to be unfriendly, unhelpful, rude and this has caused me stress and anxiety to the point I have looked forward to finishing my course and not returning to this establishment. [...] I think the staff especially in the [named] faculty would benefit from diversity and awareness training as this would make them realise that when mature students come to the university we come with skills and experience, so have a lot to offer and that the learning experience is mutual. The middle class staff need to take their blinkers off and realise that Black and working class people are equal if not more talented and should be encouraged and that they need to keep their prejudicial views to themselves. The staff in the [named] faculty would benefit from training on the obstacles that women, Black people, people with disabilities, working class people face on a daily basis which can limit their choices to opportunities [2907: Female; 36-40; below bachelor's degree programme; Law]

The issue of supportiveness extends to induction. Students need to know at the outset what facilities are available, otherwise they may become anxious regarding what is being expected of them.

Not having an induction to the university really heightened my anxiety levels and I had to make extra effort to orientate myself to the university and all the services available. [2587: Male; under 25; bachelor's degree; Architecture, Building & Planning]

Feeling adrift and out of touch with the online system; unsure of where to start and what is expected of me; anxious and unsettled with regard to the pressure the workload, stress and worry causes for other aspects of my life. [1114: Male; 36-40; PGT; Education]

Part-timers may miss induction sessions because they are held on a day when they are not attending the institution.

As a part-time student I did not undergo the library induction due to not being in on the day it was conducted. [1436: Female; 41-45; Bachelor's degree; Education]

Enrolment at a time other than the beginning of the academic year may be less than ideal:

Relatively poor induction (January intake) [1554: Female; 46-50; PGT; Education]

Assessment

Formative assessment is widely acknowledged as being of key importance to learning. Feedback on assignments needs to be both timely and given in sufficient detail if it is to be useful. The speed of feedback, particularly, has emerged as an issue in the education of full-time students and, judging by some of the comments from the present respondents, it can be just as much an issue in part-time higher education.

Tutors taking a long time in returning course work and not before next assignment in next module is due when feedback would help complete subsequent assignment. [737: Female; 41-45; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Not having feedback or my first assignment back until past the hand in date of my second assignment, this would [have] helped me to prevent repeating the same silly errors. [2953: Female; 26-30; bachelor's degree; subject allied to Medicine]

Coursework never handed back. Exam results not given back due to lecturer not handing them in. Staff refusing to give marks for past units. [556: Male; 26-30; below bachelor's level programme; Engineering & technologies]

Lack of feedback on assignments. Poor attitude from lecturers, lack of assistance. I feel if I can work full-time, look after my own house, undertake a part-time degree course (and get good grades) the least that the lecturers can do is their job. [1005: Female; under 25; bachelor's degree; Architecture, Building & Planning]

The 'feedforward' aspect of assessment, where knowledge of previous performances can be turned to good effect subsequently, is readily apparent, as the following comments indicate.

Not getting enough feedback from lecturers when you get coursework or exam results back. Then you never know whereabouts you're going wrong and hence make similar mistakes as you go along through the course. [997: Male; 26-30; bachelor's degree; Mathematical & Computer Sciences]

Never really knowing if what I was doing was good enough and how I could improve. [463: Female; 46-50; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

The following respondent was not the only one to point to confusion as to what was wanted.

Confusing marking systems, unclear what is expected of us and what we will be marked on. [86: Female; under 25; below bachelor's level programme; Architecture, Building & Planning]

If expectations are not made clear at the outset, then it is obvious that the students will find difficulty in completing their tasks properly.

Institutional resources and services

Some strongly positive comments were noted earlier regarding the supportiveness perceived by some students. One respondent indicated that their institution had made its provision sufficiently flexible for its part-time students:

The best aspect is definitely the library and learning resource centre, they have really flexible opening hours so people studying in the evening have the same access to books and resources. The blackboard system for students to keep updated during the week is also very helpful as many of the students on my course live some distance from [city], for example I live [...] a good 1hr 20mins train journey away. [857: Female; 26-30; below bachelor's level programme; Architecture, Building & Planning]

In contrast, another pointed out difficulties that are exacerbated by part-time engagement with the institution:

Library books being on a 7 day loan is ridiculous when you're only in 1 day a week. The overall lack of availability of books, especially when a module revolves around 1 particular book. I resent paying £30 - £50 x 4 for a book that I need for approximately 12 weeks of the semester. [2507: Male; 36-40; bachelor's degree; Architecture, Building & Planning]

Another (who was not the only one to criticise library provision) commented pithily:

A library that Dickens would consider outdated. [1590: Male; 41-45; bachelor's degree; Architecture, Building & Planning]

An 'Open all hours' philosophy (or, at least, a reasonable approximation to it) was not always apparent:

Student Support Services. They are only catered to full-time students (i.e. Mon-Fri 09.00-17.00hrs), impossible for a part time student that works to attend or seek support. [1748: Female; 41-45; bachelor's degree; Business & Administrative studies]

Poor catering/hospitality provision - you need a cuppa after a day at work! [1554: Female; 46-50; PGT; Education]

One respondent appeared not to have received the support that had been promised:

I have dyslexia [...] and I have not received any support from any person at the University and I was promised 1-1 support as I find it difficult to learn some aspects of my degree and struggle in

exams. I have tried to talk to my personal tutor but I always get referred to speak to another department - I was on the understanding that my Personal Tutor was their to provide me any addition support that I may require! [1592: Female; ; 26-30; bachelor's degree; Combined programme in science-based subjects]

Personal development

Aspects of their personal development were a feature of many students' responses. Part-time study had opened up possibilities that they had hitherto not envisaged.

A realisation that I have the ability to get an academic qualification. [2486 ; Female; 46-50; PGT; subject allied to Medicine]

Actually realising I CAN do this [1827: Female; 46-50; bachelor's degree; subject allied to Medicine]

1. Improving intellectual/writing/analysis/speaking skills, even at my advanced age. 2. Opening up the world 3. providing a post-retirement discipline and structure to life. [2143: Female; over 60; bachelor's degree; Humanities]

Rediscovering the 'learner' in me. [...] Developing my own [learning and knowledge and gaining from] others' knowledge and experiences that will enhance my performance in my day to day job. [2711 Female; 36-40; PGT; Education;]

Being challenged by the content of the course - it's very demanding and has made me do things that I had thought I was incapable of. [...] The expectations of the tutors are very high on this course which makes me strive to do better. [728: Female; 36-40; PGT; Law]

Often it was a matter of self-confidence and/or self-esteem.

Gained self-confidence from my ability to successfully organise my home life, work and study. Increased knowledge at work leading to increased respect from colleagues and supervisor. [2149: Female; 36-40; PGT; subject allied to Medicine]

Self esteem has been boosted [1141: Female; 46-50; PGT; Education]

My confidence has soared since doing the course and it has really opened my mind. [3011: Female; 41-45; PGT; subject allied to Medicine]

Growing confidence in my ability to study as I have never studied at this level before. When I started it was a diploma course, not a degree; I probably would not have enrolled if it had been a degree course because I would not have thought myself capable. [947: Female; 46-50; bachelor's degree; subject allied to Medicine]

SELF BELIEF - after a break from study it has been a reassurance that I do still have a brain and am capable of learning and achieving more. [2424: Male; 41-45; below bachelor's level programme; Business & Administrative studies]

Being a single mum, it has given me my own identity, confidence, social life and a way toward a better future. [3079: Female; under 25; below bachelor's level programme; Business & Administrative studies]

Any true educator would be delighted to receive comments such as these.

Meeting others

Higher education is at heart a social process, whether this be face-to-face or electronic, and whether it be between tutor and student(s) or between students. The quality of that process is central to good learning, as many respondents testified in one way or another. Tutor-student interaction was noted earlier: here the emphasis is on what students gain from each other. First, the pleasures (and educational value) of simply meeting others:

The best aspects have been getting to know the full time students (many of whom are considerably younger than me) and feeling part of the group. [798: Female; 41-45; bachelor's degree; subject allied to Medicine]

My fellow cohort are all mixed race/age and gender, I feel like I fit in at [university]. [708: Male; 41-45; bachelor's degree; Architecture, Building & Planning]

Meeting people with an equal interest in learning. Being made to feel part of an exciting learning environment. [264: Male; 56-60; bachelor's degree; Humanities]

Meeting other disabled people, who have found jobs or gone to do interviews during the training provided during the course. [2497: Male; 36-40; PGT; Creative Arts & Design]

I have met some wonderful people from many different cultures which has been rewarding and educational. [3011: Female; 41-45; PGT; subject allied to Medicine]

I really like coming to the campus and interacting with tutors and my fellow students - that is how I learn the best, the teaching has been thought-provoking and stimulating. [2704: Female; 51-55; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

The other people on the course who have been superb. [2486: Female; 46-50; PGT; subject allied to Medicine]

I loved having face to face discussions with colleagues and meeting people from different professional backgrounds. [1922: Female; 36-40; PGT; Education]

Some of the comments were more overtly instrumental:

1. Meeting other childcare practitioners; I have developed more ideas which I can take back to my setting and use there. This would not happen if I was not based at a university. 2. Meeting a wide range of tutors who specialise in particular topics, their knowledge is of great use when writing assignments. 3. Everybody I have met has been very welcoming and supportive. [217: Female; under 25; below bachelor's level programme; Education]

The degree programme is totally on-line [...]. Collaborating with other researchers has been stimulating. We discuss and debate issues, concepts and theories which improve our submitted work. [2295: Female; 56-60; bachelor's degree; Education]

Building up a good rapport with other people in occupational health departments and sharing information with each other that can help improve services provided by my department. [909: Female; 36-40; bachelor's degree; subject allied to Medicine]

1. I enjoy the fact that I have contact with other people who are studying the same subject as my self ,and I get the opportunity to get new ideas on how to work/study. 2. As I am over 50 years there is no pressure on me to get a first class degree, so I can enjoy the learning and help other younger students with my personal experience of the topics covered. [790: Male; 51-55; bachelor's degree; subject allied to Medicine]

However, not every interaction was as constructive:

Behaviour of fellow students - full time 'I am not bother[ed]' students. They disturb the lectures, make noise and stop the keen students on getting some knowledge. No respect for rules and policies in the classes. No respect for the tutors! [1817: Female; 26-30; below bachelor's level programme; programme related to the food industry]

Working with full time lazy students, who prefer to party, like to think of themselves as team players, but seldom put any effort into the group work but reap the rewards of the work and efforts put into the group work by part time students who are at the same time as study holding down full time jobs and some even coping with the stress of family life into the bargain. [2729: Female; 46-50; bachelor's degree; Business & Administrative studies]

Ageism from other students and some staff [938: Male; 46-50; bachelor's degree; Business & Administrative studies]

In an echo of a controversy that erupted earlier in the year, one respondent said:

Have found that the international students do not appear to be working at Masters level and therefore feel I am gaining very little from their participation in class. I feel the pace of teaching is slower than it should be in order to accommodate the international students. [1122: Female; 31-35; bachelor's degree; Business & Administrative studies]

Part-time students on full-time programmes

There was virtually no positive comment on the situation where part-time and full-time students were co-present on a programme. This is perhaps unsurprising, since if a system is working smoothly there is little to provoke comment. However, for quite a large number of respondents co-presence gave rise to difficulties.

Part-timers sometimes missed out on administrative information:

Essentially the course tailors for full-time students - so a lot of the emails/adverts etc tend to go to the full-timers and often the part-timers miss out - not by intention, but just the way things are set up. [...] I also find that any courses the university offers (eg, how to do a literature review, intro to library research) are on days on which I don't attend - and 99% of the time they are not run in the evenings. What I also find frustrating is that currently the full-timers have all this information about the dissertation that has been disclosed to them. While I appreciate they will be handing it in at least 12 months before I do, essential facts [were] only revealed to me [in] casual conversation with other students. [455: Female; 26-30; PGT; Architecture, Building & Planning]

Often I have felt excluded from the mainstream full-time course, particularly in the beginning when very little guidance or information was available on part-time study. What I feel are basic but essential things were overlooked (e.g. I was not involved in any induction to the university) and the induction programme offered to full-time students was not flexible enough to accommodate the time I have anyway. I have also experienced issues such as being refused

library books because I was only studying 'part-time'. The most recent one was in the Option choices for next year. None of the teaching staff can actually clarify where I fit into the new system because I am 'part-time'. I find this totally unacceptable and at times frustrating and upsetting. [1352: Female; 36-40; PGT; Social studies]

1. Part time students often appear to be an 'after thought'. 2. Don't always receive the same information as full time students because I am not always there when information is given out. 3. Definite 'us' and 'them' feeling from full time students. [903: Female; 41-45; bachelor's degree; Social studies]

Not receiving all information others on full-time equivalent do, e.g. visiting speakers etc Don't always feel valued as a 'proper' student by faculty head, or some tutors - not many are bothered about who we are/names/background etc. Don't feel the faculty have full respect for the course - Foundation Degree not a 'proper' degree, but the amount of work we put in considering we all work also is huge. [1759: Female; 41-45; below bachelor's level programme; Education]

Where both full-time and part-time students were on the same programme (or part thereof), the bias seemed to be towards the circumstances of the former rather than the latter.

The course was not geared for part time students and not all the tutors realised this so at times the part time students were left behind. Also we have commitments with work so when lectures were moved we could not attend. [1796: Male; under 25; PGT; Biological sciences]

1. More is expected of part-time students despite having less time to complete work, Full-time students are given more leeway for errors and presentation/planning . 2. Course structure is entirely geared for full-time study despite claims to the contrary from course leaders, assessment/examination dates often occur on days outside agreed dates, difficult to re-organise with work. [1906: Male; 26-30; PGT; Architecture, Building & Planning]

A large proportion of the students on this course are part time and hold down full time jobs, but a lot of tutors/admin support do not take this into account and consequently have unrealistic expectations of the amount of time that we can devote to the course outside of the scheduled lectures. [140: Female; 26-30; bachelor's degree; Architecture, Building & Planning]

Group work presented particular difficulties because of the differing frames of full-timers and part-timers.

As a part-timer in a class full of full time students you never really feel part of a group. [926: Female; 26-30; PGT; subject allied to Medicine]

Having to do group work with other students who I was not familiar with. This caused a problem because I was not always available to meet up at times convenient to them. Most students who are around the same age and have no families seem to mix more with each other rather than with the older ones like myself. I found it difficult to form real friendships and therefore always worked alone and had no-one to bounce ideas off of. [2676: Female; 46-50; PGT; Education]

Group course work, where my availability does not align with that of full time students. [2894: Female; 41-45; bachelor's degree; Mathematical and Computer sciences]

Relationship between study and employment

For many part-time students the study programme has a relevance to employment (either present or future).

Relating my studies directly to my employment role by choosing work related topics for some of my projects and dissertation. [506: Female; 46-50; bachelor's degree; Business & Administrative studies]

The foundation degree has helped me a great deal with the role that I am in at my practice, it is useful for me to share the experience with when I am in my work setting, it is an interesting course to be on and has gave me confidence to use my skills that I have learnt on the foundation course especially when i have just been promoted into management. [2832: Female; 36-40; below bachelor's level programme; Education]

Have learnt so much more about my role in my setting and how I can achieve much more. [2416: Female; 36-40; below bachelor's level programme; Education]

Being able to relate theory and practice was important for some:

Learning the theory and applying it to the practice. [1577: Female; 56-60; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

It has been great to put study into practice at work. [2701: Male; 31-35; PGT; Social studies]

Applied nature of the course has allowed me to explore and develop my understanding and ideas about the sector in which I work, and learn and apply tools to make better and more informed decisions at work and in my future career. [300: Female; under 25; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Useful information was gained from others on the programme:

The ability to learn and take my studies / things learned straight back into the workplace. Studying with other professionals and being able to ask their advice about things at work. [2721: Female; 46-50; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

The opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with other related professionals. The receipt of up to date information and practice in relation to my work and the increase of my knowledge base. [2556: Male; 26-30; PGT; Combined programme involving science-based and arts-based subjects]

I have learnt so much that is applicable to the job that I am currently doing. The way we have interacted as a group in learning has made it easier to apply knowledge learned to practice. [639: Female; 46-50; bachelor's degree; subject allied to Medicine]

Issues relating to employers

Whereas many employers support their employees, in one way or another, through higher education, this was on occasion felt to be insufficient...

The lack of support from my employer in terms of leave. It is assumed that because I work P/T that I have hours to spare. I work part time because of family commitments and would welcome all the support I can to improve myself and my family. [1959: Female; 46-50; PGT; Combined programme in arts, humanities and social sciences]

... or missing:

Having to find my own time to study as I was not given the time by my employers, therefore I have had to work late some evenings to accrue time to attend my course. I have to fully fund my course even though the research that I will do will directly benefit my employers and yet there is no support from them. [2919: Female; 51-55; PGT; Combined programme in arts, humanities and social sciences]

Juggling with commitments

Part-timers tend to be older and to have a wider range of commitments than their full-time counterparts. Juggling these commitments can be very challenging. Some seemed to cope well, seeing part-time study as offering a necessary flexibility – indeed, some noted the flexibility as one of the best aspects of their experience.

The ability to combine my studies and my work commitments effectively. [2556: Male; 26-30; PGT; Combined programme involving science-based and arts-based subjects]

Being able to fit study in with work and family commitments. [506: Female; 46-50; bachelor's degree; Business & Administrative studies]

In some cases, staff try to make allowances for the pressures:

Staff appreciate that I work full time and therefore try to work around my times as much as possible. [433: Female; under 25; PGT; Biological sciences]

The advantages of learning and earning were appreciated, not least because of the avoidance of building up debt:

Gaining a qualification as well as working full time and that I can pay for the course without having to take a loan. [2393: Female; under 25; bachelor's degree; Business & Administrative studies]

The best aspect of the course have been that I am able to fit in with working full time and have not had to fund it myself. [532: Female; under 25; below bachelor's level programme; Business & Administrative studies]

Have been able to study a subject I have found interesting and stimulating whilst also being able to work full-time which means I haven't had to get into debt to gain the qualification. [797: Female; 26-30; bachelor's degree; Combined programme in arts, humanities and social sciences]

For others, the challenge of juggling responsibilities was seen in negative terms:

Trying to fit in personal study time with dependant responsibilities and full time employment. [463: Female; 46-50; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Juggling work and study. I am a Head of Service in [a large organisation], working between 45 - 50 hours a week and trying to fit in studying on top of this. This had led to feeling highly pressurised and stressed. [737: Female; 41-45; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Need to work full time to support myself and pay my fees and sometimes feel pulled in too many directions at once. [926: Female; 26-30; PGT; subject allied to Medicine]

The adverse impact on family was specifically mentioned by a few:

Feeling guilty with having a husband and child and not being able to spend as much quality time together as a family. [1124; Female; 31-35; bachelor's degree; subject allied to Medicine]

Having to take assignments/study on holiday (Easter and Christmas). [1124; Female; 31-35; bachelor's degree; subject allied to Medicine]

Juggling my study and work responsibilities. Juggling my study and caring for my daughter at weekends. University is my social life. [2507: Male; 36-40; bachelor's degree; Architecture, Building & Planning]

1. Finding the time to study without childcare 2. Struggling to concentrate alongside family life and complications 3. Guilt of not earning money instead and getting into debt [745: Female; 36-40; bachelor's degree; Combined programme involving science-based subjects]

Financial issues

The tabulations earlier in this report indicate that many part-time students have a concern about funding. The recent policy announcement on equivalent and lower qualifications [ELQ] may have had an impact on one respondent:

Worrying at the start of each new year about funding. Of late the fear that Government changes regarding adult education will rob people like me of their chance to get learning satisfaction and ultimately their long awaited Degree. [2417: Female; 51-55; below bachelor's level programme; Creative Arts & Design]

Organisation and Administration

The aspect of part-time higher education that attracted the most vehement negative comment was institutional organisation and administration. To some extent, this was reflected in the comments relating to the co-presence of full-time and part-time students on programmes. The issue, however, runs much more widely: sometimes it is difficult to differentiate issues at institutional level from those at programme level. For a large number of part-time students, there is a concern that their interests are seen as secondary to those of full-time peers.

I am tempted to type the word "administration" 100 times. The irony is that this department teaches business administration!! I would ask them to look up "irony" in the dictionary [...] I work for a FTSE100 company [...]. I am about to feed back my experiences of the course. I will be recommending that we do not send anyone else to this institution, especially on a part time basis. [2423: Male; 36-40; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Experience of university admin systems founded absolutely on a full-time, undergraduate programme. Campus facilities again organised solely around full-time undergraduate students. [2474: Male; 46-50; PGT; Management]

Notification of commencement dates arrived week I was due to start - this is pathetic –

employers are having to accommodate staff absence, and the course administration needs to consider local authorities from a professional point of view - a bit shocked at how poor it was - I was ringing up for weeks to find out when the course and the induction week started [so that I could] inform my boss [2657: Female; 41-45; PGT; Architecture, Building & Planning]

Where do I start?!?! Student Finance - They do not want to know you unless you have given them some money, even when you are trying to sort out the payment. Even then, still not fussed about helping you. Coursework Feedback - It is provided, but only during sessions that I cannot make due to work commitments. When you ask for it to be sent over email, it is not allowed. Why not make allowances for your part time students? The majority of them have a full time job AS WELL as completing a degree [965: Male; under 25; PGT; Mathematical & Computer sciences]

Battling with the Finance department for the first two years over who is paying the fees when the employer has already confirmed and then being threatened with removal of facility access. [463: Female; 46-50; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Experience has been difficult as the university changed its module credit system just after I started and major changes were made to the timetable meaning I was expected to attend all sessions on different days even though I am a part time student and the course should [run on] one day a week. [1791: Female; 26-30; bachelor's degree; Biological sciences]

Having to book time off work to come in day time for classes when I signed up for a part-time degree on evenings. This has caused me to miss out on a lot of seminars and workshops that I would've liked to attend. [593: Female; 36-40; PGT; Combined programme in arts, humanities and social sciences]

Poor communication and organisation of the course. I enrolled for a part time taught course but half way through - with no notice - this has been changed to distance learning - with no support session to understand how this will work. Significant delays in accessing a student card and therefore access to resources. [2136: Female; 41-45; PGT; Management]

I have found the university I attend uncommunicative ('don't try to phone us, we're never there, you can email but don't expect a quick response, if you need to talk to me come and find me or ask after class' - I AM PART TIME and ATTEND ONCE A WEEK!!!!) Communication regarding results and assignments is often late with no reasonable explanation ('the tutor was sick') There was no induction to the learning resources ('we are busy with the undergraduates') [2004: Male; 51-55; PGT; Education]

1) The course did not start when it was due - and it was only after the start date that this was confirmed; 2) Two assignments should by now have been returned to me, but they have not been; 3) I am one third into the course but still haven't been allocated a Tutor; 4) the last two sessions have been cancelled; the remaining dates are in doubt; and no information has been available about when something next will happen. The course appears to have been indefinitely mothballed. [2095: Male; 51-55; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

For some, the provision of relevant information was too late to be useful. In a couple of responses quoted below, the lateness of the information caused difficulties between the student and their employer. Not every student will be blessed with such an accommodating employer.

At my interview with the Course Leader, it was decided which days I would attend University, so I arranged with my Employer which days I would go to work. When I started the course, I found out that the Timetable had been changed over the Summer. The tutor had not thought to contact part time students who had work commitments. I had to rearrange my days off work with my Employer at very short notice. I also found that I was expected to attend Tutorials and

Assessments on days I was not timetabled to attend. I have had to take annual leave to attend these. Important information was given out to students on days when part time students did not attend and so we missed out. The dates of previously organised study trips were changed at short notice. I had arranged time off work with my Employer, and then I had to rearrange them. Luckily I have a flexible Employer, but I feel that I have messed them around. Myself and half of the course received letters telling us which room to report to on our first day. After waiting for 30 minutes and when no tutor arrived, I went to the office, and discovered that the other half of the course had been told to go to another room, where they were receiving important information from the tutor, (which we had missed). An induction session for the library was held on a day I was working. I would have found this session valuable as I needed to know about the facilities available for research etc. I was therefore a little disillusioned when I commenced my course. [2972: Female; 41-45; bachelor's degree; Creative Arts & Design]

Changes in timetabling beyond my tutor's control have led to difficulties with my employer as the day for my studies was changed half way through the year when I had made arrangements for Tuesdays and found myself studying on Wednesdays. Also this semester we have had sessions cancelled. [On one occasion we were] left to watch a video - shades of school - as I travel 45 miles to the campus this was a real waste of my time. [2704: 51-55; Female; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Not having unit guides available before all modules and so choosing an option without full information (and then realising it was not the right option!) [737: Female; 41-45; PGT; Business & Administrative studies]

Disorganisation - timetables being released on a Friday when the next semester starts the following Monday does not allow time for work commitments to be rearranged to accommodate the course [140: Female; 26-30; bachelor's degree; Architecture, Building & Planning]

As a part-time student I have made the journey into college only to find my lecture has been cancelled. Students on full-time were told the previous day. Surely in today's technological age a phone text message or email would have saved unnecessary expense and time-wasting. [1436: Female; 41-45; bachelor's degree; Education]

Any organisation can fall victim to circumstances, such as the illness of an employee. A test of the organisation is whether it copes adequately with such situations. The respondent who commented below clearly felt that the organisation failed the test.

The supervisor allocated to me for my dissertation went off sick and did not return to work. Only one simple notice was put on Blackboard to indicate that one of her classes had been cancelled. There was no effort made to communicate or offer alternative support to myself or the other students in my class to help complete the project. I felt this increased stress and pressure on the project, and also feel very let down by the university - after all the cost of the module was approx £300 ... what support did I receive for that ... 6 classes and 1 meeting with my supervisor!!! Not good enough! [2729: Female; 46-50; bachelor's degree; Business & Administrative Studies]

Should an institution use the e-mail address preferred by the student, and should the programme consider submission methods and dates that allow part-timers the maximum opportunity to fulfil their tasks?

Why o why can't you use our own email addresses? Why insist on hard as well as emailed copy for assignments? Monday deadlines mean you can't post your work without missing that vital last weekend to work on it. [2734 Female; 51-55; Bachelor's degree; Philosophical & Religious studies]

The problem of scheduling teaching sessions on a Monday relates to all students, and not just to part-timers.

Having classes on a Monday night shortens learning time due to college closures for bank holidays, half terms etc. [1641: Female; 41-45; below bachelor's level programme; Business & Administrative studies]

Issues raised by this study

In drawing this account to a conclusion, some methodological caveats need to be reiterated. Although there are nearly 3000 responses, these are a small proportion of the number of part-time students in the participating institutions. In addition, there could be an element of bimodality in the responses – those who are very happy, and those who are particularly displeased, are perhaps more likely to be represented amongst the respondents. Hence caution needs to be taken when drawing inferences and conclusions. The picture suggested by the data is more like a pen-and-ink sketch than a finely-detailed photograph. A sketch can, of course, draw attention to features of interest.

This study has shown that, in general, the respondents had a strongly positive view of their part-time studies. Part-time study is particularly demanding for many students who have to juggle more commitments than (especially younger) students on full-time programmes. The responses to this survey indicate that considerable respect needs to be accorded to those who take the part-time route.

The present study does, however, raise a number of issues which merit further attention.

Institutional provision

There were two main issues where institutional provision was called into question by respondents – organisation and administration at various levels, and the inclusion of part-time students on full-time programmes.

Regarding the former, much relates to the ability of institutions to acknowledge that their part-time students are, by definition, less free than their full-time counterparts to engage with institutions on the institutions' terms. This has various implications, amongst them

- the scheduling of activities
- the need for longer 'lead-times' in the provision of information
- the recognition that, in the case of many students, employers' interests need to be taken into account.

The issue of 'service quality' has also been raised by this study, but it is one which extends beyond part-time cohorts.

The second broad issue at institutional level concerns the inclusion of part-time students on full-time programmes. Since the differences in the responses of part-time students on

full-time and on part-time programmes are small (except for financing and for the attendance at sessions) – see Statistical Appendix SA12 – the problems perceived by respondents may be relatively local to their educational environments, rather than general. However, the issues raised implicitly invite institutions to consider whether their provision for part-time students stands in need of enhancement.

Some who attended part-time on a full-time programme felt that institutional provision reflected a bias towards full-time study, and that the needs of part-time students were not adequately taken into account. The following emerged from free-response comments to the survey questionnaire.

- Induction into the institution and its facilities.
- Provision of support regarding study skills, especially for those without previous experience of higher education, or whose experience had been gained a long while ago.
- The choice available to part-time students from the totality of modules offered by the institution.
- The making of appropriate allowances for the particular circumstances of part-time students, in which the balancing of time between employment, home and academic study is rather different than for those who are enrolled as full-time students. These allowances encompassed the administrative and academic aspects of institutional provision. Callender et al (2006, pp.61-2) found that 22 per cent of their respondents disagreed with the statement that “staff recognise the pressures of combining part-time study with employment, family and other activities”. Regarding aspects of provision outside teaching contexts, concerns were expressed about, *inter alia*, the opening hours of administrative offices; library provision, and rules relating to borrowing and fines; information technology; and catering. On the academic side, concerns about the deadlines for the submission of assignments; the provision of feedback; and the viability of some pedagogic approaches (group work came in for particular mention) were amongst the matters raised.
- Social issues were significant for some. A few older respondents said, in one way or another, that they felt that their life-experience was insufficiently respected by academic staff and/or the way that they were treated was inappropriate. Others pointed to the desirability of having greater interaction with peers (for learning and mutual support), and to having more of an opportunity to engage in the explicitly social aspects of higher education.

Financing of studies

There are indications in the data collected by this study that the financing of part-time study is more of a worry from various groups that are seen as important in the widening of participation in higher education. Students who are not white British; who are from backgrounds other than managerial or professional; who have declared a disability; and who have responsibilities for dependants all tend to exhibit such a concern. The survey by Callender et al (2006, p.31) found that 40 per cent of their respondents were worried

about the costs of study – a figure almost identical to the overall 39.7 per cent found in the present study.

Employer engagement

Leitch (2006) emphasises the importance of individuals and employers in ‘demand-led’ developments. A comparison of findings from the survey conducted by Callender et al (2006) with those from the present study suggests that where there is a vocational interest employer engagement (here seen in terms of financial support for tuition and ancillary expenses) is higher. This is unsurprising. The policy push is for the level of engagement to increase.

As Leitch makes clear, there needs to be choreography between employers, employees and higher education institutions if ‘employer engagement’ is to be maximally advantageous. Initiatives can be undertaken by any of the three groups of parties, individually or in combination. A minority of respondents to this survey indicated that their experience of part-time higher education was not as rewarding as they had hoped. If part-time students have an unsatisfactory learning experience, this is bad enough in itself. However, it could also have adverse ‘knock-on’ effects upon employers – in particular, upon the enthusiasm with which they engage with institutions.

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Appendix A1: The questionnaire

This is laid out as hard copy prior to being converted for web-based administration. The actual instrument included a short preamble which linked to an explanation of the survey and what the students' role in it would be.

Part-time student survey

The questionnaire is anonymous, and if there are any questions that you cannot answer, or choose not to answer, simply leave them and move on to the next.

A. Aspects of your experience as a part-time student

Please **ring** the most appropriate response in each case.

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

N = Neutral

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

X = Not Applicable *or* Choose Not To Say

No.	Item	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A1	Staff made it clear from the start what they expected from students						
A2	The teaching on my programme has shown me what I need to do to be successful in my studies						
A3	My programme is well organised administratively						
A4	I am satisfied with the quality of the teaching on my programme						
A5	I am getting what I expected from my programme						
A6	I have been able to contact academic staff when I needed to						
A7	I am satisfied with the level of tutorial support on my programme						
A8	The criteria used in assessing work have been made clear to me						
A9	The way in which programme assessments (assignments, exams, etc) are scheduled causes problems for me						
A10	I have received detailed comments on my work						
A11	Feedback on my work has been prompt						
A12	Feedback on my work has helped me in my learning						
A13	I am finding my programme intellectually stimulating						
A14	I haven't done the background reading expected of me						

A15	I find it difficult to balance academic and other commitments	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A16	I discuss academic work with fellow students outside timetabled sessions (by one means or another)	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A17	Academic work at this level is harder than I expected it to be	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A18	I am coping with my academic workload	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A19	I am not able to attend some formally timetabled sessions because of other demands on my time	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A20	My institution's student support services have been sufficient for my needs	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A21	The library provision is good enough for my needs	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A22	I have been able to access general computing resources at the institution when I needed to	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A23	The institutional catering facilities are adequate for my needs	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A24	I worry about financing my way through higher education	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A25	I feel that I belong to an academic grouping (e.g. department; school) within this institution	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A26	I have made at least one close friend at this institution	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A27	I find it difficult to study in my home	SA	A	N	D	SD	X
A28	I would recommend my part-time programme to a friend	SA	A	N	D	SD	X

B. About your background

Part-time students vary widely in their background characteristics and in the types of programme they study – you will probably appreciate this from the questions that follow. If our analyses are to be really useful, we need to subdivide the responses in various ways. This is why these personal background questions are being asked. It will be particularly helpful if you respond to these as well as to those that you have already seen, but **it is entirely up to you whether you choose to respond to any particular item.**

B1 Under which **one** of the following broad subject areas of study would you place your current studies? (If you are unsure, tick 'Other' and indicate the subject discipline below.)

- Subjects allied to Medicine.....
- Biological Sciences.....
- Physical Sciences.....
- Mathematical and Computer Sciences.....
- Engineering and Technologies.....
- Architecture, Building and Planning.....
- Social studies.....
- Law.....
- Business and Administrative studies.....
- Media studies and Information services.....
- Languages.....
- Humanities.....
- Creative Arts and Design.....
- Education.....
- Combined programme in arts, humanities, social sciences.....
- Combined programme in science-based subjects.....
- Combined programme involving both sciences and arts etc.....
- Other.....

.....

B2 Which **one** of the following best fits the qualification you are aiming for?

- Taught Master's Degree.....
- Postgraduate Diploma or Certificate (but excluding PGCE).....
- Professional programme at postgraduate level.....
- Postgraduate Certificate in Education [PGCE].....
- Bachelor's Degree.....
- HND/C or Foundation Degree.....
- Certificate in Higher Education.....
- Professional programme at undergraduate level.....
- Short course (which may or may not lead to university credits).....
- Other, or unsure of actual level.....

If you have ticked 'Other, or unsure', please give the title of your programme in the space below

.....

B3 What is your **main** mode of studying?

- Part-time day only.....
- Part-time evening only.....
- Part-time day/evening.....
- Short block.....
- Distance learning.....

B4 Why did you opt for part-time study? (Tick more than one box if appropriate)

- I needed to study alongside other commitments.....
- I switched from full-time study.....
- An appropriate full-time course was not available.....
- I could not afford the fees for full-time study.....
- I did not want to take out a student loan.....
- I liked its flexibility.....

Other – please specify below

.....

B5 Approximately what is your current age?

Under 25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	Over 60

B6 What is your gender?

Male.....

Female.....

B7 Which of the following broad ethnic groupings would you place yourself in?

White	White, other than British	Black or Black British	Asian or Asian British	Chinese	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you ticked 'Other' – please specify below

.....

B8 Have you declared a disability to your institution? Yes... No...

B9 Which **one** of the following most closely describes your occupational background?

(If you are under 25 years of age, please interpret this question in terms of your family background, giving only the higher-level occupation if, for example, parents differ in this respect.)

Managerial or professional occupation.....

Intermediate occupation (e.g. administrative role; running small business; self-employment)

Relatively routine supervisory, technical, service or manual occupation.....

Long-term unemployment **or** Never worked.....

Not sure **or** Other, not easily categorised as one of the above.....

B10 Do you have a responsibility to care for dependants? Yes... No...

B11 What is the source of funding for the tuition fees for your current studies? (Tick more than one box if appropriate)

Self.....

Employer.....

Local Authority Grant.....

Individual Learning Account.....

Career Development Loan.....

Other – please specify).....

.....

B12 What is the source of funding for ancillary expenses such as travel, books, equipment and consumables? (Tick more than one box if appropriate)

- Self.....
- Employer.....
- Local Authority Grant.....
- Individual Learning Account.....
- Career Development Loan.....
- Other – please specify).....

.....

B13 Not counting your current studies, have you previously taken a course in higher education (even if you didn't finish it)? Yes... No...

B14 Which **one** of the following most closely fits your reason(s) for taking up your current studies?

- Personal satisfaction.....
- Improving my capability in my current employment.....
- Preparation for promotion.....
- Preparation for career switch.....
- Other – please specify.....

.....

B15 Do you have the use of a computer at home or at work to access learning resources?
Yes... No...

B16 What is the expected duration, from start to finish, of your complete current study programme?

- 6 months or less.....
- 7-12 months.....
- 2 years.....
- 3 years.....
- 4 years.....
- 5 years and above.....

B17 Roughly what proportion of your programme have you completed?

Very little.....

A quarter.....

A half.....

Three quarters.....

Almost all.....

B18 **If you are in regular employment that would not be described as 'casual'**, does your employer allow you time off work to fulfil the requirements of your part-time programme (e.g. to attend taught sessions; to complete assessments)?

Yes... No... Not applicable...

B19 Who was responsible for choosing the programme you are studying?

Myself only.....

My employer.....

My employer and I jointly.....

B20 How would you describe your situation as a student? (if you aren't sure, please tick the 'Not sure' box.)

A part-time student undertaking a part-time programme.....

A student undertaking a full-time programme but doing so on a part-time basis.....

Not sure.....

B21 If you attend your institution for the taught part of your programme, which **one** of the following best describes where the teaching takes place?

A main campus of the university.....

A subsidiary campus of the university.....

An associate or partner college of the university.....

Not sure.....

Not applicable.....

C. Open-response items

C1 What have been the **best** aspects of your experience as a part-time student at this institution? (Please list up to three aspects, using up to 100 words)

C2 What have been the **worst** aspects of your experience as a part-time student at this institution? (Please list up to three aspects, using up to 100 words)

C3 A short questionnaire cannot cover everything, and the plan is to produce subsequently a paper-based version which can probably deal more fully with 'the part-time student experience'. Has this questionnaire left out any important aspects of the experience of being a part-time student? If so, please note them below, again using up to 100 words.

C4 If you would like to comment at greater length about your experience as a part-time student, please use the space below, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary.

Thank you for giving your time to filling in this questionnaire

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Appendix A2: Commentary on the questionnaire

The Project Team appreciated that the decision to use a short questionnaire would inevitably leave some respondents wishing that items had been included that reflected their particular situations. Hence a short open response-box was included in order to allow them to register, in response to the following question, what they felt were omissions:

A short questionnaire cannot cover everything, and the plan is to produce subsequently a paper-based version which can probably deal more fully with 'the part-time student experience'. Has this questionnaire left out any important aspects of the experience of being a part-time student? If so, please note them below, again using up to 100 words.

The total number of responses to this item was 753. Of these, 41 indicated in positive terms that they had found the coverage of the questionnaire to have been appropriate. A few of these respondents wrote quite warmly about the instrument:

Thought questionnaire questions were well laid out and have preferred this option rather than a paper copy.

no its a good questionnaire

filling in this questionnaire on-line, for once was simple

It's comprehensive enough for me. Thanks for designing this.

A further 169 indicated that there was nothing further they wanted to suggest, and 49 simply said that the question was non-applicable.

Some responses were comments on the individual's experience, with any suggestion regarding the development of the questionnaire being implicit, rather than explicit. This implicitness is incorporated in the comments that follow. Where the responses were more explicit, some issues were mentioned that are inevitable consequences of using a short and general instrument. The following were amongst the issues mentioned by more than a few respondents:

- The fact that an overall rating (typically a mid-point) could subsume a mixture of positive and negative experiences, such as between one module and another
- Institutional administration, including the provision of information prior to enrolment (compared to provision post-enrolment)
- Induction into the institution and its facilities, and induction into study skills (some older students had re-entered higher education after a considerable time and indicated that they had needed more help to adjust to the level of demand)
- Curricular choice
- A perception that institutional provision was centred on full-time students, with part-time students being seen as (financially valuable) 'infill' to full-time provision
- Related to the preceding comment, a concern that inadequate attention was being given to the needs and personal circumstances of part-time students, compared with their full-time peers (figuring quite strongly were flexibility regarding assessment deadlines; matters relating to the viability of group work)

- Support, in various respects, from the institution
- More detailed inquiry about the provision of institutional facilities (opening hours of administrative offices; library provision, and rules relating to borrowing and fines; information technology; catering)
- The meeting of students' needs and expectations, to which could be coupled value for money
- The juggling of commitments and responsibilities, including perhaps greater consideration of what the role of carer for dependants might imply
- Travel
- Pedagogic issues, including teaching quality; the viability of group work in mixed FT/PT classes; assessment specification; feedback on assignments
- Matters relating to the interaction (or not) of part-time study and employment; more detailed investigation into the support that employers give
- The approach of staff in higher education towards older students
- The social aspect of part-time study, in terms both of peer interaction and learning and of engagement in activities organised under the institution's aegis.

It is probably unrealistic for a short, general questionnaire to attempt to include all of the above (and other issues, less frequently mentioned). Some could be pursued without unduly prejudicing the response rate. However, too much should not be expected of an instrument of this type. Such an instrument can serve two main purposes:

- To pick up general reactions of students to institutional provision (and, in appropriate circumstances, to allow some inter-institutional and/or intra-institutional benchmarking)
- To point to aspects of 'the part-time student experience' that might particularly repay more detailed inquiry.

Statistical Appendix SA1: Exploratory factor analysis output

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6
Per cent variance in rotated solution (Total: 56.69%)	21.31	9.01	8.19	7.51	6.34	4.33
Getting what expected	0.84	0.08	0.09	0.11	0.02	0.06
Showed what needed to do	0.83	0.06	0.11	0.06	0.06	0.03
Satisfied with quality/teaching	0.81	0.05	0.14	0.10	-0.03	-0.01
Clear from start	0.72	0.03	0.11	0.04	0.05	-0.02
Satisfied with tutorial support	0.71	0.03	0.27	0.19	0.02	0.08
Prog well organised	0.68	0.05	0.17	0.20	-0.06	-0.02
Prog is intellectually stimulating	0.67	0.09	0.10	0.09	0.12	-0.06
Able to contact academics	0.58	0.01	0.29	0.20	-0.04	0.08
Clarity of asst criteria	0.58	0.06	0.32	0.08	0.02	-0.03
Feel belong to academic grouping	0.50	0.05	0.03	0.23	0.41	-0.07
Difficult to balance acad&other	0.04	0.76	-0.03	0.05	0.04	0.09
Difficult to study at home	0.02	0.65	0.14	0.01	-0.01	0.13
Not done background reading	-0.03	0.65	0.05	-0.08	0.08	-0.19
Coping with acad workload	0.22	0.64	0.01	0.10	0.15	-0.02
Acad work is harder than expctd	-0.05	0.52	-0.03	0.03	-0.24	0.18
Scheduling of assts is a problem	0.26	0.43	0.00	0.13	-0.09	0.21
Feedback-detailed comments	0.33	0.05	0.83	0.08	0.03	0.01
Feedback-prompt	0.39	0.04	0.75	0.14	-0.04	-0.01
Feedback-helped learning	0.46	0.05	0.74	0.10	0.06	-0.01
Can access inst computing when need	0.11	0.02	0.08	0.77	0.05	-0.08
Library provision good enough	0.18	0.04	0.07	0.75	0.06	-0.07
Inst catering is adequate	0.13	0.04	0.03	0.55	0.07	0.20
Inst support services sufficient	0.43	0.06	0.15	0.52	0.03	0.09
Made at least 1 close friend at instn	0.08	0.00	0.01	0.07	0.83	-0.04
Discuss acad work with others	-0.03	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.81	0.10
Worry about financing through HE	-0.07	0.06	0.02	0.06	-0.07	0.84
Not able to attend all sessions	0.09	0.30	-0.03	-0.01	0.23	0.48

	Programme quality	Coping/ demand	Feedback	Institutional services	Social engagement	Finance(?)
Reliabilities						
Alpha	0.902	0.683	0.859	0.653	0.656	0.229
Number of items	10	6	3	4	2	2

Note: Loadings of 0.40 and above are highlighted. Where an item loads at this level on two items, only the higher-loading item is included in a scale.

Statistical Appendix SA2

Item	Level of study	PGT	Bachelor's	Below	Short
		Nmax=1127	Nmax=1170	Bachelor's Nmax=443	course Nmax=69
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Getting what expected		3.53	3.57	3.44	3.78
Showed what needed to do		3.68	3.71	3.58	3.90
Satisfied with quality of teaching		3.58	3.61	3.39	3.84
Expectations made clear from start		3.76	3.76	3.69	3.96
Satisfied with tutorial support		3.53	3.48	3.42	3.70
Programme is well organised		3.18	3.13	3.01	3.55
Prog is intellectually stimulating		4.00	3.96	3.74	3.99
Able to contact academics		3.84	3.73	3.73	3.85
Clarity of assessment criteria		3.83	3.78	3.60	3.74
Feel belong to academic grouping		3.15	3.20	3.18	3.18
Difficult to balance acad & other		2.50	2.55	2.52	2.61
Difficult to study at home		3.40	3.26	3.12	3.42
Have not done background reading		3.61	3.53	3.52	3.63
Coping with academic workload		3.62	3.66	3.57	3.48
Acad work is harder than expected		3.30	3.25	3.17	3.43
Scheduling of assess'ts is a problem		3.28	3.20	3.18	3.28
Feedback-detailed comments		3.54	3.30	3.28	3.53
Feedback-prompt		3.16	3.05	3.03	3.39
Feedback-helped learning		3.52	3.43	3.36	3.60
Can access inst computing when need		3.79	3.75	3.70	3.80
Library provision good enough		3.66	3.59	3.60	3.57
Inst catering is adequate		3.28	3.21	3.40	3.47
Inst support services sufficient		3.26	3.21	3.22	3.24
Made at least 1 close friend at instn		3.52	3.65	3.74	3.37
Discuss academic work with others		3.54	3.62	3.86	3.43
Worry about financing through HE		3.08	2.94	3.06	3.05
Not able to attend all sessions		3.19	3.15	3.27	3.38
Would recommend my PT programme		3.63	3.70	3.55	3.90

Note: the shading in this and succeeding tables merely indicates the grouping of the items according to the exploratory factor analysis.

Statistical Appendix SA3

Item	Age	Under 25	26 to 30	31 to 40	41 to 50	Over 50
		Nmax=440	Nmax=526	Nmax=789	Nmax=775	Nmax=293
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Getting what expected		3.40	3.47	3.51	3.62	3.76
Showed what needed to do		3.54	3.62	3.67	3.75	3.89
Satisfied with quality of teaching		3.40	3.44	3.58	3.66	3.83
Expectations made clear from start		3.63	3.76	3.76	3.77	3.88
Satisfied with tutorial support		3.44	3.46	3.47	3.52	3.65
Programme is well organised		2.89	3.01	3.17	3.28	3.34
Prog is intellectually stimulating		3.59	3.87	3.98	4.05	4.22
Able to contact academics		3.68	3.70	3.74	3.86	3.96
Clarity of assessment criteria		3.64	3.66	3.83	3.81	3.94
Feel belong to academic grouping		3.12	3.15	3.18	3.17	3.33
Difficult to balance acad & other		2.49	2.51	2.44	2.53	2.81
Difficult to study at home		2.97	3.25	3.21	3.45	3.70
Have not done background reading		3.26	3.46	3.55	3.72	3.78
Coping with academic workload		3.58	3.66	3.61	3.62	3.68
Acad work is harder than expected		3.26	3.25	3.26	3.24	3.36
Scheduling of assess'ts is a problem		3.16	3.21	3.18	3.33	3.31
Feedback-detailed comments		3.10	3.34	3.39	3.51	3.75
Feedback-prompt		2.85	2.94	3.11	3.22	3.44
Feedback-helped learning		3.24	3.32	3.51	3.54	3.71
Can access inst computing when need		3.80	3.85	3.75	3.73	3.65
Library provision good enough		3.65	3.59	3.59	3.64	3.64
Inst catering is adequate		3.38	3.26	3.19	3.31	3.29
Inst support services sufficient		3.20	3.21	3.20	3.21	3.49
Made at least 1 close friend at instn		3.81	3.80	3.51	3.53	3.36
Discuss academic work with others		3.86	3.86	3.53	3.51	3.36
Worry about financing through HE		3.07	3.07	2.87	3.06	3.15
Not able to attend all sessions		3.22	3.11	3.07	3.27	3.42
Would recommend my PT programme		3.45	3.62	3.64	3.73	3.87

Statistical Appendix SA4

Item	Gender	Male	Female
		Nmax=973 Mean	Nmax=1833 Mean
Getting what expected		3.61	3.50
Showed what needed to do		3.72	3.66
Satisfied with quality of teaching		3.55	3.58
Expectations made clear from start		3.75	3.75
Satisfied with tutorial support		3.54	3.48
Programme is well organised		3.18	3.13
Prog is intellectually stimulating		3.92	3.95
Able to contact academics		3.77	3.79
Clarity of assessment criteria		3.73	3.80
Feel belong to academic grouping		3.22	3.15
Difficult to balance acad & other		2.55	2.51
Difficult to study at home		3.23	3.33
Have not done background reading		3.49	3.59
Coping with academic workload		3.65	3.61
Acad work is harder than expected		3.28	3.26
Scheduling of assess'ts is a problem		3.18	3.27
Feedback-detailed comments		3.27	3.47
Feedback-prompt		2.98	3.16
Feedback-helped learning		3.34	3.52
Can access inst computing when need		3.79	3.74
Library provision good enough		3.72	3.56
Inst catering is adequate		3.37	3.22
Inst support services sufficient		3.30	3.20
Made at least 1 close friend at instn		3.62	3.60
Discuss academic work with others		3.67	3.59
Worry about financing through HE		3.22	2.91
Not able to attend all sessions		3.16	3.20
Would recommend my PT programme		3.70	3.63

Statistical Appendix SA5

Item	Ethnic group	White	White, not	Black or	Asian or	Chinese
		Nmax=2272	British	Black	Asian	Nmax=11
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Getting what expected		3.55	3.38	3.76	3.60	3.73
Showed what needed to do		3.66	3.76	3.94	3.73	4.00
Satisfied with quality of teaching		3.58	3.48	3.75	3.54	3.64
Expectations made clear from start		3.73	3.84	3.96	3.79	4.10
Satisfied with tutorial support		3.51	3.50	3.59	3.40	3.73
Programme is well organised		3.12	3.20	3.39	3.29	3.64
Prog is intellectually stimulating		3.95	3.86	4.05	3.87	4.27
Able to contact academics		3.80	3.80	3.68	3.73	4.18
Clarity of assessment criteria		3.76	3.82	3.91	3.73	4.00
Feel belong to academic grouping		3.16	3.19	3.33	3.27	3.60
Difficult to balance acad & other		2.49	2.60	2.73	2.83	2.55
Difficult to study at home		3.32	3.28	3.29	2.97	3.00
Have not done background reading		3.57	3.51	3.62	3.41	3.18
Coping with academic workload		3.64	3.52	3.57	3.77	3.18
Acad work is harder than expected		3.30	3.27	3.07	2.84	3.18
Scheduling of assess'ts is a problem		3.24	3.26	3.34	3.17	3.27
Feedback-detailed comments		3.40	3.33	3.41	3.43	3.73
Feedback-prompt		3.09	3.01	3.29	3.05	3.64
Feedback-helped learning		3.45	3.41	3.60	3.44	4.00
Can access inst computing when need		3.76	3.69	3.80	3.88	4.09
Library provision good enough		3.65	3.51	3.57	3.43	3.82
Inst catering is adequate		3.30	3.31	3.18	3.23	3.27
Inst support services sufficient		3.27	3.16	3.05	3.16	3.40
Made at least 1 close friend at instn		3.58	3.58	3.76	3.98	3.91
Discuss academic work with others		3.63	3.54	3.58	3.58	4.10
Worry about financing through HE		3.11	2.81	2.64	2.64	2.50
Not able to attend all sessions		3.19	3.19	3.26	3.31	2.73
Would recommend my PT programme		3.63	3.65	4.03	3.78	3.80

Statistical Appendix SA6

Item	Disability declared?	
	Yes Nmax=218 Mean	No Nmax=2565 Mean
Getting what expected	3.42	3.55
Showed what needed to do	3.57	3.69
Satisfied with quality of teaching	3.50	3.58
Expectations made clear from start	3.68	3.76
Satisfied with tutorial support	3.34	3.51
Programme is well organised	2.90	3.16
Prog is intellectually stimulating	3.92	3.95
Able to contact academics	3.81	3.78
Clarity of assessment criteria	3.67	3.78
Feel belong to academic grouping	3.16	3.18
Difficult to balance acad & other	2.60	2.52
Difficult to study at home	3.28	3.30
Have not done background reading	3.64	3.55
Coping with academic workload	3.56	3.63
Acad work is harder than expected	3.22	3.27
Scheduling of assess'ts is a problem	3.03	3.25
Feedback-detailed comments	3.32	3.42
Feedback-prompt	3.04	3.10
Feedback-helped learning	3.42	3.47
Can access inst computing when need	3.54	3.78
Library provision good enough	3.39	3.64
Inst catering is adequate	3.17	3.29
Inst support services sufficient	3.30	3.23
Made at least 1 close friend at instn	3.46	3.62
Discuss academic work with others	3.46	3.63
Worry about financing through HE	2.78	3.05
Not able to attend all sessions	3.21	3.19
Would recommend my PT programme	3.47	3.67

Statistical Appendix SA7

Item	Socio-economic group	Managerial etc Nmax=1829	Intermediate Nmax=465	Supervisory etc Nmax=273	Long term unemployed or never worked Nmax=31	Unsure or other Nmax=197
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Getting what expected		3.53	3.60	3.49	3.68	3.56
Showed what needed to do		3.67	3.73	3.71	3.94	3.61
Satisfied with quality of teaching		3.53	3.70	3.58	3.71	3.59
Expectations made clear from start		3.76	3.71	3.79	3.97	3.77
Satisfied with tutorial support		3.49	3.49	3.52	3.81	3.48
Programme is well organised		3.16	3.08	3.14	3.39	3.17
Prog is intellectually stimulating		3.96	3.98	3.87	4.40	3.79
Able to contact academics		3.79	3.76	3.77	4.03	3.72
Clarity of assessment criteria		3.77	3.78	3.81	3.74	3.72
Feel belong to academic grouping		3.17	3.22	3.13	3.37	3.11
Difficult to balance acad & other		2.50	2.52	2.62	2.71	2.56
Difficult to study at home		3.38	3.16	3.23	3.13	3.04
Have not done background reading		3.62	3.41	3.51	3.23	3.49
Coping with academic workload		3.63	3.60	3.68	3.40	3.59
Acad work is harder than expected		3.30	3.24	3.20	3.00	3.19
Scheduling of assess'ts is a problem		3.24	3.25	3.26	2.71	3.18
Feedback-detailed comments		3.42	3.38	3.36	3.61	3.35
Feedback-prompt		3.10	3.06	3.18	3.61	3.03
Feedback-helped learning		3.44	3.51	3.46	3.90	3.44
Can access inst computing when need		3.74	3.82	3.78	4.07	3.72
Library provision good enough		3.63	3.59	3.71	3.94	3.47
Inst catering is adequate		3.27	3.26	3.38	3.43	3.23
Inst support services sufficient		3.25	3.19	3.26	3.44	3.17
Made at least 1 close friend at instn		3.54	3.77	3.75	3.47	3.59
Discuss academic work with others		3.61	3.61	3.79	3.06	3.53
Worry about financing through HE		3.20	2.70	2.90	2.07	2.55
Not able to attend all sessions		3.15	3.27	3.34	3.41	3.10
Would recommend my PT programme		3.64	3.73	3.61	4.16	3.51

Statistical Appendix SA8

Responsibility for dependants?	Yes	No
	Nmax=1227	Nmax=1566
Item	Mean	Mean
Getting what expected	3.62	3.48
Showed what needed to do	3.76	3.63
Satisfied with quality of teaching	3.66	3.50
Expectations made clear from start	3.81	3.72
Satisfied with tutorial support	3.56	3.45
Programme is well organised	3.29	3.04
Prog is intellectually stimulating	4.05	3.87
Able to contact academics	3.83	3.74
Clarity of assessment criteria	3.84	3.72
Feel belong to academic grouping	3.23	3.14
Difficult to balance acad & other	2.46	2.57
Difficult to study at home	3.18	3.38
Have not done background reading	3.62	3.51
Coping with academic workload	3.60	3.65
Acad work is harder than expected	3.24	3.28
Scheduling of assess'ts is a problem	3.24	3.24
Feedback-detailed comments	3.48	3.35
Feedback-prompt	3.19	3.03
Feedback-helped learning	3.55	3.39
Can access inst computing when need	3.77	3.76
Library provision good enough	3.69	3.56
Inst catering is adequate	3.28	3.28
Inst support services sufficient	3.26	3.22
Made at least 1 close friend at instn	3.58	3.63
Discuss academic work with others	3.53	3.69
Worry about financing through HE	2.89	3.12
Not able to attend all sessions	3.11	3.25
Would recommend my PT programme	3.78	3.56

Statistical Appendix SA9

Item	Previous experience of HE?	
	Yes Nmax=2185 Mean	No Nmax=607 Mean
Getting what expected	3.55	3.51
Showed what needed to do	3.68	3.69
Satisfied with quality of teaching	3.58	3.55
Expectations made clear from start	3.76	3.73
Satisfied with tutorial support	3.52	3.41
Programme is well organised	3.16	3.07
Prog is intellectually stimulating	3.97	3.87
Able to contact academics	3.81	3.68
Clarity of assessment criteria	3.79	3.72
Feel belong to academic grouping	3.19	3.16
Difficult to balance acad & other	2.53	2.49
Difficult to study at home	3.34	3.15
Have not done background reading	3.58	3.48
Coping with academic workload	3.64	3.55
Acad work is harder than expected	3.32	3.04
Scheduling of assess'ts is a problem	3.26	3.14
Feedback-detailed comments	3.42	3.33
Feedback-prompt	3.10	3.09
Feedback-helped learning	3.47	3.46
Can access inst computing when need	3.78	3.72
Library provision good enough	3.63	3.60
Inst catering is adequate	3.26	3.34
Inst support services sufficient	3.23	3.24
Made at least 1 close friend at instn	3.57	3.74
Discuss academic work with others	3.60	3.69
Worry about financing through HE	3.04	2.92
Not able to attend all sessions	3.17	3.25
Would recommend my PT programme	3.66	3.62

Statistical Appendix SA10

Item	Main reason for studying				
	Personal satisfaction Nmax=549	Improving capability in current job Nmax=1286	Preparation for promotion Nmax=333	Preparation for career switch Nmax=526	Other Nmax=117
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Getting what expected	3.66	3.58	3.30	3.50	3.42
Showed what needed to do	3.77	3.71	3.53	3.65	3.56
Satisfied with quality of teaching	3.74	3.56	3.33	3.59	3.64
Expectations made clear from start	3.80	3.79	3.58	3.73	3.77
Satisfied with tutorial support	3.55	3.56	3.31	3.41	3.57
Programme is well organised	3.23	3.20	2.93	3.03	3.23
Prog is intellectually stimulating	4.07	3.90	3.80	4.03	3.91
Able to contact academics	3.83	3.83	3.63	3.72	3.78
Clarity of assessment criteria	3.75	3.80	3.65	3.83	3.74
Feel belong to academic grouping	3.21	3.18	2.98	3.25	3.27
Difficult to balance acad & other	2.77	2.44	2.37	2.55	2.59
Difficult to study at home	3.45	3.23	3.22	3.32	3.34
Have not done background reading	3.64	3.54	3.51	3.58	3.46
Coping with academic workload	3.72	3.57	3.56	3.71	3.57
Acad work is harder than expected	3.31	3.21	3.28	3.32	3.39
Scheduling of assess'ts is a problem	3.34	3.23	3.14	3.22	3.08
Feedback-detailed comments	3.41	3.41	3.26	3.43	3.59
Feedback-prompt	3.18	3.13	2.87	3.08	3.14
Feedback-helped learning	3.53	3.48	3.28	3.45	3.50
Can access inst computing when need	3.80	3.81	3.62	3.74	3.65
Library provision good enough	3.55	3.68	3.58	3.61	3.48
Inst catering is adequate	3.33	3.29	3.21	3.26	3.18
Inst support services sufficient	3.34	3.26	3.08	3.14	3.38
Made at least 1 close friend at instn	3.54	3.59	3.53	3.76	3.59
Discuss academic work with others	3.48	3.67	3.77	3.58	3.47
Worry about financing through HE	3.01	3.23	3.19	2.53	2.76
Not able to attend all sessions	3.28	3.15	3.09	3.24	3.22
Would recommend my PT programme	3.82	3.66	3.40	3.65	3.53

Statistical Appendix SA11

Item	Location of teaching	Main campus	Subsidiary campus	Associate or partner college
		Nmax=1926	Nmax=312	Nmax=205
		Mean	Mean	Mean
Getting what expected		3.51	3.50	3.72
Showed what needed to do		3.65	3.70	3.83
Satisfied with quality of teaching		3.52	3.65	3.74
Expectations made clear from start		3.76	3.71	3.82
Satisfied with tutorial support		3.42	3.55	3.82
Programme is well organised		3.05	3.04	3.42
Prog is intellectually stimulating		3.91	3.99	3.96
Able to contact academics		3.71	3.84	4.06
Clarity of assessment criteria		3.75	3.84	3.82
Feel belong to academic grouping		3.21	3.10	3.15
Difficult to balance acad & other		2.51	2.45	2.79
Difficult to study at home		3.23	3.27	3.44
Have not done background reading		3.51	3.58	3.72
Coping with academic workload		3.61	3.60	3.85
Acad work is harder than expected		3.25	3.32	3.32
Scheduling of assess'ts is a problem		3.23	3.14	3.34
Feedback-detailed comments		3.29	3.51	3.92
Feedback-prompt		2.98	3.17	3.46
Feedback-helped learning		3.36	3.57	3.86
Can access inst computing when need		3.79	3.88	3.65
Library provision good enough		3.67	3.66	3.35
Inst catering is adequate		3.31	3.05	3.31
Inst support services sufficient		3.20	3.28	3.41
Made at least 1 close friend at instn		3.71	3.52	3.80
Discuss academic work with others		3.74	3.46	3.59
Worry about financing through HE		3.05	3.00	3.04
Not able to attend all sessions		3.22	3.02	3.36
Would recommend my PT programme		3.62	3.61	3.90

Statistical Appendix SA12

Item	PT on PT	PT on FT
	prog Nmax=1819	prog Nmax=803
	Mean	Mean
Getting what expected	3.57	3.50
Showed what needed to do	3.69	3.68
Satisfied with quality/teaching	3.57	3.60
Clear from start	3.77	3.72
Satisfied with tutorial support	3.51	3.45
Prog well organised	3.18	3.04
Prog is intellectually stimulating	3.95	3.98
Able to contact academics	3.80	3.72
Clarity of assessment criteria	3.79	3.75
Feel belong to academic grouping	3.17	3.20
Difficult to balance acad&other	2.55	2.44
Difficult to study at home	3.34	3.21
Not done background reading	3.55	3.55
Coping with acad workload	3.64	3.60
Acad work is harder than expctd	3.29	3.26
Scheduling of assts is a problem	3.29	3.16
Feedback-detailed comments	3.42	3.35
Feedback-prompt	3.10	3.06
Feedback-helped learning	3.47	3.43
Can access inst computing when need	3.78	3.75
Library provision good enough	3.63	3.61
Inst catering is adequate	3.30	3.22
Inst support services sufficient	3.27	3.16
Made at least 1 close friend at instn	3.61	3.61
Discuss acad work with others	3.64	3.60
Worry about financing through HE	3.10	2.84
Not able to attend all sessions	3.25	3.05
Would recommend my PT prog	3.68	3.59