PART-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION
IN SCOTLAND

Final Report to the Scottish Office
Education and Industry Department

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Responsibility for the contents of this report, and for any mistakes and errors, is ours alone. The views and judgements expressed in this report are our own, and do not necessarily reflect the policies and opinions of the SOEID, SHEFC, or any of the individuals mentioned above.

Ian Clark, Brenda Morgan-Klein, David Raffe and Tom Schuller

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Part-Time Higher Education: The Field - Part A

The study was carried out between November 1994 and December 1996. It was funded by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID) and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC).

The aims of the study were as follows:

- to review provision and participation in part-time higher education (HE) in Scotland;
- to determine the costs and benefits to the parties involved; and
- to identify influences on participation.

It comprised:

- a review of evidence on provision and participation;
- interviews with institutional policy-makers; and
- case studies in four institutions: two universities and two colleges, plus a student survey in the Open University (OU) in Scotland. (Chapter A.1)

The project initially aimed to focus on part-time study for first degrees and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs). The blurring of boundaries between Higher National Certificate (HNC) and HND provision led us to broaden its scope to include HNCs.

Previous studies of part-time students have emphasised the diversity of their motivations, educational backgrounds and social and economic circumstances. Research has tended to reflect the researchers’ chosen role as advocates for part-time HE. It has emphasised the growing numerical significance of part-time HE and its importance for access, but sub-degree provision has been largely neglected.

Many participants in the study, and especially institutional leaders, perceive a trend in HE towards increased flexibility, resulting in a general blurring of boundaries within HE, including the boundary between full-time and part-time study. Other changes which form the context of our research include the abolition of the binary divide, the incorporation of Further Education Colleges (FECs), the consolidation (capping) of full-time student numbers, the development of SCOTCAT and of links between HE and further education (FE), and changes in educational technology. (Chapter A.2)

Participation, Provision and Guidance - Part B

There was rapid growth in full-time student numbers and in full-time entrants in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The growth in full-time students was much faster than the growth in part-time students, which was both less significant and less consistent. This widened the gap between full-time and part-time numbers. There is no sense in which part-time study is “taking off”.

1
The significance of the part-time mode varies by level and sector, so that part-time postgraduate study is significant in the pre-1992 universities and part-time HNCs in the FE sector.

Study at HNC level predominates in the part-time mode, accounting for 37% of all part-time students across sectors. The OU was the major provider of part-time first degrees, followed by the post-1992 universities. (Chapter B.1)

Analysing institutional prospectuses for 1994, we identified 563 part-time HNC/D courses, of which all but 21 were in the FE sector, and 76 part-time first degree courses, of which all but four were in HEIs. The courses were fairly evenly spread across subject areas in the HE sector, but FE courses tended to be concentrated in business studies and engineering and technology. The growing flexibility and responsiveness of the system make it impossible to map provision definitively. (Chapter B.2)

Guidance practitioners perceive gaps in provision in relation to the availability of courses at times convenient to students. They perceive untapped demand for part-time HE. (Chapter B.3)

The Perspectives of Institutional Policy-Makers - Part C

Costs and benefits

We interviewed a senior policy-maker in each of the 23 Scottish HEIs (including the OU) and in 11 FECs. The interviewees were selected by the institutions. We also had access to documentary evidence on institutional provision and policy.

Institutional benefits of part-time HE identified by institutional policy-makers included:

- facilitating the pursuit of its mission, particularly in relation to access, responsiveness, vocational education or contributions to the local community;
- strengthened links with employers and the local community; and
- staff satisfaction from teaching more mature and motivated students, and closer links with the world of work.

Educational benefits included:

- increased access (providing opportunities not otherwise available to the students concerned);
- enabling students to draw on practical or work experience; and
- broadening the student body.

Some interviewees felt that part-time students could experience a fragmented curriculum and miss out on the personal and social dimension of HE, but these views were contested by others. Issues were raised in respect of quality assurance and the need for different teaching and learning approaches. Staff costs included working unsociable hours.

The costs and benefits of increasing part-time provision varied across institutions, and depended among other things on the scale of existing provision. Modularisation, credit-rating and
semesterisation reduced the threshold costs of introducing part-time provision or expanding it from a small base. The resource implications were highly variable across institutions and courses. They are monitored carefully by institutions, but usually as part of a broader budgeting process, from which it is difficult to extract specific conclusions. (Chapter C.1)

Policies

Several institutions had no explicit policy for part-time undergraduate-level HE. Policy was either implicit or to be inferred from other policies, for example for flexible provision.

*It was the policy of most institutions to increase part-time HE provision.* If realised, these policies would result in a significant expansion of part-time HE in the next few years. Much of the expansion would occur among institutions which are already relatively large providers, especially the post-1992 universities. FECs would increase their share of part-time HE provision.

Most institutions had a policy to increase the flexibility of their provision, although they interpreted flexibility in different ways. Many universities pursued a model of *flexible integration*, in which all provision would be accessible to full- and part-time students in a way that did not exclude or disadvantage part-timers. Many colleges pursued a model of *flexible differentiation*, which put more emphasis on dedicated and customised provision and responsiveness to diverse demands.

Underlying most institutions’ policies for part-time HE was the *perceived desire or need to expand total provision*. Policies for expanding part-time provision often varied inversely with the perceived prospects for full-time HE. The consolidation or capping of full-time provision had had a major influence.

*Funding regimes*, and the policies which lay behind them, were a powerful influence on institutions’ policies.

Policies were influenced by the perceived opportunities, and also the constraints, of the market. Most institutions anticipated increased demand, although they recognised that many traditional sources of demand, including employers’ demand for day-release provision, were unlikely to increase.

Many policy-makers felt that institutional policies were primarily driven by external pressures, especially those associated with funding and markets. (Chapter C.2)

The Case Studies - Part D

The case study institutions comprised one pre-1992 university, one post-1992 university, a large FEC and a small FEC. There were two complementary strands: a survey, based on self-completion questionnaires sent to up to 250 part-time students in each institution (and also in the OU); and in-depth interviews with a total of 23 members of staff, 44 individual students, six groups of students, eight employers and two family members. (Chapter D.1)
Institutional structures

Institutional structure and strategy were important in creating the conditions necessary for the development and expansion of part-time provision. The commitment to increase *flexibility of provision* throughout the institution in three out of the four institutions was a particularly significant factor. Modularisation and CATs were important elements in this increase in flexibility.

Integrated models of provision are not necessarily more flexible than segregated models. Part-time students may be constrained, for example, by inappropriate timetables and delivery designed for full-time students. The *apparent flexibility of programmes requires critical investigation*.

Part-time programmes have considerable *administrative and resource implications*. The setting up of dedicated information and support services for part-time students gives rise to new intra-institutional relationships and raises questions about the allocation of resources.

*Staff attitudes* to, and participation in, part-time teaching vary with institutional culture and staff contractual duties vary institutionally. The use of part-time teaching staff raises important managerial issues. (Chapter D.2)

Student characteristics

The part-time students whom we studied came from a *wide range of social and demographic backgrounds*. Except in the OU, nearly all students were economically active and most were in full-time jobs. University students most commonly had technician-level jobs, and college students more often had clerical or craft occupations.

Part-time HE was *typically a ‘further step’ in a post-school educational career*: most students had gained qualifications since school, often by part-time study, and their current courses usually built on their previous qualifications in one way or another.

Part-time students were generally perceived to be *more highly motivated, to be more demanding to teach and to exhibit a ‘customer culture’*.

Most students had vocational motives for study, but in a majority of cases *vocational and personal motives were closely interlinked*. Vocational motives were often defensive, to protect existing positions in the labour market, or based on a view of the occupational returns to study as long-term, non-specific and uncertain. Many students sought job enrichment as much as career advancement.

Several students had been influenced to study by the opportunity to *transfer credit* for existing qualifications or part-qualifications.

The *cost* of study was a concern to those students who had to pay *fees*, but many perceived the greater cost in terms of their *time commitment*. (Chapter D.3)

Employer support

Payment of fees by employers was quite extensive, but it is important to look at the way different components of support - financial, time off and moral support - do or do not fit together. Even when supported by employers, most students had taken the initiative to study: students, not employers, were the main customers of part-time HE. Employers who supported
part-time study typically did so to enhance skills and to encourage loyalty. Employer support was becoming more conditioned and less dependable in many fields, with a large contribution of time or money expected from students.

Employers tended to be passive in their dealings with institutions and in communicating their interests. Institutions were attempting to enhance links with employers, with mixed results. Current notions of institutional ‘responsiveness’ to employer demand presuppose a pattern of relationships which both sides find difficult to sustain. (Chapter D.4)

**Student experience**

Generally, students report themselves as satisfied with their courses, from most points of view. Ratings of ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ are far more common than ‘adequate’ or ‘poor’ (though we acknowledge the possibility of some sample bias). There are clear sectoral differences in the perceptions of quality reported. It appears that the OU’s specialised experience in providing for part-timers is reflected in generally higher levels for OU students than those in other sectors.

Many part-timers are not able to compare their experience with that of full-timers. Where they do, there is a strong feeling that full-timers are better provided for in terms of facilities; however, part-timers remain generally positive about their part-time status and the advantages which this brings.

Part-time students experience marginality for a number of reasons, practical or cultural. They may have lesser claims on staff attention or module places, and feel isolated amongst full-timers, socially and because they are not following the same sequential curricular paths. Or they may feel marginal for organisational reasons, for example because of the timing of their classes which excludes them from full institutional life. Some of this is an inevitable consequence of their own crowded lives.

The student experience changes over time: satisfaction and perceptions of quality can change along with motivation. This highlights the continuous interaction between the student experience, the internal and institutional course contexts and the changing occupational and domestic circumstances. Any simple model of linear progression is unlikely to reflect the reality.

The part-time mode allows a closer integration between study and work. Students bring past and current experience into the classroom, and constitute active sources of learning for each other, but this is mediated by a number of factors. These include the extent to which past and current work is recognised, especially for credit purposes; the structure of the workplace; and the quality of the teaching.

Part-timers can benefit, relative to full-timers, from having the financial stability of a regular income and the temporal structure of fixed working hours.

Students find their primary sources of support in their social milieux rather than from academic quarters. Academic counselling as a specialised function plays a minimal role, especially for women.

**Significant costs, financial and personal,** are reported during the course of study. These are higher for women than for men. The single biggest pressure is time, as most part-timers combine multiple commitments.
Students are overwhelmingly optimistic that the outcome will be beneficial overall; that at the end, benefits will outweigh the costs. (Chapter D.5)

**Concluding Discussion - Part E**

We identify the limitations of our study; discuss issues which arise in respect of supply and demand, and quality; and we summarise and discuss our evidence on the advantages and disadvantages of part-time HE. (Chapter E.1)
PART A        PART-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION: THE FIELD

CHAPTER A.1     THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

A.1.1   Objectives of the research

This is the Final Report of the research project on Part-time Higher Education in Scotland. The project was carried out from November 1994 to December 1996 by the Centre for Educational Sociology and the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Edinburgh. It was sponsored by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID) and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), and had the following objectives:

To determine:

- the current extent and nature of opportunities for part-time study for degrees, Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) in Scotland, and recent and expected changes in these opportunities;

- trends in numbers of part-time degree and HNC/D students over the past ten years in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Further Education Colleges (FECs) in Scotland, and also of Scottish students studying for degrees with the Open University (OU); and

- the place of part-time provision in the policies and missions of HEIs and FECs, and recent and future changes.

To determine the costs and benefits to the parties involved (the students, institutions and, where applicable, sponsoring employers and members of students’ families), and to relate these to differences in the organisation of part-time provision and to the different backgrounds, circumstances and goals of students.

To explore:

- factors influencing students’ (or their employers’) decisions on participation in part-time higher education (HE); and in particular

- the effects of changes in the organisation of part-time courses and in entrance arrangements, including modularisation and opportunities for credit transfer.

A.1.2   Components of the project

The project had three main components:

- A review of evidence on opportunities for, and participation in, part-time HE. We reviewed the information on part-time opportunities in college and university prospectuses, and we analysed statistical data on participation obtained from the SOEID. These information sources were supplemented by further data collected directly from institutions and by the general research and policy literature on HE. To gain a complementary perspective on provision and participation we interviewed staff in adult guidance agencies.

- Interviews with institutional policy-makers. We conducted interviews with a senior policy-maker in each of the 23 HEIs in Scotland (including the OU) and in 11 FECs. The
interviews explored institutional policies, policies for part-time HE, future plans, and perceived costs and benefits.

- **Case studies of four institutions.** We conducted detailed case studies of two courses or programmes available to part-time students in each of four Scottish institutions. These comprised one post-1992 university, one pre-1992 university, one large FEC with a well-established tradition of advanced course provision, and one newer college with less experience of advanced provision. We carried out a questionnaire survey of part-time students in the four institutions and in the OU. We interviewed staff and students from the selected courses, and in some cases we interviewed employers and family members. The interviews covered a wide range of issues, including practical aspects of provision of part-time courses, the backgrounds of part-time students and their motivations for study, the social and educational experience of part-time study, and the advantages and disadvantages of part-time study as perceived by different groups.

All the interviews with policy-makers were conducted in 1995 and the case studies were carried out during 1996. We conducted much of the review of evidence on participation and provision during 1994-95, but we revised and partially updated our review in 1996, and most of the guidance interviews were conducted in 1996. In reading our report, it is important to bear in mind that our data were collected at different times during a period of rapid change in the development of HE. For this reason we find it appropriate to present our evidence from each component of the research in a separate section of the report. The three components described above are reported in Parts B, C and D respectively. Each Part comprises one or more chapters and each chapter concludes with a summary and, where appropriate, a discussion of emerging issues. In Part E we take an overview of all three components of the research, and identify some of the main conclusions and issues for the future of part-time HE in Scotland.

First, in the rest of Part A, we say a little more about the questions addressed by the research and the context in which they arise.

**A.1.3 Summary**

- The project aimed to review provision and participation in part-time HE, to determine the costs and benefits to the parties involved, and to identify influences on participation.

- The project comprised a review of evidence on provision and participation, interviews with institutional policy-makers, and case studies in four institutions.
CHAPTER A.2 THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

A.2.1 Part-time higher education: questions for research

At a time when a mass HE system is developing in Scotland, and when the purposes, organisation and funding of HE have come under intense scrutiny, it is not surprising that attention should turn to the role of part-time provision. Part-time participation has expanded less than full-time participation in HE over the last ten years, as we shall see in more detail in Part B. Nevertheless several commentators have argued that part-time provision has an important role to play in undergraduate-level HE (Ball 1991; Schuller 1991; Tight 1991; Robertson 1992, 1994; National Commission on Education 1993). Such commentators have identified several reasons why its role should or could expand in the next few years.

The first, and perhaps most important, reason refers to the educational benefits claimed for part-time study. These include: that it enables students to combine study with work or family commitments, that it allows learning to be related to prior or concurrent experience, and that it may take place at a more appropriate time in the life cycle, when an individual may have a clearer purpose and stronger motivation for learning. Tight (1991, p.119) has argued that “part-time higher education is in general more valuable than full-time higher education.... Higher education, to have most value for most people in most circumstances, should be predominantly part-time.”

A second reason is the growing importance of lifelong learning in public policy, and a growing recognition of its potential economic and social contribution (DfEE 1995; Scottish Skills Forum 1997). Most lifelong learning is part-time.

A third reason is the growing organisational and financial pressure on full-time HE. As student support continues to decline, students and governments alike may increasingly see part-time study as a more affordable way to realise their aspirations for HE. Institutions, coping with the effects of expansion and of a declining unit of resource, may see part-time provision as a means to make more effective use of resources and to increase student numbers at marginal cost.

Fourth, since 1994-95 the government has sought to ‘consolidate’ full-time student numbers in HEIs and to ‘cap’ full-time advanced-level provision in further education (FE). In both sectors, therefore, institutions which might otherwise have expanded full-time undergraduate numbers may recruit more part-time students instead.

A final reason, linked to those described above, is the contribution of part-time provision to access and openness in HE. Scott (1995) argues that recent changes, such as the expansion of HE and the associated structural changes at the institutional level and in the relationship between institutions and funding bodies, have helped to undermine ‘British exceptionalism’ in HE:

“[T]he distinctive qualities of British higher education, derived from and reinforcing the particularities of our national culture, have been undermined by widening access beyond traditional elite (and meritocratic) constituencies and creating an open system in which institutional boundaries and hierarchies have become more fluid.”

We discuss the growing fluidity of boundaries in the next section of this chapter.

Such arguments will, no doubt, be developed in the contributions to Sir Ron Dearing’s current enquiry into HE. The future role of part-time HE raises wider issues than can or should be covered in a single research project, including issues of political values and priorities. Nevertheless there is a need for research to inform the public debate. The arguments summarised
above raise a number of questions, which must be addressed before we can adequately consider the role of part-time provision in the future HE system.

- The first set of questions concern the demand for part-time HE. Is this demand of a level and quality to sustain the kind of role which the commentators described above have advocated for part-time HE? What kinds of students currently enter part-time HE, and what is their motivation for doing so? Who are the main ‘customers’ for part-time HE - individual students or their employers? What support do employers give to part-time students, for what reasons? How has participation changed in recent years and what future trends may be anticipated? In what ways might part-time provision be developed to stimulate demand? What is the influence of changes in the organisation of part-time courses and in their entrance arrangements, such as modularisation and opportunities for credit accumulation and transfer (CAT)?

- Second, there are questions about the provision of part-time HE. What kinds of opportunities are currently available, and how does the provision of part-time HE vary across different types of institutions? What role does part-time HE play in institutions’ policies and plans, and what kind of national system would we see emerging from these plans? How do institutions organise the provision of part-time courses, how is this related to full-time provision, and what practical issues are raised in their delivery? Is part-time provision really a practical response to financial constraints or to limits on full-time numbers, as suggested above? Is it equally practicable for all institutions?

- Third, there are questions of quality. Are the standards and procedures applied to part-time HE identical to those applied to full-time HE? How do part-time HE students rate the quality of the courses they attend, and do they perceive this to be comparable to that of full-time courses? What are the distinctive educational characteristics of part-time study? Is it sensible to aim for comparability, or are part-time and full-time study qualitatively different experiences between which no comparison of standards is appropriate?

- Finally, and overlapping all the other questions, what are the advantages and disadvantages of part-time HE? To what extent are the benefits of part-time HE that are claimed by its exponents realised in practice? Are they offset by countervailing disadvantages? How do the perceived advantages and disadvantages vary across the different parties involved: students, institutions, teaching staff, employers, families, friends and others?

These, in broad terms, are the questions addressed by our research.

A.2.2 Issues in defining part-time higher education

To define our field of study, part-time HE, we had to address two questions: “What counts as HE?” and “What counts as part-time?” The first of these questions raised few problems for our respondents. Even the FECs, whose provision straddled this boundary, had no difficulty in distinguishing advanced (higher) from non-advanced courses. However our project initially restricted its field of study to part-time HND and first degree provision; and this posed more problems. Most colleges referred to Higher National (HN) provision as a single category. Especially since unitisation in 1989-91, HNCs and HNDs have increasingly been articulated, with many HNCs contributing 12 credits towards the 30 required for an HND. (Many HNDs in turn have led into degree provision.) Early in the project it became clear that the distinction between HNC and HND was too fluid to serve as a boundary for the project, or for us to ask useful questions based on this distinction. We therefore extended the project to include all HN
provision. Since many more HNC than HND students study part-time, mostly in FE, this shifted the balance of our research in the direction of HN provision and of the FE sector.

The boundary between part-time first degree provision and postgraduate or continuing education (CE) raised fewer immediate problems of definition, although some respondents in the older universities felt that the imminent ‘mainstreaming’ of CE (see A.2.3 below) might erode this boundary in future. However institutions’ policies for part-time provision were often driven by developments in CE and/or postgraduate education at least as much as by developments in HN and first degree education, so in this respect at least it was hard for us to confine our research to its chosen boundaries.

The second question concerned the definition of ‘part-time’ HE: this was at once straightforward and problematic. Part-time HE is often defined and described in terms of its difference from full-time HE. As Tight (1991) has pointed out, part-time HE is HE that is not funded as full-time provision and for which students are not eligible for mandatory support. The emphasis on difference as a way of defining part-time HE masks both the diversity of part-time HE and the increasing blurring of the boundary between part-time and full-time study.

The shift in the balance of student support away from grants and towards loans means that increasing numbers of full-time students will spend more of their time working in order to support themselves. In four institutions surveyed by the National Union of Students (Scotland), between 47% and 74% of full-time students were employed during term time, and many were employed for more than 16 hours per week. The Scottish School Leavers Survey, which contacts direct entrants from school during their first year of study, records a sharp increase in the proportion with part-time jobs, from 31% in 1993 to 43% two years later (Lynn 1996). There is increasing attention in the literature to the way in which students, particularly mature students, structure their time (Edwards 1993) and the issue of juggling time between study and other activities appears increasingly to apply to both full-time and part-time students (Blaxter and Tight 1994). Writing about part-time study in Norwegian universities, Berg and Kyvik (1992) note three different ways in which the concept ‘part-time student’ has been operationalised: calculating the number of hours spent in gainful employment; distinguishing between students who used most of their time for studies or other activities; and asking the students themselves whether they regarded themselves as part-time or full-time students. Conversely, some institutions have modified their timetables to accommodate these working patterns.

Most interviewees in our study were able to distinguish, for practical purposes, between part-time and full-time HE at their institution. There are several criteria for making the distinction. As suggested above, funding distinctions are the most obvious. The structure of part-time degrees in some institutions is different and part-time students may be subject to different regulations - for example CATs and Combined Studies students. Such degrees may be validated and examined separately even where part-time students study the same modules as full-time students on named degrees. Part-time students may be registered separately, particularly where entry/admissions requirements are different for part-time study. Lastly, it was often pointed out that part-time students are eligible for welfare benefits while full-time students are excluded from the benefits system. In this way the 21-hour rule or the 16-hour rule was an important consideration, particularly for community or FECs, but perhaps most relevant to non-advanced study.

Many of our interviewees, and especially the institutional policy-makers reported in Part C, mentioned the trend towards greater flexibility. There are several dimensions to the concept of flexibility; these include curricular flexibility, flexibility of delivery and flexibility of pathways (Raffe 1994a). Flexibility of delivery - where students may follow the same curriculum via different methods of learning or over different time periods - was perhaps most frequently mentioned. Many interviewees also referred to curricular flexibility - the capacity to update
programmes quickly, to adapt them to local needs and circumstances or to tailor them for individual students or employers. Flexible pathways mentioned by interviewees included: flexible admission and access arrangements, progression routes between FE and HE, CAT schemes and Combined Studies programmes. According to the Higher Education Quality Council, 80% of UK universities have or are committed to developing modular arrangements; nearly 85% plan or have a CAT scheme; over 65% have or plan a two semester structure; and 70% allow for credit-based work (Robertson 1994).

Williams and Fry (1994, p.32) expect that “the spread of course modularisation will blur the distinction between full-time and part-time students and possibly cause it to disappear altogether. This distinction is not known in most European countries”. The institutional policy-makers whom we interviewed similarly expected the part-time/full-time boundary to erode.

“Flexibility has been a trademark of FE provision over the last ten years and the modularisation of courses allows students to attend on a morning/evening basis - at times that suit them. Students may come and study only one unit or any multiple thereof. Studying an HND like this would of course take a long time. Nevertheless differences between part-time and full-time are breaking down.”

“Because of the modular system, whereas students used to go through their career as cohorts, nowadays anyone doing a particular module will be from a variety of degree courses. So there are several different cohorts and so the part-time students are less visible.”

and

“As time goes on I think that we will stop talking about part-time/full-time and stop distinguishing. We will simply talk about students.”

Some interviewees went on to suggest that the key issue for our study was not part-time HE as such but the flexibility of all HE.

In conclusion, the apparent increase in flexibility has led to the blurring of a number of boundaries: sectoral, temporal and institutional; between levels; and between methods of delivery. For example, while HNCs are traditionally seen as suitable for part-time study and HNDs for full-time study, unitisation has blurred this distinction because the two levels share units facilitating progression on either a part-time or a full-time basis. Moreover, students may progress in a similarly seamless fashion from HND to degree level study thus blurring the boundaries between sectors.

While there appears to be considerable blurring of boundaries, we should perhaps add a note of scepticism. The concept of flexibility “is wonderfully vague. It is like freedom, peace or democracy: we are all in favour of it, even if we do not agree on what it means.” (Raffe, 1994a p.13). In our research we found no difficulty in making the practical distinction between full- and part-time study, although we certainly found considerable variation in the hours and circumstances of part-time students. The concept of flexibility was mentioned far less often by the staff responsible for delivering the courses in our case studies than by the policy-makers we had interviewed in the earlier phase of the research. The extent of flexibility in any system is likely to be exaggerated by those involved. Robertson (1994) notes that the existence of what he terms ‘phantom arrangements’ may exaggerate change. For example some modular schemes unitise course structures with little improvement in choice, CAT schemes are sometimes adopted as marginal arrangements, and new arrangements may regress into conventional academic arrangements or fail to change conventional structures and attitudes.
A.2.3 Change in higher and further education

In the previous section we discussed the (claimed) increase in flexibility and blurring of boundaries, a trend which helps to define the context for the research. In this section we broaden the discussion and list some of the key changes which have affected the HE and FE sectors in recent years.

Higher Education Institutions

Student numbers

A mass HE system is emerging. Student numbers have grown dramatically, if not steadily, over the last decade. Between 1983-1984 and 1993-1994 the number of students in HE has risen from 112,000 to 180,000 (Scottish Office 1996, p.3). The 1994-1995 total, calculated on a slightly different basis, is 202,000. The increase in full-time students has been far steeper than that in part-timers, especially in the early 1990s, when the rate was 10% or 11% annually. Thus part-timers have increased in absolute numbers but have declined as a proportion of total HE enrolments. FECs provide the majority of part-time places - 52% in 1993-1994 - but this proportion has declined from 62% in 1983-1984. Statistical trends are discussed further in Part B.

The translation of Central Institutions into universities

Central Institutions (CIs) were already part of the HE sector, so the fact that five of them became universities in 1992 may not appear as a major change from the perspective of an analysis of part-time HE. However there are at least three reasons why this transmogrification is significant in this context:

- It gave a higher profile to the practice of the former CIs, partly for sheer reasons of status but also because they and older universities now meet in the same policy fora. This practice contained a stronger element of part-time provision, and a stronger declared ethos of flexibility and student orientation.

- The change of status has arguably created a vacuum, or at least an updraft, which may affect the trajectory of FECs, encouraging some of them to move into the lower levels of advanced provision, either for the first time or by increasing an existing presence.

- Relatedly, the former CIs’ stronger local links include links to local FECs, facilitating the growth of articulation between FE provision and university degrees (see below).
Felisinisation: the growth of the SCOTCAT system

Up to a point, CAT schemes may be a phenomenon which has been more talked about than realised. Nevertheless, within the overall SCOTCAT framework, progress has been made at different rates towards a system which is more flexible in that it allows students to build towards a HE qualification in stages, and (to a lesser extent) to do so by combining periods of study at different institutions. The debate about modularisation has been characterised in some quarters by conceptual confusion and organisational uncertainty, compounded by a proposed move to a semester system. Institutions have embraced it with different levels of enthusiasm. But in any event the trend towards greater flexibility through new curriculum structures is there.

Mainstreaming of continuing education

In many of the older universities, if part-time HE existed at all it was largely at postgraduate level or through its extra-mural or CE provision, open to members of the public and almost wholly uncertificated. Over the past two decades this form has been accompanied by professional development courses, which were generally part-time. There are two trends of significance here:

- The expansion of CE, especially continuing professional development, as part of university missions.
- The move by SHEFC, declared formally only in 1995 but foreshadowed earlier, to bring much CE, and especially the more traditional liberal adult education, into the mainstream of HE by funding it through the universities’ main grant and requiring it to be accredited. This move in itself is having a major impact on the statistics of part-time HE as thousands of CE students begin to be counted in with the universities’ undergraduate and postgraduate populations.

Technology and open learning

The OU occupies a curious position in British HE, venerated but marginalised. In the context of part-time HE it is a major player, since its considerable numbers of students are all by definition part-time - a matter of some discontent, since as we discuss elsewhere the definition is substantially a matter of who is entitled to have their fees paid. The OU is now being joined as a purveyor of distance HE by a number of institutions. More generally, the divide between distance education provision and other forms is rapidly eroding as new technology begins to pervade provision of all kinds, making learning at all times of day, night or year more feasible and regular.

Student finance and the labour market

The impact of the steady diminution of the value of the student grant and the increasing use of student loans has yet to be assessed. One consequence, discussed earlier in this chapter, has been the increasing recourse by nominally full-time students to job-holding, even in term-time. This trend coincides with a steady growth in part-time employment generally, and changes in the labour market towards greater ‘flexibility’. Institutional responses to this vary: some will accommodate or even facilitate the trend by adapting course structures and organisational arrangements; in others there is a mounting friction between the technical requirements of full-time attendance and the practical dispositions of the students.
Further Education Colleges

Student numbers

As described earlier, FECs account for a majority of part-time HE students but their share has fallen slightly in recent years. Like the HE sector, the FE sector has seen the number of advanced full-time students grow much faster than the number of part-time students. A large majority (94%) of full-time but only 64% of part-time advanced students in FECs were registered on HNC/D courses in 1993/94, the rest studying mainly for higher professional qualifications.

Unitisation of advanced courses

Under the Advanced Courses Development Programme, launched in 1987, SCOTVEC HNCs and HNDs went through a process of reform and unitisation. This followed the modularisation of non-advanced provision in 1984; the reform of advanced provision had the important difference that the group awards (HNCs and HNDs) were retained, although individual HN units may also be certificated separately. Unitisation provided an opportunity for HNCs and HNDs to be articulated, with HNCs leading to HNDs in the second (full-time) year; much of the unitised HN provision was also articulated with degrees through the SCOTCAT scheme. This has resulted in a ‘dual role’ for many HNCs, to provide a stand-alone qualification, and to allow progression to HND or beyond (SCOTVEC 1995). To a lesser extent the same applies to HNDs. There has been a tendency for HNCs to bifurcate on these lines, between more specific courses used primarily as terminal qualifications for the labour market, and more general courses used primarily for progression. There are at least two possible implications for part-time study. On the one hand, as more students progress from HNCs to HNDs so the traditional characterisation of HNCs as part-time qualifications and HNDs as full-time qualifications is likely to be undermined. On the other hand, progression may be harder for part-time than for full-time students. Part-time study takes longer in any case, and the structure of HN courses (in which the step from HNC to HND is typically 18 credits, much more than the 12 credits required for the HNC) is likely to deter part-time progression. The former have been more likely to attract, or to be designed for, part-time students. As a result the boundary between part-time and full-time study may now coincide with the bifurcation of HNCs described above, with part-timers seeking a stand-alone qualification and full-timers expecting progression to HND.

Incorporation and new roles

Following the Education Act of 1992, FECs were removed from local authority control and incorporated as independent institutions. This has allowed them to pursue different markets, or to pursue the same markets but in different ways, without formal reference to local government policy. This freedom has been interpreted in various ways, on two interrelated dimensions. First, there is the extent to which colleges have sought to retain predominantly local links or to move more onto the national stage. Second, there is the extent to which they have sought to change their profile in terms of level of study, notably by moving more into advanced work. The relationship between the two can be complex, with some colleges aiming to combine a strong community role with an increase in their advanced level provision. It is too early to assess the full consequences of incorporation, but the general trend has been to a greater diversity of mission and provision among colleges.
Irrespective of incorporation, colleges would have been faced with major changes in the local labour market and composition of the local economy. Colleges have been perceived - and have perceived themselves - to have a role in making HE more accessible, in both geographical and social terms. By virtue of their more geographically defined focus, FECs are more sensitive to shifts in the local economy. So whilst local context is a factor in HE as well as FE, it has a stronger salience in the latter. Long-standing traditions of day-release have been undermined by structural change. Those industries which historically were the main suppliers of day-release students have largely been in decline, whilst emergent sectors have not seen fit to follow the same pattern of support. This has meant rapid change to the content as well as the structure of provision, as skill requirements and corporate practices alter. It has also led to growth in advanced provision, and we consider later in this chapter the issue of convergence or divergence between and within sectors.

Capping of advanced provision

The government indicated in December 1994 that colleges would no longer be funded for a continued increase in full-time advanced provision. This policy was inevitable given the desire to consolidate full-time HE numbers; the dramatic growth in college enrolments would, if continued, have undermined any policy for consolidation aimed only at HEIs. But it also reflected a perception that in the emerging HE system, FECs had a particular role as providers of part-time opportunities, linked to their more local mission.

Articulation with higher education

In addition to providing a substantial proportion of HE (advanced-level) provision, FECs are strengthening their links with HEIs. Most of these links have been established through articulation agreements, rather than through franchising and validation arrangements which are more common south of the Border (Gallacher and Sharp 1995). The national SCOTVEC framework of HN provision and quality assurance, which has no direct counterpart in England and Wales, helps to explain this difference. However, the present pattern of FE-HE links arose during the period of rapid expansion in full-time HE; the capping of student numbers, together with the consequences of incorporation and other developments in HE, create a new context: “the next few years may see further interesting lines of development, in which new forms of partnership between HEIs and FECs may become increasingly central” (ibid., p.21).

General trends

Both sectors exemplify the growing emphasis on devolved management in the public sector. In Scott’s words: “Instead of planning inputs, the state audits outcomes. This is a radical change in the means by which social control is exerted” (1995, p.81). Responsibility for budgets, personnel and policy has shifted downwards, so that individual institutions, operating within a government-determined framework and within formula-determined budgets, have been required to make policy decisions to a far greater extent than in the past, and to account for these decisions. This has meant, in principle at least, more explicit statements of institutional mission and policy and a clearer designation within institutions of responsibility for areas of policy and practice.

Change of the dimensions described above is unlikely to leave the pattern of institutional behaviour undisturbed, for a number of reasons, including: competition for market share; the release of suppressed creativities; the desire of institutional leaders to achieve a recognisable profile; or simply the explication of internal dynamics, the working out of tendencies to move in
one direction rather than another which are the natural expression of individual professionals working together in given local and occupational contexts.

Above all, these changes may affect institutional differentiation. Williams and Fry (1994) have described two scenarios for change. In the first scenario institutions develop divergent missions, roles and market niches; their relations are more collaborative than competitive and there is a place for small, specialist institutions as well as larger ones. In the second scenario missions converge: all institutions seek to do all (or most) things, with intensified competition and pressures for expansion. As Williams and Fry (1994, p.3) comment: “Much of the rhetoric is towards differentiation of institutional function. However the present reality is towards convergence.” This raises the question of whether institutions are converging or diverging in respect of their policy for and provision of part-time HE. We return to this question in chapter C.3 and in Part D.

A.2.4 Students in part-time higher education

There is a growing body of research on part-time HE students. This growing interest may be understood in the context of the growth of the access movement (for example, McPherson 1991), the policy of expansion of HE and changes in the funding of student support (Smith and Saunders 1991). The focus of these studies has overwhelmingly been on first degree level despite the recognition that most part-time students are to be found at sub-degree level (Tight 1991; Bourner et al. 1991).

Blaxter and Tight (1993) have usefully summarised six key surveys of part-time HE students and identified a number of important issues arising from them. The emphasis in these surveys is on student characteristics although some, such as the Glasgow College survey (Gallacher et al. 1989), also include institutional and course data. The CNAA study (Bourner et al. 1988; 1991) surveyed 2,876 part-time degree students on courses accredited by the CNAA in 1985. The Glasgow College study (Gallacher et al. 1989) surveyed 445 students on four degree courses offered by four different Scottish HEIs. In addition this comprehensive study surveyed 25 institutions, collected information on 35 different courses and undertook six case studies. The OU (McIntosh et al. 1976; Woodley and Parlett 1983) and Birkbeck (Birkbeck College 1991) data are drawn from routine university administrative sources. Warwick University (Blaxter and Tight 1993) and the Polytechnic of North London (Johnson and Hall 1985) surveyed their own students and reported on their own part-time degree programmes.

From the six studies, Blaxter and Tight note considerable variation in age although part-time students were older on average than full-time students. Similarly, there was wide variation in sex distribution: 76% of Warwick’s students were women, as were only 35% in the CNAA survey. In all the studies part-time students were concentrated in social science and arts; the reasons for this are difficult to unravel and may reflect the available provision in the institutions concerned. There was however agreement across the studies on the social class and educational level of part-time students, who tended to be in paid employment in non-manual occupations, and a majority (at least 70%) had standard university entrance qualifications before embarking on part-time study.

Drawing on the work of Johnston and Bailey (1984) and West et al. (1986), Blaxter and Tight categorised part-time students along three dimensions. Along the first dimension, expressed motivation, they identified vocationally-oriented and personally-oriented students. Along the second dimension, study method preferences, they identified institutionally-focused and home-based students. The third dimension distinguished students from different educational backgrounds: early school leavers (who left without qualifications for HE entrance), recyclers
(who already had a qualification from HE), returners (who had started but not completed a qualification in HE) and deferrers (who had left school qualified to enter HE, but had not directly done so). Students may vary in the ways in which they assess and express their personal motivation according to time and place. The growth of flexible methods of delivery and the growing emphasis on pathways and lifelong learning must make neat categorisation of study method preferences and educational experiences increasingly difficult.

A recurrent theme of the literature is the growing importance of part-time HE both numerically and in terms of its value in widening access to HE. Writing in the late 1980s, Gallacher et al. (1989) noted that part-time first degree students (excluding the OU) in Scotland had more than doubled over the two years between academic session 1985-1986 and session 1987-1988, although numbers were still small in 1987-1988 at 1,746. The OU was the dominant provider and 81% of all part-time first degree students in Scotland were studying with the OU in 1987-1988. Gallacher et al. identified differences in participation according to sector (University and CIs/Colleges of Education). Universities had a lower proportion of part-time students than might be expected given their share of degree courses. Different educational traditions in these sectors led to different patterns of provision. In the non-university sector a well-established tradition of part-time study, of vocational education, and of catering for the needs of particular occupational groups had resulted in a large number of programmes specifically designed for part-time study. The universities, on the other hand, had provided part-time access to existing (full-time) degrees.

Apart from these sectoral differences Gallacher and his co-authors developed a typology of degrees including post-qualifying/in-service degrees, initial professional qualifications and general degrees. The second and third of these are of particular relevance to the present study. Initial professional qualifications were more likely to involve attendance on a long day basis reflecting the tradition of day-release in particular professions. Half of these courses were in science and technology. By contrast, general degrees were concentrated in arts and social sciences. Most general degrees (89%) were in the university sector and they were less likely to include special part-time provision.

The CNAA study conducted by Bourner et al. (1991) also noted considerable growth in part-time student numbers based on trends between 1975 and 1987. This large scale study provided a wealth of data on part-time students, but is too detailed to summarise here. However, many of the student characteristics it identified were consistent with those noted by Blaxter and Tight above.

Finally, it is possible to identify recurring themes in the literature. The first is the increasing significance of part-time HE: by 1988-1989 Tight (1991) could identify 712 part-time first degree courses offered by 128 institutions across the UK. However, the true significance of this growth is difficult to assess. As Tight points out, much of the increase identified by writers may be attributed to the opening and rapid expansion of the OU. Related to this, a second theme is that of the overwhelming dominance of the OU in providing part-time first degrees. However, this dominance is not reflected in the balance of the research, and Gallacher et al. identify a comparison of OU and other provision as a fruitful line for research. Similarly, although most part-time study is at sub-degree level the research has focused overwhelmingly on degree level. These emphases and biases in the research may reflect the researchers’ advocacy of the part-time mode as a means of widening access to degree-level HE. A third important theme is that of sectoral differences between polytechnics and colleges and the university sector. The changes discussed above (in section A.2.3) make this a particularly relevant theme for exploration in the current environment. Lastly, there appear to be, as Blaxter and Tight (1993) would term it, different ‘audiences’ for part-time degrees and it is not possible, therefore, to identify a typical part-time student except in the broadest sense.
A.2.5 Summary

- This chapter discusses some of the policy debates, recent trends and current issues which provide the context of our research.

- Commentators have suggested several reasons why part-time provision could or should play an important role in the future HE system. These include the educational benefits of part-time study, the growing importance of lifelong learning, organisational and financial pressures on HE, the consolidation of full-time student numbers and the need to enhance access and openness in HE.

- However, a strategy for part-time HE must be based on answers to a number of questions concerning the demand for part-time HE, its provision, its quality and its advantages and disadvantages. This project seeks to answer these questions.

- Our project initially aimed to focus on part-time study for first degrees and HNDs. The blurring of boundaries between HNC and HND provision led us to broaden its scope to include HNCs.

- Many participants, and especially institutional leaders, perceive a trend in HE towards increased flexibility. This is claimed to have resulted in a general blurring of boundaries within HE, including the boundary between full-time and part-time study.

- Other changes which form the context of our research include the abolition of the binary divide, the incorporation of FECs, the consolidation (capping) of full-time student numbers, the development of SCOTCAT and of FE-HE links, and changes in educational technology.

- These changes, together with the growing emphasis on devolved management, may promote the diversification of policy and practice at both institutional and sectoral levels.

- Previous studies of part-time students have emphasised the diversity of their motivations, educational backgrounds and social and economic circumstances. They also draw attention to differences between sectors.

- The existing research has tended to reflect the researchers’ chosen role as advocates for part-time HE; it has emphasised the growing numerical significance of part-time HE and its importance for access, but it has not systematically compared OU students with other part-time students, and sub-degree provision has been largely neglected.
PART B  PARTICIPATION, PROVISION AND GUIDANCE

CHAPTER B.1  STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN PART-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION

B.1.1  Introduction

The discussion above has already shown (and more detail is given on this in succeeding Parts) that HE provision is not coterminous with HE institutions nor with the HE sector, and that this is particularly the case with part-time HE. That is the rationale for including FECs as we have done. Within the HE sector, we need to allocate institutions to different categories in order to give proper shape to the analysis. The most obvious approach is to use the categories which obtain historically, retaining a distinction between the post-1992 former Central Institutions and pre-1992 universities; holding the OU in a separate category of its own; and using a residual category for non-university HEIs. This gives us five categories, spread unevenly across the two sectors. We considered subdividing the FE category into two by separating members of the unofficial Scotland’s Polytechnic Colleges grouping - characterised as large, serving a wide hinterland, and offering a substantial range of HE - from the rest. We did not do so because we judged that FECs varied along several dimensions, and represented a continuum within each dimension, so that a subdivision into two or three categories would be less useful for analytical purposes.

We present data on the participation of part-time students in different sectors and categories of our typology, according to different levels. This gives an overall picture of the distribution of part-time participants. It allows us to gauge the significance of part-time participation from several angles and at different levels. Significance can be judged in terms of numbers of part-timers in an institution, category or sector in relation to the overall total of part-timers, or of these numbers as a proportion of a sector, category or institution’s total enrolments. We have done this below in respect of sectors and categories, but not in relation to individual institutions.

This chapter first examines trends in participation for the ten year period 1983-1984 to 1993-1994. It then analyses participation in more detail for the year 1993-1994, the last year for which comparable and detailed data was available.

B.1.2  Trends in participation 1983 - 1994

The following analysis is based on statistics provided to us by the SOEID for the period 1983-1984 to 1993-1994. The OU has been excluded from the calculation of general trends and is dealt with separately.

Students

Table B.1.1 shows the percentage changes in HE students by mode both at all levels and at all levels excluding postgraduate study (which was outside the terms of the research).
Table B.1.1
Percentage changes in Higher Education students by year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Part-time students</th>
<th>Full-time students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All levels</td>
<td>Excluding postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-1984</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1985</td>
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<td>1990-1991</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991-1992</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-1993</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-1994</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>-2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation in full-time HE remained relatively stable during much of the eighties until 1988 when a period of rapid expansion began. Table B.1.1 shows that full-time participation expanded much faster than part-time participation. Full-time student numbers nearly doubled from 76,487 in 1983-1984 to 132,509 in 1993-1994. The increase in full-time HE students at all levels over the period was 73%. The growth in part-time student numbers was far less dramatic, increasing from 35,575 students in 1983-1984 to 47,220 in 1993-1994 - an increase in part-time student numbers at all levels of 33% over the ten years, dropping to 19% when postgraduate study is excluded. The growth in part-time student numbers was also less consistent so that when postgraduate study is excluded, the figures show percentage decreases in four out of the ten years. There were variations in the rates of growth by sector and level.

Full-time student numbers at all levels in HEIs (excluding postgraduate study) rose from 62,958 in 1983-1984 to 98,440 in 1993-1994 - an increase of 56%; this compared with an increase from 6,148 to 20,221 for the same group in FECs: an increase of 229%. The highest increases in the FE sector were in the number of full-time HN students, particularly HNCs. HN students accounted for 94% of all full-time HE students studying in FECs in 1993-1994. The greatest increase in full-time students in HEIs was at postgraduate level, at 89% over the ten years. This was closely followed by first degree study at 72% where, of course, absolute numbers were much higher: at 54,235 in 1983-1984 and 93,172 in 1993-1994.

Part-time student numbers at all levels in HEIs (excluding postgraduate study) rose from 9,436 in 1983-1984 to 10,653 in 1993-1994: an increase of 13% compared with an increase of 21% for the same group in FECs. Absolute numbers of part-time students in FECs were much higher at 22,020 in 1983-1984 and 26,649 in 1993-1994 (excluding postgraduate study). In 1993-1994, nearly half (48%) of all part-time HE students in HEIs were studying at postgraduate level and a further 31% were studying for a first degree. There was a significant increase in part-time study at both these levels in HEIs at 136% for postgraduate study and 249% for first degree study, but absolute numbers in these groups were small. In the FE sector the most significant growth was in HNC study where there was a percentage increase of 193% over the ten years. Although there were significant increases in postgraduate study and first degree study in this sector, absolute numbers were very small making HNC by far the most significant level of study in the part-time mode in the FE sector. Throughout this period, the OU in Scotland continued to dominate as a provider of part-time degrees. Student
numbers at all levels of study nearly doubled during the period, increasing from 7,037 in 1983-1984 to 12,232 in 1993-1994.

**Entrants**

An analysis of percentage changes in entrants to HE over these ten years reveals similar contrasts between trends in full-time and part-time numbers. Table B.1.2 shows the percentage changes in HE entrants by mode at all levels and at all levels excluding postgraduate study.

**Table B.1.2**
Percentage changes in Higher Education entrants by year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Part-time entrants</th>
<th>Full-time entrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All levels</td>
<td>Excluding postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-1984</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-1985</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td>-2.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-1987</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-1988</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-1989</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
<td>-3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-1990</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990-1991</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
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<td>1991-1992</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-1994</td>
<td>-3.7</td>
<td>-4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The greatest percentage increase over the ten years is in full-time entrants: 97% at all levels compared with an increase of 19% for part-time entrants, dropping to 11% when postgraduate study is excluded. Table B.1.2 shows that the rate of growth in full-time entrants is slow but steady until 1989-1990 when there is a significant increase in the rate of growth, jumping from 1.6% in 1988-1989 to 12.7% in 1989-1990. For four out of the six years from 1989-1990, the percentage increase is in double figures reaching a high of 14.8% between 1990-1991 and 1991-1992. By contrast, the rate of growth in part-time entrants has been far from steady. There has been a percentage fall in the number of entrants in five out of the ten years and the rate of growth has been inconsistent, varying from an increase of 10.9% in 1992-1993 to a fall of 3.7% in the following academic year.

Analysis of percentage changes in entrants by level and sector reveals a similar pattern of differences to that of student numbers. Particularly noteworthy is the contrast between part-time and full-time entrants in the FE sector where percentage increases in entrants to advanced courses (excluding postgraduate study) were 12% and 320% respectively over the ten years. The rapid expansion of full-time HE entrants in the FE sector over the period in absolute and relative terms meant that almost half of the FE sector’s HE entrants in 1993-1994 were full-time.

**1994-1995**

While figures for 1994-1995 were available, these have not been included in the general analysis of trends because changes in coverage make comparison with previous years difficult. In this year the Higher Education Statistics Agency assumed responsibility for the collection of information on students in HEIs and the figures now include students on CE courses and students studying by distance learning at the eight universities previously funded
by the Universities Funding Council. These changes particularly affect part-time numbers. Much of the increase of 27% of part-time HE entrants between 1993-1994 and 1994-1995 may therefore be accounted for by the improvement in coverage. The overall figure disguises considerable variation between levels that may also be accounted for by changes in data collection. For example, the increase of 142% in part-time postgraduate entrants is accounted for by the inclusion of large distance learning programmes, while the decrease of 31% in entrants to part-time degree programmes, which appears to reverse a trend, may be explained by changes in classifying students; for example some students who were previously assumed to be studying for a degree are now categorised, more accurately, as ‘other HE’.

Comment

There is no sense from these data that part-time study is ‘taking off’. On the contrary, yearly increases in the number of entrants to part-time HE have been small and decreases in both student numbers and entrants during the ten years up until 1993-1994 have been nearly as frequent as increases. There is no clear trend demonstrating that part-time study is increasing significantly overall - particularly in the context of the expansion of full-time study. Moreover, in the case of part-time study, percentage changes from one year to another appear to be a poor predictor of future years. By contrast, the dramatic increases in full-time entrants and students over these ten years have served to increase the preponderance of full-time over part-time study, thus further marginalising the part-time mode. Nevertheless, the significance of the part-time mode varies considerably by sector and level. Part B.1.3 therefore examines full-time and part-time student participation for 1993-1994 in some detail.

B.1.3 Student participation 1993-1994

The following tables were derived from data supplied by the SOEID and are for the year 1993-1994 with the exception of the OU, where statistics are for the year 1992-1993 because this was the last year for which detailed published data were available. However, these figures incorporate a few changes to the 1993-1994 data discussed in B.1.1. In the course of our fieldwork, we became aware of some inaccuracies in the statistics, particularly when courses offered jointly with another institution, or service courses provided for another institution’s students, were recorded as part-time even though their students were studying full-time. In the following tables we have corrected for the two large instances of this of which we became aware. The result in both cases is to increase the contrast between FE and HE sectors in respect of the levels of part-time provision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Postgraduate</th>
<th>First degree</th>
<th>HND</th>
<th>HNC</th>
<th>Other HE</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-1992 university</td>
<td>1751</td>
<td>4464</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>2816</td>
<td>10165</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1992 university</td>
<td>7619</td>
<td>1646</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9265</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>8655</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1154</td>
<td>10290</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other HEIs</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FECs</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>16283</td>
<td>8230</td>
<td>26085</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (no.)</td>
<td>10399</td>
<td>15583</td>
<td>1316</td>
<td>16980</td>
<td>12438</td>
<td>56716</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B.1.3 shows that nearly half (46%) of part-time students in Scotland were studying in the FE sector, 18% were studying with the OU, a further 18% with the post-1992 universities and 16% were studying part-time at the pre-1992 universities. Under 2% were studying at ‘other HEIs’.

Table B.1.4 shows the percentages of students studying at each level by sector and excludes postgraduate study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>First degree</th>
<th>HND</th>
<th>HNC</th>
<th>Other HE</th>
<th>All levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-1992 university</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1992 university</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other HEIs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FECs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If postgraduate study is excluded, then 56% of all part-time students were studying in the FE sector, 21% were with the OU and 18% were studying at the post-1992 universities. The pre-1992 universities had less than 4% of the total part-time students and ‘other HEIs’ had less than 2%. (The vast majority of part-time students in the pre-1992 universities were postgraduates). Over half (56%) of all part-time first degree students were studying with the OU. The FE sector contained a majority of part-time students because 37% of all part-time students in Scotland (excluding postgraduates) were studying for an HNC, and 96% of part-time HNC students were studying at FECs. 34% of all part-time HE students were studying for a first degree, 27% were studying on some other HE course and only 3% were studying part-time for an HND. These figures are summarised in Table B.1.5 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Post-1992 university</th>
<th>Pre-1992 university</th>
<th>Open University</th>
<th>Other HEIs</th>
<th>FECs</th>
<th>All sectors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First degree</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HND</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNC</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other HE</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While these data give a clear picture of the distribution of part-time students by level and sector, it is necessary to compare these figures with a similar analysis for full-time students in order to gain a clear sense of the empirical significance of the part-time mode. Table B.1.6
shows numbers of all full-time students for 1993-94 and may be compared with Table B.1.3. Table B.1.6 shows a fairly predictable pattern of participation. Over half (53%) of all full-time students were studying at a pre-1992 university and the majority (71%) of all full-time HE students were studying for a first degree.

**Table B.1.6**

Full-time student numbers by sector and level for 1993-1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Postgraduate</th>
<th>First degree</th>
<th>HND</th>
<th>HNC</th>
<th>Other HE</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-1992 university</td>
<td>2152</td>
<td>23165</td>
<td>2920</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>29024</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1992 university</td>
<td>10010</td>
<td>59935</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>70012</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other HEIs</td>
<td>1565</td>
<td>9947</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>12565</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FECs</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>11053</td>
<td>8123</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>20342</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (no.)</td>
<td>13848</td>
<td>93269</td>
<td>14497</td>
<td>8311</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>131943</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B.1.7 shows the percentage of all HE students who were part-time by level and sector.

**Table B.1.7**

Percentage of all students who are part-time by level and sector for 1993-1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Postgraduate</th>
<th>First degree</th>
<th>HND</th>
<th>HNC</th>
<th>Other HE</th>
<th>All levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-1992 university</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1992 university</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other HEIs</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FECs</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from the OU, the FE sector has the highest proportions of part-time students (56%), followed by the post-1992 universities at 26%. The sectoral differences change if postgraduate study is removed. The changes are minor except in the case of the pre-1992 universities where the proportion of HE students studying part-time drops to 3%. For comparison, Table B.1.8 shows the percentages of students studying part-time at each of the case study institutions analysed in Part D.

**Table B.1.8**

Percentage of all students who are part-time in each case study institution for 1993-1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Postgraduate</th>
<th>First degree</th>
<th>HND</th>
<th>HNC</th>
<th>Other HE</th>
<th>All levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1992 university</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-1992 university</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large FEC</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three out of the four case study institutions had higher than average proportions of part-time students when compared with the average for their sector (see Table B.1.7). There is considerable variation in the proportions of HNC students who are part-time. Both universities have higher than average proportions of their first degree students studying part-time for their sector, particularly the pre-1992 university.

### B.1.4 Summary

- There was rapid growth in full-time student numbers in the decade to 1994. The growth in full-time students was much faster than the growth in part-time students which was less significant and less consistent. This widened the gap between full-time and part-time numbers. There is no sense in which part-time study is ‘taking off’.

- Part-time education grew fastest at first-degree level, but from a very low base.

- Both part-time and full-time study grew fastest in the FE sector.

- The significance of the part-time mode varies by level and sector, so that part-time postgraduate study is significant in the pre-1992 universities and part-time HNCs in the FE sector.

- Study at HNC level predominates in the part-time mode, accounting for 37% of all part-time students (excluding postgraduates) across sectors.

- The OU was the major provider of part-time first degrees followed by the post-1992 universities.
CHAPTER B.2  PART-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION COURSES

B.2.1   Analysis of part-time opportunities

We tried to count part-time courses offered in Scotland using institutions’ own prospectuses and other publicity material. This proved problematic for a number of reasons. First, increasing flexibility along the dimensions already referred to means that it is difficult to decide what counts as a course. Large CATs programmes may have large numbers of part-time students but not themselves count as a course or at least may count as only one thus obscuring their size, significance and diversity. Second, as institutions become more responsive to demand it becomes harder to identify the ‘opportunities’ to study part-time which may exist. Opportunities may not be advertised; institutions may provide opportunities in response to the demands of employers or to the needs of individual students, for example allowing a full-time student to continue part-time following a change in personal circumstances. Third, increasing numbers of students studying on individual modules and increasing integration of part-time and full-time modes blurs boundaries between the two. Opportunities may not be advertised specifically as full- or part-time and may, at least in principle, be available in either mode. However in some cases this might be little more than a formal opportunity: several institutions indicated that all courses were, in principle, available for part-time study but that timetabling constraints would make this impracticable. Fourth, it is difficult to assess the reliability of the publicity material itself. Some advertised courses might not run, for example if the necessary quorum of students was not reached. Conversely, during interviews at institutions we were often made aware of opportunities to study part-time that were not advertised.

642 courses were advertised by institutions as available in the part-time mode. 478 (74%) of these were HNC courses offered in the FE sector. In the following summary, proportions are of total courses. Only 17 HNC courses were offered in the part-time mode in the HE sector. A total of 68 HND courses were advertised, 64 (10% of total courses) in the FE sector and 4 (1%) in the HE sector. 76 degree courses were advertised, 72 (11% of total courses) in the HE sector and 4 (1%) in the FE sector. A further 3 courses classified as ‘other HE’ were also advertised as available in the part-time mode. These findings are not a simple mirror of student participation and this requires closer analysis. However, the same general concentration at HNC level is immediately apparent and the concentration of HNCs in the FE sector and degrees in the HE sector is predictable, underlining the relative lack of growth of part-time HE in the FE sector beyond HNC level.

These 642 courses were also categorised by subject using the 16 Universities Statistical Record subject categories plus a residual one for some professional courses such as hairdressing that did not fit elsewhere. There is a fairly even spread in the HE sector. By contrast, there is considerable concentration in the FE sector, where 37% of all part-time courses are in the area of Business and Financial Studies, and a further 26% of all courses are in Engineering and Technology. These initial findings suggest that the links between part-time study and employment are important and the nature of these links requires further analysis.

B.2.2   Summary

• Analysing institutional prospectuses for 1994, we identified 563 part-time HNC/D courses, of which all but 21 were in the FE sector, and 76 part-time first degree courses, of which all but four were in HEIs. The courses were fairly evenly spread across subject
areas in the HE sector, but FE courses tended to be concentrated in business studies and engineering and technology.

- The growing flexibility and responsiveness of the system make it impossible to map provision definitively.
CHAPTER B.3 ADULT GUIDANCE FOR PART-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

B.3.1 Organisation of adult guidance services in Scotland

To complete our review of participation and provision, we conducted interviews with adult guidance practitioners, who might be able to offer a more ‘qualitative’ view on provision and participation and thus complement the data from statistics and prospectuses. We conducted informal and exploratory interviews at an early stage of the research. In this chapter we report on interviews conducted later, with one guidance practitioner from each of the three regional areas in which our case study institutions were located. Although the case study methodology and analyses come later in Part D of this Report, we have labelled the three areas to correspond with the case study institutions for comparative purposes; consequently area A/C includes college A and university C, area B includes college B and area D includes university D. Two of the interviews were conducted by telephone.

At the start of each interview, the guidance practitioners were asked to describe briefly the sort of work they do. One works for a local enterprise company (LEC), the second works within Community Education in a local council, and the third belongs to a guidance service funded by two-thirds of the new unitary local authorities which replaced the former Regional Council. At least two of the interviewees have a role in the development of their respective adult guidance services.

B.3.2 Enquiries from students relating to part-time higher education

Interviewees were asked about the source and number of enquiries relating to part-time HE. All three areas operate a telephone helpline service for prospective part-time students, and in two of the areas the majority of contacts appear to be telephone enquiries - the highest estimate was 15,000 calls per year. Students may be referred to the adult guidance service by local HEIs and FECs, training providers, jobcentres, LECs, and companies enquiring about further training opportunities for their employees and other advice agencies. Those who are referred to the careers service may take up face-to-face interviews, or be referred to HEIs or FECs for more information. In the other area there is an information and training shop accessed by about 30,000 people per year, some of whom have been referred to the shop from a similarly wide range of sources.

Next, we asked what most of the enquiries are about in relation to part-time HE. In one area, most prospective part-time students ask about access and when they can fit into the curriculum. In another, callers want to know what courses are available, about entry qualifications and eligibility criteria, and where they can get funding support. In the third area the emphasis was split between general types of enquiry such as “Where can I do a part-time degree?” and “What subjects are available for part-time study?”; and more specific questions on, for example, what part-time routes are available to develop professional knowledge in a particular subject. Funding issues were considered to be intrinsic to all such enquiries.

Interviewees were invited to consider how the balance of enquiries had changed in respect of part-time HE students over the last three to five years. In area B it was suggested that due to part-time funding constraints, more people are thinking about returning to education on a full-time basis, and that part-time education is often perceived as very much an evening-class scenario. However, the practitioner felt that the guidance service had improved by showing prospective
students a range of different progression routes to complement their financial, domestic and work circumstances and by getting across the message that people can work, learn and train at the same time.

Some of these views were supported in area D, where the practitioner thought there was a growing awareness of the option to go part-time; due partly to publicity and promotion, both professionally and by word of mouth, and partly to university D being proactive in promoting its part-time courses and extending the range of its provision. Higher levels of unemployment and redundancy were also thought to be changing the profile of students away from “middle-class ladies with time on their hands” towards more students from “lower social classes”. Our interviewee stressed that this was very much a generalisation.

In area A/C the emphasis was on more interest in part-time HE shown by callers, more part-time provision by FECs and HEIs, and the growth of CATs schemes and accreditation of CE courses; all of which has led to an increase in the perceived value of qualifications gained through part-time study.

**B.3.3 Comparisons with enquiries about full-time higher education**

We asked practitioners to compare the number and nature of enquiries from prospective part-time HE students with those from prospective full-time HE students. In one area it was considered that the proportions are roughly equal at present, although when the shop first opened it had been set up with the aim of attracting part-time woman returners and was used almost exclusively by prospective part-timers. As the reputation of the shop grew, it attracted more people who were considering returning to full-time education, either because they were having difficulties gaining employment or because they recognised their skills were outdated. Of the students who go to one-to-one guidance sessions, 55% are employed and 45% non-employed. This ratio does not seem to have changed significantly in recent years. Part-time students were said to be concerned with access and curricular availability, whereas full-time students had to make decisions about returning to learning in total, and whether to do so locally or to move elsewhere.

In another area the number of enquiries from prospective full-time students was thought to be similar to those from part-timers, though the former are less likely to have contact with careers advisers. From this we infer that on being told what was available, they would then contact institutions directly. The other distinctions drawn were firstly that people from a community-based setting tended to favour the part-time route at least initially, possibly due to a lack of confidence, and can therefore ‘test the water’. Secondly, adult returners often find that work and domestic commitments preclude full-time study, whereas younger people are less likely to have these types of commitment or to be put off entering HE by having been away from learning for several years. Thirdly, funding issues were considered to be more straightforward for full-time students, who are mostly eligible for grants. However, funding takes on a higher profile with part-time students, some of whom do not think to request funding from their employers. Clearly, these distinctions need not be mutually exclusive.

The response was similar in area A/C, where people who selected the part-time route could not afford the cost of full-time education or spare the time for it due to domestic and work commitments and, as a consequence, were often obliged to try to study as close to home as possible. They may use the part-time route as a stepping-stone to a full-time degree - to ease themselves back to learning - or as a way of upgrading professional qualifications. Most of the
prospective part-time students were thought to be mature and to have exhausted all of their possible sources of full-time funding, whereas according to the practitioners most of the prospective full-timers “are straight from school or pretty near it” and are consequently still eligible for funding.

B.3.4 Provision and demand: guidance practitioners’ views

Practitioners were asked whether the provision of opportunities for part-time HE in their areas was adequate, or whether there are gaps in terms of level, subject, location and mode of attendance. Responses varied: in one area the perceived gaps were not so much curricular as in terms of flexibility of access to education and training at times which suited the students. The practitioner felt that training providers for FE and HE could be more flexible, and that there was scope for more people in full-time employment accessing HE opportunities; currently, unless their employers allow them time off to attend timetabled classes, employees are unable to study part-time. Supported training in the workplace was felt to be another area where improvements could be made.

In area D, due to the development of part-time courses at university D, there were thought to be few subjects unavailable to part-time students, with the exception of science and engineering, but part-time opportunities for daytime study were limited, given that part-timers would have to be infilled into the existing full-time classes which are spread throughout the week. However university D’s Summer Academic Programme affords part-time students an additional option to study during the summer months and enables part-timers to complete their degrees more quickly (see also Part D, Chapter D.1.4).

In the third area the practitioner explained that gaps were not always perceived until enquiries were being followed-up by guidance advisers. She felt that provision has improved, particularly due to CATs schemes and the accreditation of CE courses, although she had reservations about whether the expansion of part-time HE was geared to meet the needs of prospective students as much as it was geared to enable institutions to attract “a different type of client”. Perhaps surprisingly, due to the proliferation of institutions in the area, she identified a number of curricular gaps at both HN and first-degree levels, based on enquiries which had been received. However, she added that whilst some local institutions did offer most of these types of subject, demand often exceeded supply.

We asked about the relative importance to prospective part-time HE students of prospectuses and other paper resources, and information from verbal guidance and support. The varied responses signalled the different approaches adopted by guidance practitioners in each area. One actively encourages visitors to do a lot of their own research by accessing interactive databases, and believes this allows the guidance intervention to be much more productive, enabling prospective students to be more committed to assessing their opportunities and preparing more effective action plans through being better-informed. Another tended to give verbal guidance in the first instance to prospective students - particularly those who lack confidence, need reassurance, and would benefit from being informed about their opportunities. Paper resources were perceived to have limited value, as there was a danger of mature returners suffering from information overload when confronted by bulky prospectuses. Prospective students were encouraged to contact someone associated with the delivery of courses at the local HEI, whose staff were said to be very approachable.

One of the characteristics of area A/C was the large number of local institutions from which prospective students could choose, and for this reason the opposite approach was adopted there. The national databases for FE, HE and graduate opportunities were not thought to be “terribly
good for Scotland”, as they only reflect information which had been provided by institutions, the usefulness of which was variable. The practitioner found it necessary to refer to individual prospectuses in the first instance when dealing with specific telephone enquiries, to find out exactly what provision was available, and in some cases the prospectus was the only source. More in-depth verbal guidance from advisers was given at the follow-up stage.

In the final part of the interviews, practitioners were asked if they thought there was untapped demand for part-time HE in their area and, if so, why. All three believed there was untapped demand. In areas B and D, this was considered to be predominantly because many people were unaware of the opportunities which were available, had never considered returning to learning and were unlikely to understand what it involved; in area B the practitioner felt that more could be done to tailor provision to meet students’ needs, and that for this to be done, the first stage was to identify people’s needs. In area A/C, however, the perception was that there was insufficient provision of various courses to meet demand.

We asked what factors discourage potential students from entering part-time HE. All three practitioners put cost at the top of their list. Other potential barriers mentioned were domestic responsibilities, and inaccessibility due either to geographical remoteness from delivery points or to lack of funding in area B; curricular gaps, timetabling restrictions, travel, the time required, lack of childcare provision, and uncertainty that learning could improve employment prospects in area D; and time commitments, inability to manage time, location and mode of attendance in area A/C.

In conclusion, we asked if there were high levels of drop-out from part-time HE courses, but interviewees did not feel able to answer this question. In area A/C, any follow-up surveys of people who have accessed guidance services tended to be random rather than focused on people who chose the part-time route.

B.3.5 Summary

- To complete our review of participation and provision, we interviewed adult guidance practitioners in each of the areas in which our case study institutions were located.

- There are telephone helplines staffed by guidance advisers in all three areas. In two areas the bulk of enquiries are through the helpline; in the other area most enquiries take the form of visits to an information and training shop. These initial contacts may lead to one-to-one interviews with advisers or referrals to institutions.

- Most of the enquiries were about one or more of the following: access, provision and funding. Prospective students seem to have become more aware of part-time opportunities as a consequence of better guidance, and the extension of provision, CATs schemes and accreditation of CE courses in some institutions.

- Enquiries from prospective full-time students appear to be simpler to process, as they tend to be younger, have fewer commitments and need less encouragement and support. Funding issues for full-time students are also more straightforward.

- Opinions on adequacy of provision varied: there were considered to be a few absolute curricular gaps in one area, and some gaps in another area where demand for courses exceeded supply, but in two of the three areas the main gaps were perceived to be not in the curriculum but in the availability of courses at times which were suitable for students.
All three practitioners believed there was untapped demand, due to a combination of lack of awareness of part-time opportunities, insufficient knowledge about prospective students’ needs, and shortfalls in provision in some subject areas.

The barriers to part-time HE which practitioners identified were: cost (which all respondents emphasised); geographical location and travel; some curricular gaps and timetabling restrictions; time commitments and inability to manage time; domestic responsibilities; lack of childcare provision; and uncertainty that learning could improve employment prospects.
PART C PERSPECTIVES OF INSTITUTIONAL POLICY-MAKERS

CHAPTER C.1 COSTS AND BENEFITS OF PART-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION

C.1.1 The informants

The second main component of the research was a series of interviews with a senior policy-maker in each of the 23 Scottish HEIs (including the OU), and in 11 FECs. At the beginning of the project we wrote to the Principal of each HEI or FEC in Scotland. We outlined the nature of the research, requested documentation on the institution’s part-time provision and policy, and asked the Principal to nominate a senior member of the institution whom we might interview and who could speak for the institution’s policy on part-time HE. The documentation on provision was used in the analyses reported in chapter B.2. The documentation on institutional policy, which ranged from mission statements and corporate plans to internal committee papers, was used by the research team to prepare for the interviews and to complement the data collected in the interviews.

The relatively small scale of the Scottish system made it possible for us to include all HEIs in the interview study. Identifying separate institutions was not always straightforward. Some universities have a federal or semi-federal structure, and some institutions have a formal link with another institution, for example as an Associate College of a university, but are nevertheless treated by SHEFC as separate institutions for funding purposes. We decided to follow the SHEFC criterion, which led us to identify 22 separate SHEFC-funded institutions, plus the OU.

We initially planned to include six to eight FECs in this phase of the study. However the decision to extend the study to include HNC provision (see A.2.2 above), together with a recognition of the diversity and complexity of advanced-level provision in FE, led us to select 11 colleges. These comprised a quarter of the 43 FECs in Scotland. They were selected to over-represent the main providers of part-time HE, while still providing a range in respect of size, geography and mission.

As described above, the institution decided which person we should interview. In most cases, the individual designated was at Vice-Principal level or equivalent, but in some cases this role was given to the person directly responsible for part-time provision, either in total or in part. Some institutions found it difficult to identify a single individual who could speak for the institution’s policy on part-time HE. This was particularly the case in institutions where decision-making was substantially decentralised, especially on academic matters, and where there might be a range of faculty positions rather than a single institutional position.

The interviews were semi-structured, and tape-recorded but not transcribed. Assurance of confidentiality was given, with only published information to be used in attributable fashion except where permission was given. We used the interview to check on published data and official statistics, and in several instances were able to follow up on the interview with requests for some further relevant statistics.

In presenting our data we attempt to convey the range of views expressed, and where appropriate we refer to four of the five categories of institution introduced in chapter B.1: pre-1992 universities, post-1992 universities, non-university HEIs and FECs. Although the OU was
included in our interviews, and the data are used in our analysis, we do not identify it in this part of our report for reasons of confidentiality. In the rest of this chapter we summarise our respondents’ views on the costs and benefits of part-time HE. Chapter C.2 describes the institutions’ current policy and provision, recent changes and expected future developments.

C.1.2 Interpreting costs and benefits

We asked our interviewees what they saw as the main benefits and costs (or disadvantages) of part-time HE, to the institution and to the student respectively. Many of our interviewees had already discussed costs and benefits of part-time HE at some length, while describing their institution’s policy and provision, and these responses are included in the data analysed in this chapter.

Few institutions took a formal, corporate view on the costs and benefits of part-time HE, and our interviewees probably expressed their own personal views. The context of the interviews suggested that many of the views that were expressed were shared within the institution and had influenced its policies; nevertheless they are likely also to have reflected the personal interests and position within the institution of our interviewee. There may also have been a degree of arbitrariness concerning which of a respondent’s taken-for-granted assumptions about costs and benefits were made explicit during the interview - especially perhaps in institutions where part-time HE was not part of the active policy agenda. Most interviewees pointed out, or implied, that costs and benefits varied across students and institutions, and depended on the mission and circumstances of the institutions, including the scale and nature of its current provision. Finally, several interviewees identified ‘issues’ or ‘challenges’ which could be interpreted as either costs or benefits according to one’s point of view: for example, the higher demands and expectations of part-time students, and the need for different approaches to teaching and learning.

Consequently it would be inappropriate to draw precise, quantified conclusions about perceived costs and benefits from our interview data. Rather the data allow us to list the main issues and criteria on which judgements of costs and benefits are based, to describe the range of perceptions in relation to each, and to make cautious statements about the extent to which perceptions varied across types of institutions or according to the nature of current part-time HE provision. In the following account we describe perceived costs and benefits under six main headings, although there is overlap across these.

C.1.3 Mission-oriented costs and benefits

Several interviewees pointed out that part-time HE was a means by which the institution pursued its mission, and counted this as a benefit. Part-time HE might constitute the core business of the institution, or a significant part of it; or it might contribute towards a mission defined in terms of access, responsiveness, client-orientation, vocational or professional education, or contribution to the local community. The relationship to mission was, however, not always a clear or simple one. For example, a few respondents said that part-time provision could conflict with an active research role, but this was not always seen as a disadvantage: one post-1992 university linked its strong commitment to part-time provision to the low priority for research in its mission. Within the teaching mission there could also be ambiguity and tension: an interviewee at another post-1992 university perceived a potential conflict between the flexibility and individual choice which frequently accompanied part-time provision, and the institution’s vocational rationale which offered programmes conforming to the requirements of each relevant profession.
C.1.4 External links

Part-time HE was perceived to benefit the institution by strengthening its external links. Three types of links were mentioned:

- **Industry**: several respondents, mainly in FECs, said that part-time provision, especially when sponsored by industry, helped the institution to maintain or improve its links with industry and employers. These links provided secondary benefits, including: helping the college to keep in touch with current workplace developments and to keep its curriculum up to date; providing access to expertise and other resources; encouraging future business for the college; and promoting the employment prospects of the college’s full-time students.

- **Local community**: several interviewees cited improved community links as a benefit of part-time HE provision, whether or not these were an explicit goal of the institution’s mission. Interviewees in pre-1992 universities, including those who were not currently major providers of part-time HE, were most likely to cite this (potential) benefit.

- **Reputation and visibility**: part-time HE can serve a public relations function for the institution, promoting awareness of the institution, enhancing its reputation for the range and diversity of its provision, and encouraging future students.

C.1.5 Educational costs and benefits

Some of the educational costs and benefits related to the learning opportunities and experiences of part-time students:

- **Opportunities not otherwise available**: most of our respondents stated - or at least implied - that part-time provision provided many people with opportunities for HE which would not otherwise be available to them, particularly if they had employment or family commitments which could not easily be shed.

- **Links with practical or work experience**: the experience which part-time students bring to their HE, whether from their job or elsewhere, could enhance their learning experience as well as that of their fellow-students. However there were also potential disadvantages. It could be difficult for part-time students to gain experience for future occupations: for example, it would be hard to organise placements for part-time students in initial teacher education.

- **Coherence/flexibility**: here, too, some respondents perceived benefits where others saw costs. On the one hand, some felt that part-time study (especially when associated with modularisation) would threaten the integrity of the student experience. A policy-maker in an Art College linked this experience with the ‘hothouse’ nature of the institution:

> “The real strength of [the college] is... in the hands-on unlimited access to your workplace and the development of the individual as a creative person. It is not just a series of pieces of information that students gather.... [with more flexible provision] we would be merely educating and training a bigger number of people in more flexible ways, but we wouldn’t actually have the kind of success that we have had in producing top designers, top artists and top architects.”
Others identified problems of coherence with student choice rather than with the part-time nature of a course. The director of a university CATs programme expressed the contrary view:

“There is nothing wrong with the cafeteria approach because people do choose sensibly what they are eating. We don’t have tomato sauce on top of our ice cream.... The coherence is in the eye of the student.”

- **Socialisation and the student experience:** several respondents, especially in the pre-1992 universities, felt that part-time study could not supply the personal and social dimension of HE which was gained through university and college life.

  “What is lacking completely is the social element. We have come to the conclusion that we will be able to give our full-time students a university education, but for those who are doing part-time or flexible learning all that we can probably hope for is to give them a high quality university training.”

However some felt that this view was premised on an Oxbridge institutional environment and ignored the realities of modern student life:

“I’ve got one student with psychiatric problems coming to see me today. She’s working 15 hours a day to earn her keep and it’s just that she is broken down.”

Other educational costs and benefits were experienced in the first instance by institutions themselves and might affect the educational experience across the institution as a whole.

- **Student composition:** several respondents, especially in universities, referred to part-time provision as a means of attracting ‘good’ students or achieving a better student mix. It could attract high-ability students, especially from disadvantaged areas, or students whose maturity and experience would enhance the learning experience of fellow students and the ethos and atmosphere of the institution as a whole.

- **Expectations and demands of part-time students:** this could be perceived as a cost or a benefit. Part-time students or their employers are more likely to be the direct customers for their courses and many have made considerable personal sacrifices to study. They are less likely to accept a poor quality of provision.

- **Quality issues:** while few respondents said that part-time provision was of lower quality than full-time provision, several, mostly in the pre-1992 universities, identified issues or challenges that it raised. These concerned the measurement and comparability of standards, particularly in the context of flexible and distance learning, and in relation to the recognition and transfer of credit (especially where grades were involved).

- **Teaching/learning approaches:** part-time study may require a different approach to teaching and learning; in institutions where provision is integrated this has implications for provision for full-time students.
C.1.6  Personal costs and benefits

We have already described some of the educational benefits to part-time students, not least that part-time provision provides opportunities for HE which might not otherwise be available to them. Several respondents said that students might derive other personal benefits, including career and personal development (for example, gains in self-confidence). Several said that part-time students tended to be isolated and not to be involved in college or university life, and suggested that this was a personal cost, although others pointed out that part-time students often developed their own social support networks, and some derived benefit from the social life it could provide. Our respondents were generally reluctant to speculate in detail about personal costs and benefits for students but they mentioned the following as likely factors: finance, time pressures, impact on personal life and relationships, and motivation.

C.1.7  Costs and benefits for staff

Especially in FE, part-time courses were seen to benefit staff by enabling them to establish or strengthen contact with employers, and thereby to keep up to date with developments in the world of work. More generally the contact with motivated and mature students was seen as a benefit. However to the extent that part-time provision involved teaching in the evening or at weekends this was likely to be perceived as a cost.

There are wider contractual and employment issues. For example, in one post-1992 university we were told of the rules governing the deployment of staff. Staff are employed on terms which lay down a global annual figure of working hours, about 1,300, with a 40-week year. Thirty of the 32.5 hours in the week are at the employer’s discretion, with 108 hours in the year to be deployed by the employer for teaching outside the ‘normal’ day. In the institution where we had the most detailed discussion of this, the ‘normal’ day was defined as 8 am to 6 pm. Clearly this is a major, and sensitive, area which needs further exploration.

C.1.8  Resources

It was not possible to explore in detail the resource implications of policy developments in any institution. The only instance where it was possible even to conjure with figures was where a Flexibility In Teaching and Learning Scheme (FITLS) grant from SHEFC was explicitly cited as enabling expansion into part-time HE to occur, and this led on to a discussion of internal resource allocation, but even here the picture was not fully defined. All we can do here is list the items or issues which were mentioned as having resource implications.

- The most significant item was the use of part-time provision as a way of accomplishing expansion and thereby attracting public funding when full-time places are capped. How such expansion actually benefits an institution will vary: in some cases through more intensive use of capacity, in others by bringing in income.

- Development costs were cited. These covered capital expenditure on varying scales, from establishing distance learning provision or outreach centres to relatively minor costs; staff development; and curriculum development.

- Student numbers constitute another angle. On the one hand, part-time students could be seen as infill, making up numbers at a very low marginal cost. On the other hand, putting on a part-time class could be costly if the numbers were not sufficient (as with any class).
• Overhead costs: heating, lighting and administration. Where part-time means evening provision, there could be additional costs if buildings were not otherwise to be open.

• Short-term v. long-term costs. In some cases there were references to start-up costs which would be expected to diminish over time; in others there could be instances where initial costs are covered by pump-priming funding which then disappears.

Other than at the level of the individual course, we were not presented with evidence of precise formulae for calculating resource costs. This does not mean that they are not seriously monitored, but in most instances they are likely to be part of a wider institutional budgeting process which does not allow specific bottom-line judgements to be made.

C.1.9 Summary

• We interviewed a senior policy-maker in each of the 23 Scottish HEIs (including the OU) and in 11 FECs. The interviewees were selected by the institutions. We also had access to documentary evidence on institutional provision and policy.

• Many institutional policy-makers perceived that part-time provision benefited the institution by enabling it to pursue its mission, particularly in relation to access, responsiveness, client-orientation, vocational education or contributions to the local community.

• A perceived benefit of part-time HE was that it strengthened links with employers and the local community.

• Among the perceived educational benefits of part-time provision were that it increased access (by providing opportunities not otherwise available to the students concerned), that it enabled students to draw on practical or work experience, and that it broadened the student body. Some interviewees felt that part-time students could experience a fragmented curriculum and miss out on the personal and social dimension of HE, but these views were contested by others. Issues were raised in respect of quality assurance and the need for different teaching and learning approaches.

• The perceived benefits to institutions’ staff included the satisfaction from teaching more mature and motivated students, and closer links with the world of work. The costs included working unsocial hours.

• The costs and benefits in terms of resources were highly variable across institutions and courses. They are monitored carefully by institutions, but usually as part of a broader budgeting process, from which it is difficult to extract specific conclusions.

C.1.10 Emerging issues

Interviewees’ perceptions of the costs and benefits of part-time HE varied across institutions. This variation reflected differences in the traditions, ethos and missions of institutions, as well as in their funding and organisation and in the types and levels of courses they provided.

Nevertheless, there was substantial consensus on the general costs and benefits of part-time HE, even if respondents varied in the extent to which they felt these did or should apply to their own institution. The main area of disagreement concerned the holistic nature of the educational
experience. Some respondents felt that part-time courses tended to be fragmented and lack coherence. Others questioned the concept of coherence that underlay this view, and pointed out that part-time students could often integrate their learning with other practical or work experience to a greater extent than full-time students. Some claimed that part-timers missed some of the broader social experiences that were an important feature of HE; others questioned whether this model of HE was still applicable to most full-time students.

Resource-related issues were important for institutions’ judgements of the costs and benefits of part-time HE. In the FE sector, the introduction of the funding methodology based on SUMS (Student Units of Measurement) had removed disincentives to part-time provision: this had clearly influenced several colleges. Resource considerations were central to planning at the institutional and strategic levels. However they are not only highly complex; they are also highly variable in relation to the institution, the subjects, the level and type of courses, the context of other provision, and so on. Despite having discussed the issue with all the institutional policy-makers in our study, we find it impossible to generalise about it. While funding is clearly a very powerful instrument of policy, the complexity and variability of resource considerations means that it may also be a very blunt one.
CHAPTER C.2 EXPANSION AND FLEXIBILITY: INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES FOR PART-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION

C.2.1 The status of institutional policies

In our interviews we asked about each institution’s current policy for part-time HE, whether this had changed in the last few years and, if so, the reasons for the changes. The responses reflected the increasing mission-consciousness of both HEIs and FECs. When discussing their institutions’ policies for part-time HE, nearly all interviewees related it to their perceptions of the institutional mission, whether or not this was articulated in a mission statement. According to our interviewees, policy on part-time HE was made - or at least co-ordinated - at the top level of most institutions, rather than being dependent on initiatives at departmental or divisional level. This may of course reflect the perspective of our interviewees, who were chosen to represent institutional-level policy-making.

In several institutions, ‘policy’ for part-time HE was passive or implicit. In HEIs where part-time provision was currently low and there were no plans to expand it, it was not part of the explicit policy agenda. As one interviewee put it, “the fact that there isn’t a demand means we don’t leave first base” in considering part-time provision; “we don’t have a unit which plans for part-time education”. However the same institution had been considering distance learning in another context, and our interviewee recognised that “if we were really struggling we would have to re-think the whole thing”. Conversely, part-time HE was so central to the current mission and practice of some other institutions that no formal policy - in the usual sense which connotes an intended change in practice - was felt to be necessary. Even where institutions were embarking on a considered course of expansion, their interviewees found it hard to define the status of the decisions that led to it. Asked whether his institution (a pre-1992 university) had a policy for part-time provision, one interviewee replied “Yes, I think so. If not, we’re only just short of it; it depends how you interpret committee minutes.”

Even when institutions pursued active policies which affected part-time provision, these were not necessarily framed in terms of part-time HE as such. For example, many FECs had a policy to increase advanced-level provision. When full-time advanced provision was ‘capped’ colleges sought to expand part-time provision instead, but this was not how the policy had originally been defined. Several HEIs had active policies for part-time postgraduate courses or CE; these policies might spill over into undergraduate provision, the subject of our research, but they were less clearly articulated for this level. Nearly all the institutions we visited framed their policies in terms of overarching concepts such as flexibility and responsiveness. Part-time study was an aspect of this but not necessarily one for which specific policy was made.

In discussing institutional policies for part-time HE, we must therefore take account of the extent to which these policies were implicit, or were not explicitly framed in relation to part-time HE. Allowing for this we can identify two prevailing thrusts of policy: a quantitative thrust which focused on expansion, and a qualitative thrust which focused on flexibility. We discuss these below.
C.2.2 Expansion: policies for the level of part-time higher education provision

All the FECs we visited aimed to expand their provision of part-time HE. These included two small colleges with no formal policy, but de facto expansion plans; and two or three colleges which planned to expand provision across the board, not specifically in relation to part-time HE. We did not visit colleges with little or no advanced provision, but among colleges currently offering some part-time HE, most planned to increase this offer; some by increasing the range of part-time HNCs and developing post-HNC provision, for example professional development awards; others by focusing their expansion plans on HNDs; and in some of the largest colleges by introducing or expanding degree-level provision.

All post-1992 universities planned substantial expansion in part-time HE provision. Those whose provision was already substantial aimed to increase it, and those with less developed provision planned large increases. As we have seen in Part B, post-1992 universities account for a large proportion of part-time degree students, and for most of the part-time HE located in HEIs. If the policy intentions revealed in our interviews are fulfilled, they are likely to retain and even increase this market share.

Among the pre-1992 universities the picture is more mixed. One aimed to expand provision which was already well developed; three had policies to expand, more or less gradually, from lower starting points; and the other four reported no formal policy. Usually this meant that there were no plans to expand provision, which was currently low, although in two cases policy reviews were imminent.

Current part-time provision by the non-university HEIs was low, and only one had plans to expand it. Another had recently reversed expansion plans. Two others reported policies for enhancing individualised provision and access respectively, and this might involve an increase in part-time opportunities, but any increase would be small in the near future.

Taken together, if the policy goals reported in our interviews are realised, the provision of part-time HE in Scotland will expand substantially in the next few years. Much of the expansion will occur among institutions which are already relatively large providers, especially the post-1992 universities. The FE sector will increase its aggregate share of part-time HE provision, but our sample of FECs does not easily allow us to make statements about differences within the FE sector.

C.2.3 Flexibility: policies for the organisation of part-time higher education provision

Several institutions had policies, not for part-time HE as such, but for a more flexible pattern of provision in which part-time study was likely to form a significant component. Notions of flexibility permeated our interviews. As we discussed in Part A, there are several dimensions to the concept of flexibility and our interviewees used the term in several different senses. It was variously linked with other concepts and policy objectives such as openness, access, responsiveness and diversity. While there was considerable variation in the concept of flexibility across institutions within each sector, we perceived the largest difference to lie between universities and FECs.

Most universities which wanted to expand part-time provision pursued a model of flexible integration. This might include: modularisation and credit-rating of courses; a single timetable
for full- and part-time students, usually based on an extension of the ‘normal’ day; formal access of all students to all units, subject to specific entry requirements; a CATs or Combined Studies programme; the ‘blocking’ of the timetable to facilitate part-time study of the most popular programmes; duplication of particular courses or units in the evenings and on Saturdays; making key units available to full- and part-time students through flexible learning; longer opening hours for facilities; and special support (and, sometimes, admission) arrangements for part-time students. The flexible integration strategy aimed to provide what one interviewee termed a ‘seamless environment’ of full- and part-time study, and to place the main emphasis on making existing provision accessible to all students, on as ‘part-time-friendly’ a basis as possible.

No university’s policy represented a pure type of the flexible integration model; conversely, many elements of the model were also implied in the policies pursued by FECs. However, we perceived that, at least as a matter of emphasis, the colleges’ policies more closely approximated a model of flexible differentiation. This model places more emphasis on the diversity of provision and the need to respond to the diverse needs of the market. Thus FECs were more likely to see the future of part-time HE provision in terms of customised programmes for specific employers, delivery in the workplace, and other off-campus delivery.

While we would stress that the difference between flexible integration and flexible differentiation is a matter of emphasis and degree, we believe that two general factors explain this difference between the sectors. The first is the stronger imperative for FECs to be responsive to their markets: flexible differentiation is a demand-driven policy, whereas flexible integration is at least partly concerned with rationalising supply. The second factor is the different nature of the sectors’ markets: FE, with its tradition of day-release and employer-sponsored courses, and with HNCs rather than degrees accounting for most of its provision, has a more segmented market which is more dependent on particular employers.

**C.2.4 Factors influencing policy**

Interviewees’ reasons for institutional policies, and in particular for recent policy changes, referred to three sets of factors: those specific to the institution; government policy and funding; and demand.

*Institution-specific factors*

*Mission*

Several institutions, especially those which planned to expand their part-time HE provision, gave ‘mission-related’ reasons for their policies. These generally referred to the institution’s commitment to access, openness or responsiveness, to its vocational or community orientation, or to the absence of a strong research orientation. These reasons tended to be similar across institutions, as far as our semi-structured interview data allow us to judge, with two main exceptions. First, the non-university HEIs were more likely to refer to student-centred or individualist reasons for increasing flexibility, although most had little scope for increasing part-time provision in practice. Second, the post-1992 universities were much more likely than other institutions to give mission-oriented reasons for their policies. All five interviewees in post-1992 universities gave such reasons, compared with a minority within each other category of institution. We can only speculate whether this reflects a real difference in policy-making, or whether leaders of the post-1992 universities were simply more self-conscious about the role and mission of their institutions following their recent change in status. If it is a real difference, this suggests that the post-1992 universities are more committed to their role as providers of part-time HE than other institutions and, perhaps, more confident about its expediency.
Ability and need to expand

Nearly all the institutions in our study wished to expand student numbers. This goal underpinned many of the other policy considerations discussed in this chapter, but it was rarely made explicit in the interview: it is part of the taken-for-granted reality of institutional policy. It was only made explicit by institutions whose circumstances put them at the two extremes of the spectrum. At one extreme some post-1992 universities felt that expansion was an organisational imperative as they were currently too small to be viable. At the other extreme several non-university HEIs were unable to expand, either because of resource constraints (for example, the Art Colleges) or because student numbers within their specialist fields were limited (for example, initial teacher education). If full-time student demand already exceeded this constrained supply, institutions saw little point in introducing or increasing part-time provision.

Critical mass: the scale of existing provision

In some HEIs there was little current part-time provision and its expansion would represent a major qualitative change; in others part-time provision was already substantial and further expansion would primarily involve a quantitative change. The former required some additional factor - such as development funding, or very committed institutional leadership - to get part-time provision off the ground. Some non-university HEIs were cutting out their existing part-time provision because it was too small to be viable.

Changes in institutional structure and control

In some HEIs and FECs the arrival of a new Principal had been an important catalyst. In addition to such personal factors, several colleges had recently restructured, typically creating a smaller number of divisions which more closely matched the changed labour market and the demand for FE courses; this was also seen as a catalyst for policy change. Interviewees in several FECs said that the colleges’ incorporation in 1993 had stimulated change. It had enabled them to develop new provision more rapidly, and it had removed the constraints of education authority policies which sought to rationalise provision across local institutions. It had also made colleges more customer-conscious and more responsive. However some interviewees pointed out that incorporation merely reinforced changes which were already under way, and our statistical analyses in Part B show that advanced-level participation in FECs took off before incorporation.

Modularisation, credit-rating and semesterisation

Modularisation and credit transfer had, for several years, been part of the taken-for-granted world of FECs. Most HEIs had either introduced, or were currently planning, modular course structures, typically as part of a broader strategy for flexibility. All HEIs are members of the SCOTCAT scheme, although in some cases this had little impact on practices within the institution. Several HEIs had also introduced semesters.

The three processes - modularisation, credit-rating (and accumulation) and semesterisation - tended to be closely linked in the policies of the institutions that we studied. However, they were not always linked in the same way, nor were the terms used consistently by our respondents. For example, some used the term ‘unit’ rather than ‘module’, to connote the continued integrity of the course or programme and/or the variable size of units. This makes it difficult to generalise about the impact of modularisation, or of related processes, on part-time provision. Nevertheless our data make it clear that while modularisation, credit-rating and semesterisation do not necessarily result in an expansion of part-time provision, they may all have a powerful catalytic or facilitating effect. This effect may be understood in terms of their contribution to the model of
flexible integration which underpinned most institutions’ expansion plans. Semesterisation adds a further dimension to this model, by providing greater flexibility in the pace of study (especially where a third semester is provided), by allowing two or three entry points during the year, and by opening up a new mode of part-time study in which semesters of full-time study alternate with semesters back on the job, or elsewhere. They thus reduced the ‘threshold cost’ of offering part-time provision in institutions where it was currently small or negligible; and even in the pre-1992 universities where part-time provision was negligible it was acknowledged that modularisation might be a catalyst for further change. Conversely, going a little beyond our data, we would speculate that it is increasingly difficult for an institution to offer part-time HE except on the basis of a modular course structure, probably credit-rated, and possibly semesterised.

Technology/distance learning

A very few institutions had already invested fairly heavily, and aimed to build on this in developing policies for flexible and/or part-time provision.

Other factors

In the previous chapter we analysed the costs and benefits of part-time HE as perceived by our respondents. Some of these were used to explain current institutional policies: for example, the difficulties of providing appropriate work experience for some vocational courses was a reason for not developing part-time provision.

Government policy and funding

The second set of factors influencing policy arose from the mechanisms and policies for funding HE.

Funding arrangements

The broad context of funding and control had a pronounced influence on the way in which institutions went about making policy. Several interviewees in FECs said that incorporation had made colleges more market- and customer-oriented; this contributed indirectly to policies for expanding part-time provision. (However colleges’ missions and policies varied widely with respect to ‘non-market’ goals such as support for the community and the alleviation of disadvantage.) An interviewee in a College of Education described the change in thinking which followed the move to SHEFC funding. Under the old (Scottish Office Education Department-funded) system the college did ‘good works’ such as in-service training, curriculum development and work for the Examination Board:

“Each year you wrote and said what you did and they said ‘good on you, and here’s the money for next year’. Under the regime of the SHEFC we’re forced by all kinds of things... because we’re in a different regime, because money is tight, we are working on formula funding... and so on. That has triggered a different kind of thinking in the College and a lot of the recent expansion ideas have been fuelled from the kind of imperatives that are coming from the Funding Council.”

None of our interviewees in the post-1992 universities cited the move to university status as a major factor behind their expansion of part-time provision - somewhat surprisingly, in view of their leading role in the planned expansion.

Funding policies and formulae
For most FECs which planned to expand part-time HE provision, the single most important reason was that funding policies - the ‘capping’ policy announced in 1994 - restricted the opportunity to expand full-time HE. Usually our interviewees implied that otherwise they would have preferred to expand full-time provision, or at least offer a different mix of full-time and part-time. Consolidation policies had had a similar impact on HEIs, although this was mentioned less consistently by our interviewees in these institutions. In both sectors interviewees commented on the change in relative funding formulae for full-time and part-time courses, in favour of the latter, although there was disagreement as to whether the existing differential adequately allowed for the differences in the costs of provision.

‘Mainstreaming’ of continuing education funding

The pre-1992 universities which currently receive SHEFC funding for continuing personal education (liberal adult education) face the prospect that this funding will soon be integrated into funding for mainstream provision, and tied to the accreditation of provision. Our interviewees in some of the pre-1992 universities felt that the new policy was not yet clear enough for a specific policy to emerge in response. Potentially it could result in large numbers of additional students coming to be counted as part-time undergraduate students, and in students using credits gained in CE to count towards mainstream qualifications. However even those institutions which anticipated the new funding regime most proactively were very uncertain as to whether this would lead to the full integration of CE provision with mainstream undergraduate provision, and this uncertainty remains at the time of writing.

Development support

Specific development funding, such as the FITLS, had often played a critical role in getting part-time HE off the ground, especially in the pre-1992 universities.

Perceived direction of policy

Funding arrangements were a major influence on institutions’ policies for part-time HE. Nevertheless institutions responded, not only to the incentives and constraints implied in current funding formulae, but also to the government policy intentions that were perceived to lie behind them. The planning process encouraged this, especially in the FE sector which receives its funding directly from the Scottish Office without an intermediary Funding Council. As one interviewee in an FEC noted, “it would be foolish not to take cognisance of the way that policies are being directed”. Like others in the sector, he perceived a policy thrust favouring the part-time route for colleges’ advanced provision. This did not always lead to the same outcome, however. Another FEC manager commented:

“To some extent... [certain colleges] have become in effect University Colleges, which wasn’t well received by the Scottish Office, so our route has been somewhat different.”

The post-1992 universities also perceived strong policy encouragement for the expansion of part-time education. Nevertheless the signals conveyed by the government and SHEFC were not always clear:

“Are we [HEIs] competing with one another or are we collaborating with one another?... No one has got the answer to that right because of the conflicting signals that we get.”

Demand
The final set of factors influencing policy was the perceived demand from students or other ‘customers’. Institutions responded to the perceived trend in demand for their full-time or non-advanced provision, on the one hand, and for part-time HE on the other. Demand for part-time courses also had a strong local dimension.

Demand for other provision within the institution

Several universities were encouraged to expand part-time provision by fears of a decline in the demand for full-time courses. Some reported a fall-off after the recent period of rising applications. While some universities felt more vulnerable than others, even those where student demand remained buoyant on average voiced concerns about particular subjects and departments. Two factors lay behind the anxieties about student demand: the declining flow of school leavers due to demographic trends, and the rising financial cost of full-time study, which it was felt would deter participation. However this was not an area where predictions were made with certainty. One of the largest providers of part-time HE had expanded its provision in the early 1990s because it anticipated a decline in full-time demand following the demographic downturn. This decline had not materialised, with resulting pressure on resources.

Institutions in both FE and HE sectors were aware of pressures from full-time students who needed to work long hours to finance themselves. Many had responded by modifying the timetable, for example by concentrating classes in the three middle days of each week, allowing the other days free for employment. Full-time provision was thus being made more ‘flexible’, and some respondents commented on how this was weakening the boundary between full- and part-time study. However funding arrangements, both for institutions and for students, still acted to maintain this boundary, although some respondents perceived signs of flexibility. One respondent in an FEC felt that the Student Awards Agency for Scotland showed flexibility in the definition of full-time study, allowing deviations from normal full-time hours for students with special needs; he suggested that the Agency might be equally disposed to look favourably on other students seeking flexibility.

Demand for part-time higher education

Most respondents in FE reported a recent decline in employer demand for day-release provision, which was still the largest type of part-time provision for most colleges. Some colleges hoped for a recovery, but there was a general feeling that past levels of demand would not return. There were also more qualitative changes, described by one respondent (whose courses served an industry previously noted for its conservatism) as a ‘culture change’ among employers. They were increasingly demanding programmes tailored to their particular requirements, sometimes preferring individual HN units rather than complete programmes. There was a trend towards on-site delivery. There was also a shift from the employer towards the individual student as the customer for FE provision. For example day-release was sometimes moving towards a half-day-plus-evening pattern, with students matching their employer’s contribution with their own time; or students might be expected to start a course in the evening and be permitted release from work once they have demonstrated an initial commitment.

These changes help to explain the move towards flexibility in HE provision, but they do not in themselves suggest that there will be a market for the significant expansion of part-time provision that both FECs and HEIs are planning. Our respondents offered three main reasons for anticipating increased demand. First, some believed that there were untapped areas of demand - including a demand for the more ‘flexible’ forms of provision described above. Second, some perceived an upgrading in employers’ demands; for example, one reported that the market for National Certificates had ‘collapsed’ and employers now expected HN qualifications. This view was expressed most often in respect of certain subject areas (for example, business and
administration) and relatively buoyant labour markets. Third, several respondents anticipated a future society characterised by frequent job change and lifelong learning, in which people would move in and out of HE over the life cycle.

Local dimension to demand

Cross-cutting these issues was the local dimension. Some HEIs felt their local populations were too small to sustain a demand for part-time courses; if they offered part-time provision it tended to be provided either by distance learning or as short residential courses. All institutions took account of the size of their local catchment and the existing part-time provision offered by other local institutions. However, except for the various forms of FE-HE links, we found little evidence of active collaboration among institutions to share markets or avoid duplication.

C.2.5 Institutional and sectoral differences in policy influences

Do the policies described above indicate a trend towards institutional differentiation or convergence in Scottish HE? Our evidence is mixed. On the one hand, most institutions are developing or expanding part-time HE provision; and the few institutions that are not doing so are taking the idea more seriously than in the past. In this respect there appears to be convergence. On the other hand, institutions vary in their rate of expansion and in their commitment to expansion. The trends revealed by our study suggest that the post-1992 universities may actually increase their already substantial share of part-time first degree provision. Within the FE sector, the expansion of part-time advanced courses in some FECs may increase the gap between these colleges and others which offer little or no advanced provision.

Within the HE sector, institutions whose current part-time provision was small found it difficult to generate the critical mass of resources and infrastructure required to expand it cost-effectively. Some non-university HEIs had withdrawn part-time provision precisely for this reason. This supply-side inertia may encourage continued diversity in the provision of part-time opportunities. However institutions which have introduced credit-rating, modularisation and semesterisation have found that the threshold cost of introducing significant part-time provision is significantly reduced. As these aspects of flexibility are introduced to more HEIs, and in progressively stronger forms, perhaps we may see future institutional convergence, with part-time provision playing a larger part in the policies of all or most institutions.

However convergence in this sense - towards a position where most institutions offer part-time opportunities - may not entail institutional convergence in any broader sense. There continue to be strong functional differences between FECs and HEIs, reflected in the different funding regimes and policy environments, in the different levels of courses offered (with the emphasis on HNC/HND and degree provision respectively) and to some extent in the different modes of provision - what we have referred to as flexible differentiation and flexible integration. And among HEIs, part-time opportunities can be developed in pursuit of very different missions. The provision of part-time HE may cut across other dimensions of institutional differentiation. That is, institutions pursuing very different missions may still recognise a need to organise some of their provision on a part-time basis. Indeed there may even be a contrary relationship: the greater the institutional diversity, the greater the need for all (or most) institutions to offer part-time provision, given that there is a need for part-time opportunities within most types of provision.

C.2.6 Summary
• Several institutions had no explicit policy for part-time undergraduate-level HE. Policy was either implicit or to be inferred from other policies, for example for flexible provision.

• It was the policy of most institutions to increase part-time HE provision. If realised, these policies would result in a significant expansion of part-time HE in the next few years. Much of the expansion would occur among institutions which are already relatively large providers, especially the post-1992 universities. FECs would increase their share of part-time HE provision. This assumes that institutions’ current policies will be realised: this is most likely to be the case with the post-1992 universities, whose commitment to expansion appears mostly deeply rooted.

• Most institutions had a policy to increase the flexibility of their provision, although they interpreted flexibility in different ways. Many universities pursued a model of flexible integration, in which all provision would be accessible to full- and part-time students in a way that did not exclude or disadvantage part-timers. Many colleges pursued a model of flexible differentiation, which put more emphasis on dedicated and customised provision and responsiveness to diverse demands.

• Underlying most institutions’ policies for part-time HE was the perceived desire or need to expand total provision. Policies for expanding part-time provision often varied inversely with the perceived prospects for full-time HE. The consolidation or capping of full-time provision had had a major influence.

• Funding regimes, and the policies which lay behind them, were a powerful influence on institutions’ policies.

• Policies were influenced by the perceived opportunities, and also the constraints, of the market. Most institutions anticipated increased demand, although they recognised that many traditional sources of demand, including employers’ demand for day-release provision, were unlikely to increase.

• The costs and benefits of increasing part-time provision varied across institutions, and depended among other things on the scale of existing provision. Modularisation, credit-rating and semesterisation reduced the threshold costs of introducing part-time provision or expanding it from a small base.
C.2.7 Emerging issues

*Do institutions matter?* Our research was based on the importance of institutional policies for the future provision of part-time HE. Yet our interviewees almost unanimously reported that institutional policies were substantially driven by funding and by markets. Many of them gave voice to a sense of institutional powerlessness. A university Vice-Principal said “It’s hard to be in control; we’ve managed so far but it may get harder in the future”. There was little room to manoeuvre with a declining unit of resource; it was hard to make long-term policy when the market was uncertain and the funding regime liable to change. A respondent in an FEC pointed out that “policy and implementing that policy are not the same thing”: the college may put together a three-year development plan but the funding goalposts might change during that period and the college would have to change tack very quickly. Such comments call into question the concept of institutional autonomy, and also the notion of mission-driven change. At best, institutional policies and missions may be little more than rationalisations of positions which institutions are forced to adopt by external pressures. In this view the shift from ‘planning inputs’ to ‘auditing outcomes’ (Scott 1995) does not represent a diminution of government control, but simply a changed mode of control.

*How well entrenched are institutional policies?* This raises a further issue. If institutions are not really in control, or at least stand ready to change tack if the winds should change, then how much importance should we attach to their current policy statements? In particular, how much importance should we attach to the trends - the expansion and flexibilisation of part-time HE - which these policies promised to bring about?

The interviews gave us grounds for scepticism. The policies that were described to us were recent, and many institutions had already changed their policies; some had already restrained their expansion plans in response to changing perceptions of demand, or to changes in funding and resource imperatives. Some institutions’ commitment to part-time HE may not have been very strong; several had chosen to expand part-time HE in response to the capping or consolidation of full-time provision. If these policies were removed, the implication is that part-time provision might again take lower priority. A further implication is that the differentiation of provision across institutions will be greater than indicated in our interviews, since policies for part-time expansion seemed much better entrenched in some institutions than in others.

A further cause for scepticism arises from the contrast between the careful market research which informed the development of some courses, and the much more speculative extrapolations of social and economic trends which informed longer-term strategy. Many respondents were uncertain about the longer-term prospects; this uncertainty arose variously from economic trends, especially in depressed local labour markets, from employers’ growing reluctance to sponsor part-time students, and from a fear that part-time provision may be drawing from a finite pool of potential students which would eventually be drained.

The policies for flexibility espoused by most institutions often assumed a progressive erosion of the boundaries between full- and part-time study. Here again, a sceptic might question whether this erosion was imminent, or at least whether it might be progressing in geological rather than educational time. The demand for flexibility will be constrained by continuing sources of rigidity arising from student funding regulations, from institutional funding procedures, and from the nature of employer demand (in particular the importance of traditional day-release, and the growth of on-site provision, which tend to require dedicated part-time provision).

Our scepticism may be unjustified. Changes in these factors could accelerate the erosion or even cause the boundaries to collapse together. Our interviews revealed several instances where institutions, once they had developed part-time provision, acquired a strong commitment to its...
continuation; where student demand for part-time HE continued to outstrip the supply of full-time provision; and where a flexible pattern of provision was the basis for sustained expansion. There may be a wider logic favouring flexibility and expansion in part-time HE: but if so this logic rests upon something stronger than institutional missions.
PART D  THE CASE STUDIES

CHAPTER D.1  METHODOLOGY

D.1.1  Introduction

In this chapter we describe the methodology used in undertaking the case study research. The next four chapters consider specific aspects of the findings. In chapter D.2 we look at the delivery and organisation of part-time HE in the case study institutions. In chapter D.3 we compare and contrast student profiles. In chapter D.4 we discuss the role of employers. Finally, in chapter D.5 we consider the quality of the educational experience for part-time students and weigh up the advantages and disadvantages for them of part-time study.

We decided that the case study institutions should comprise one pre-1992 university, one post-1992 university, a large FEC and a small FEC. In order for a case study to be feasible, it was necessary to choose institutions which had a significant number of part-time students and offered a variety of part-time courses or programmes at advanced or first degree level. However, one of the institutions selected (the small FEC) had less tradition of advanced-level provision than the others. In one respect the selection process was simpler in the HE sector, as several HEIs could be disregarded for having little in the way of part-time provision other than at postgraduate level or in CE or extra-mural departments. Other selection criteria included local demographic factors (whether the institution was located in an urban or rural setting and the size of its catchment area), modes of attendance (evening only, day-release, or mixed mode) and modes of provision (dedicated part-time classes or integration with full-time classes).

Taking all these things into consideration, an initial selection of four institutions was made. We sent letters to their Principals, inviting them to participate in this phase of the research, and some were later visited by members of the project team to discuss in more detail what the case studies would entail. Permission was subsequently given by each Principal, enabling the case study phase of the research, involving two complementary strands of research, to commence. In order to honour the project team’s assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, it is necessary to avoid explicitly naming institutions, and henceforward we will refer to them as college A - small FEC, college B - large FEC, university C - post-1992 university, and university D - pre-1992 university. Table D.1.1 summarises the research undertaken in each case study institution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Research components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College A</td>
<td>questionnaires; interviews: 6 staff, 12 student, 4 employer, 2 family, 2 group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College B</td>
<td>questionnaires; interviews: 7 staff, 10 student, 4 employer, 2 group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>questionnaires; interviews: 4 staff, 11 student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>questionnaires; interviews: 8 staff, 10 student, 2 group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>questionnaires</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D.1.2   The student survey

The first research strand was a student survey. This was based on a self-completion questionnaire, designed by the project team and sent during March 1996 to a sample of 250 part-time students who were ideally in at least their second year of study in three of the four institutions, and all part-time students in the other institution, which had fewer than 250 part-time students. In addition, 250 questionnaires were sent to a sample of OU students based in the Scottish region in order to compare and contrast their experiences.

Recognising that the case study institutions had the majority of their part-time students concentrated in perhaps only one or two broad subject areas, the samples in each institution were derived by forcing an allocation to each subject area based on the proportion of all its part-time students studying in that area. Within each subject area allocation, the gender balance was roughly proportional to the institution’s student profile. Due to concerns that the institutions had about releasing names and addresses of their students, it was agreed that institutions would send out the questionnaires on our behalf. This meant that the institutions were also responsible for selecting the samples, following criteria and procedures which we had specified. We sent 250 questionnaires and reminder postcards to each institution, where administrative staff derived the samples, generated labels for the questionnaire envelopes and sent the packages out. These arrangements were an appropriate compromise between the interests of the research and the legitimate confidentiality concerns of the institutions, but they represented a loss of control over the research.

The packages sent to students contained an A4 leaflet describing the research, a letter inviting the student to participate in the research, a 16-page questionnaire and a prepaid envelope for returning the completed questionnaire. Some two or three weeks after the questionnaires were despatched, reminder postcards were sent to all students in the samples by administrative staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Rate of return</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College A</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College B</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of responses from each institution is shown in Table D.1.2. The rate of return in college A was considerably lower than in the other institutions. By drawing on observations made during interviews held in college A about the time pressure a number of students were under, it is possible to speculate that many students were unwilling to expend the time and effort required to complete the 16-page questionnaire methodically.

270 separate variables were coded; a substantial number of them related to multi-option questions requiring in some cases one from a range of options to be ticked, and in other cases all options that applied to be ticked. The volume of data made it necessary to recode some data - a good example being students’ ages - into bands which were more easily susceptible to analysis.
Table D.1.3
Students’ level of study and subject, by sector (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of study</th>
<th>Colleges</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>OU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HNC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HND</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Colleges</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>OU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths/Science</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art &amp; Design</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/Law</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample n (=100%) 243 145 168

D.1.3 In-depth interviews

The second strand of the case study research involved in-depth interviews with staff, students and, where possible, employers and families of students. In addition, we sought group discussions with students from each course or programme, focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of part-time study. The bulk of the interviewing was conducted in college A, college B and university D between April and June 1996, with interviews in university C taking place between June and August 1996.

We decided to obtain a wide spectrum of courses or programmes. An initial decision had to be taken as to what should constitute a ‘course’. The first criterion was that it should be available throughout the academic year; over two semesters or three terms or sessions. Secondly, for comparative purposes we included a spread of subjects, modes of attendance and qualifications aimed for. Thirdly, other contrasts had a bearing on the selection of courses; for example male or female subject areas, newness or longevity of courses, and varying relationships with employers and local industry. Within these parameters we had room for considerable variation.

We made a selection after scrutinising profiles of part-time student numbers broken down by subject area which had been provided by each institution on request. We wrote to the eight department heads or programme organisers, asking for permission to conduct the research; they were subsequently visited in order to explain the team’s requirements in more detail and to answer any enquiries. In one case the head of department wrote back to advise us that all the relevant staff involved with part-time teaching would be on leave or on sabbatical during the period when the interviews were due to be carried out. Fortunately, a replacement course was found at short notice from within the same broad subject grouping, and ultimately there was only duplication in one broad subject area, though in different sectors.

From the initial approaches to department heads or programme organisers, it was apparent that relevant staff could be put in any of four main categories. Firstly, department heads or their equivalent, who may have had responsibility for or input into institutional or departmental policies on part-time provision and delivery; they may also have taught on part-time courses. Secondly, course leaders or co-ordinators, who normally undertook most of the administrative
duties in relation to the part-time course or programme; most of whom also had some teaching involvement. Thirdly, lecturers or tutors, who were largely responsible for delivery and internal assessment of courses. Finally, part-time staff who were mostly bought in to undertake (often specialised) teaching or tutorial assistance tasks; almost invariably for evening classes.

As with the student survey questionnaires, in order to maintain confidentiality of student records, in most cases student interviewees were recruited by staff who had been previously approached and interviewed by team members. In a few cases we were allowed to address meetings of the class and recruit volunteers. In addition to individual interviews, group discussions were held with students from six out of the eight courses or programmes. All members of the project team were involved with the interview programme; each interviewing singly or in pairs in at least three of the four institutions.

During the student interviews, if it transpired that the student was employed and that their employer was making any contribution towards the student’s fees, we asked for permission to approach their employer to request an interview. Unsurprisingly, recruitment of employers was most successful on courses with strong vocational links, and we interviewed one or two employers in relation to each of the college courses. We were unable to secure employer interviews from any of the university courses, although two of these courses did have clear vocational links. In university D, most of those students who were employer-funded were employees of the university itself, while in university C, the ‘employer’ for one of the programmes tended to be large public-sector organisations, and it was difficult to find an appropriate representative to be interviewed.

If it emerged that the student did not live alone, we also sought permission to interview family or household members. However, recruitment of families was constrained as some student interviewees lived alone, others were unwilling for their families to be approached, and in a few cases the domestic circumstances which had been described during interviews suggested that a family interview would be either intrusive or inappropriate. Additionally, time constraints meant that we interviewed family members in only two cases.

Data obtained from interviews were not coded as such, although to facilitate the analysis responses from the student interviews were summarised, question by question and course by course. To analyse the interview data we defined a thematic grid which identified key themes and topics with each theme. This grid was used to provide an analytical portrait of each institution in turn. The process was iterative: the grid was modified or expanded to accommodate themes arising from each case study to which it was applied. We then placed the four institutional portraits alongside each other, searching both for common themes and for differences across sectors, institutions and courses.

The next four chapters will discuss themes and issues arising from the interview programme in more detail.

D.1.4 Description of the case study institutions and courses

College A

This college was situated in a large urban catchment area, historically specialising in technical and vocational courses. In terms of the number of part-time students, it was the smallest of our four case study institutions. It offered daytime, evening and mixed-mode courses. Components of the courses selected had close links with one large local employer; the other course had employer links with a diverse range of organisations, both large and small.
Table D.1.4
Interviews conducted in College A, by course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HNC Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNC Social Care</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3~</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The group discussion was conducted with infill Automotive Engineering students.
~ includes one telephone interview.

HNC Engineering

This was complex, since the students came from three different courses within the Engineering School: Automotive Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Engineering (Shipbuilding). All were studying for HNCs.

Automotive Engineering students were in class for two and a half days per week, with a fixed timetable, and did the HNC in a year, with most of their fees funded by European Social Fund (ESF) money. It is a new course, crowded, and in fact is far closer to a traditional full-time course, on a number of criteria: the amount of time spent in college, the amount of further studying required, the current employment status of the students and the extent of their work experience; and their attitudes.

The course is delivered all day Monday, all day Tuesday and half day Wednesday. The class contact time adds up to just under 16 hours, presumably deliberately in order to allow students to carry on claiming Income Support. There is no overlap with other courses, but the students have access to all college facilities on the same basis as full-timers. The first year of the course has five full-time students, 6 part-time infill students who are ESF funded, and 11 evening students.

The Shipbuilding course has moved from day-release as the employer has shifted from bearing the cost of an employee being away in company time to the cheaper alternative of paying the fees. This indicates the college’s responsiveness to changes in the company’s timetable, putting the course on on Friday afternoons when they know that the employer’s regular week finishes at Friday lunchtime. The unit system provides a good deal of flexibility, with students able to vary their pace somewhat by doing two units rather than one per week, if they can find enough of their own time - for example, an evening a week as well as the Friday afternoon. There is some scope for credits counting towards different HNCs. HNCs do not articulate automatically into HNDs - for instance, having done an HNC in Engineering in college A does not mean students can go on to complete an HND elsewhere. (On the other hand the HNCs can count towards a degree at a local university.) The employer is not encouraging progression on to degrees.

The Electrical Engineering course conformed most closely to the traditional day-release pattern, with students coming to college for one full day a week. There are increasing links and overlaps between electrical and mechanical engineering programmes, marking a shift towards more generic provision.

From these three strands we interviewed two members of staff, six students, one employer and one family, and held one group discussion.
HNC Social Care

The course lasts two years, scheduled regularly from 5 pm to 8 pm. It has varied in intensity, moving from one evening per week to two, and back to one again. There is no overlap with other courses; the Social Care student group is virtually isolated from the rest of the student body, and their access to facilities is severely limited. This is felt acutely in respect of library facilities, where they find that the full-time students almost monopolise the books, leading to a semi-private but minimal book stock for the class operated on an informal and not very successful basis; and in respect of catering facilities. With the college cafeteria closed by the time they arrive, the installation of a microwave for them to make their own drinks was seen as a minimal but significant step. One student said there is no atmosphere in the college because no-one is there in the evening, although it is unclear how far this is actually the case.

Most students have a few ‘O’ grades only, but all have several years’ experience of working, in a variety of social care settings. There is no structured progression; this may be significant in the light of employer comments about the lack of articulation between HNC and social work qualifications. Some students are thinking of studying further, but for the most part without clear information on available opportunities. There are major questions about the professional/market currency of this HNC.

There seems to be no choice of units, insofar as all students follow the same set of units. There is a good deal of repetition in the teaching, which reflects the fact that attendance rates are far from perfect. This is a source of frustration to some. Interviews were conducted with four members of staff, six students, three employers and one family. A group discussion was also held.

College B

College B was restructured following incorporation in 1994 when three smaller colleges were amalgamated, making it the largest FE provider in the locality. Subject areas were reorganised into ten sectors, each headed by managers (apparently often former teaching staff who relinquished teaching for these full-time senior administrative posts) and consisting of a number of subject-specific teams. In turn, teams are headed by (usually senior) lecturers who have responsibility for the delivery, assessment and administration of all the courses they provide. Our case study covered two HNC courses out of the 22 HNCs which are currently offered part-time. As with college A, this college offered daytime, evening and mixed-mode courses; neither of the two selected had noticeable gender imbalances. Employer links could perhaps be best described as historical in the case of one, long-standing course; and tenuous but strengthening in the case of the other, newer course.

Table D.1.5
Interviews conducted in College B, by course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HNC Accounting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNC Graphic Design</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HNC Accounting

Accounting, in the Business Studies Sector, was a long-standing course with 213 part-time students in the 1995-1996 intake. As with all SCOTVEC qualifications, students taking HNC
Accounting require at least 12 credits, and 30 credits for the HND. At college B, Accounting students were more likely to progress to professional courses, and required 15 credits for exemptions from the ACCA Foundation Course. The teaching year was divided into three 12-week blocks. In Accounting each credit typically required a weekly three-hour session (a morning, afternoon or evening) in a single block. An HNC would therefore require two years if studied one day per week, or four years if studied one evening per week, with various combinations of evening and daytime study possible. For example, the team leader indicated that a student seeking the 15 credits for a professional exemption might be recommended to attend for one day and one evening in their first year and one day or two evenings in their second year, as they can get six credits studying one day per week throughout the year and three credits studying for one evening per week. Over the period we were interviewing, units worth one, two and three credits were available. There were two core (compulsory) units offered, each worth three credits; and the remaining credits could be made up from six other optional units, all of which also count towards an HND. A one-credit unit would be taught over one block, a two-credit unit would be taught over two blocks, and a three-credit unit would take the whole year. Due to demand, the most popular units are offered in up to three classes on up to two days and/or evenings per week. Separate daytime units were offered for part-time and full-time students, although part-timers could infill onto the full-time units. The HNC courses are periodically revalidated by SCOTVEC - next year’s HNC Accounting will be a revalidated course, and the credit value of units will be changed to one, one and a half, and two credits to allow greater flexibility.

Interviews were conducted with the sector manager, an acting team leader (who was looking after the Accounting course until a new team leader was appointed), an acting course leader, and a tutor - the latter three taught part-time classes. A group discussion was also held with part-time students, and individual interviews were conducted with five part-time students from the course. With the consent of the relevant students, interviews were subsequently arranged and conducted with two employers.

**HNC Graphic Design**

Graphic Design, in the Art & Design Sector, was a smaller course with only 17 enrolments of whom about 11 remained on the course by the end of the year. It was a newer course, having been running for about five or six years, although it had been modernised a year ago, partly to make it more computer-oriented. It was a dedicated day-release course, which students attended one day a week. The course involved a substantial amount of individual learning, with students working on briefs on their own and at their own pace; the unit structure of the course was consequently less apparent to students, some of whom were not sure how many credits had been available to them last year. Students wishing to progress to the HND would need to do so on an infill basis.

Interviews were conducted with the sector manager, an acting team leader (who was covering for a colleague on maternity leave) and a tutor - the latter two taught part-time classes. A group discussion was also held with part-time Graphic Design students, and individual interviews were conducted with five part-time students. With the consent of the relevant students, interviews were subsequently arranged and conducted with two employers.
**University C**

This institution was granted university status in 1992, and is situated in a large urban area. It offers a wide range of semesterised and modularised degree and postgraduate courses within three faculties, although the two programmes selected for case studies were relatively new, and could be described as innovative. One was taught mostly by infilling part-time students into full-time classes and were thus mainly daytime courses; the other was tailored to fit the availability and academic requirements of a particular profession, and its modules were offered mostly in the evening, although a small number were available in the afternoons. This programme attracted a high proportion of female students (in accordance with the high proportion of females within the profession).

**Table D.1.6**

Interviews conducted in University C, by course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Group</th>
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<td>Health Studies</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes one member of staff who had been involved with the establishment of both programmes.

**Combined Studies**

Combined Studies is not a ‘course’ at all, but the packaging of existing courses which allows students to accumulate enough points to qualify for a degree. It was originally on a part-time basis only, but now also allows students to study full-time, in which case they differ from other full-time students only by not being enrolled on a named award. University C has expanded its Part-Time Degree Programme (PTDP) too, so there are now three overlapping categories of students: full-timers doing named awards, part-timers doing named awards, and Combined Studies students, who may be full- or part-time.

A full-time module represents four hours of teaching per week. Most part-time modules condense this into three hours, so a Combined Studies student may be doing three- or four-hour modules, and will usually be doing one or two of these per semester.

Combined Studies students are very clearly infill students; they occupy places on courses where these are available, so that their acceptance into the programme does not guarantee them access to any given set of courses. The Combined Studies administrative staff are now able to identify the most likely patterns of access on the basis of past experience - a combination of (low) demand and the willingness of named degree providers to accommodate Combined Studies’ requests. The institution has in one sense moved very much towards the Combined Studies model, with modularisation and with expansion of part-time provision - a process we have called reverse integration (on the analogy of reverse take-overs), with the smaller agent drawing in the larger. But there is not a sense of a change in the balance of power: ‘infill’ still connotes supplication.

Up until now Combined Studies has been institution-wide, in the sense that the students’ individual packages are made up of courses drawn from across the whole university, constrained or shaped only by guidance as to what makes up a coherent package. It looks now as if this will be broken down into three sets of Faculty-based Combined Studies, in Business Studies, Health
Studies, and Science and Technology, presumably with no inter-faculty packages. This blurs the distinction between named awards and Combined Studies. It poses the question of whether the move is curriculum-driven because of fears of incoherence, or organisation/budget-driven to preserve managerial tidiness.

In 1994-1995 there were 73 Combined Studies students; in 1995-1996, there were 61. The decline is mainly due to the efforts made by the Combined Studies staff to channel applicants where possible directly into named awards, and because the system as a whole (nationally and institutionally) has become more flexible. In a sense, Combined Studies could be said to succeed if it disappears as a discrete entity. We interviewed three Combined Studies administrative staff (including one who had been involved with the establishment of the programme) and six students.

**Health Studies**

Health Studies is a very complex set of awards and courses, with 700 students on the BSc programme overall. Not all of those are part-time, but it is not so much the numbers of students which makes it complex as the number of awards and the permutations available. Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing (DPSN) students are all qualified nurses, and therefore enter with 120 points at Level One and 80 points at Level Two, at a minimum. The DPSN gives them another 40 points to complete their Level Two, and 80 points at Level Three, leaving them needing only another 40 points to get a degree. Most of the students (including all our interviewees) go on to take the BSc by doing further Level Three modules (and some go on to Level Four, Honours). A major initial task for the programme organiser is to draw up individual profiles for each student.

The DPSN has always been part-time. In principle it is day-release, the ‘day’ being 9 am to 4 pm. But this seven-hour day does not fit with the four-hour module structure. Each module comprises 48 contact hours; with an additional 127 ‘student effort’ hours, the module totals 175 hours - making the course cost exactly £1 per hour. Three modules per year is the standard part-time load, so students do two modules in one semester and one in the other, which means that they have respectively a long ‘day’ and a rather short one. We interviewed the programme organiser, who also does some teaching; a semi-retired administrator who had been responsible for setting up the Health Studies programme; and five students.

**University D**

Our fourth case study institution was one of the smaller pre-1992 universities, from which we selected two General degree courses from the PTDP. We looked in particular at the Evening Programme (EP), the largest component of the university’s part-time undergraduate provision, which consists at present of 16 subjects mostly from arts and social sciences. The course structure is semesterised and modularised. The Part-Time Degree Office (PTDO) arranges (through the departments) the provision of EP and Summer Academic Programme (SAP) courses, and is responsible for part-time admissions and for providing advice and information to part-time students. Departments which provide EP courses are funded one member of staff (or equivalent), typically to act as course co-ordinator and to provide much of the tuition, although the deployment of staffing resources varies across departments. Neither course had noticeable gender imbalances; both courses were variants of existing daytime courses for full-time students. There were few discernible employer links, and advertising of the EP was directed towards individuals.
Table D.1.7
Interviews conducted in University D, by course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Group</th>
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<tr>
<td>Business Studies</td>
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<td>PTDO</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Business Studies

Under current regulations, students studying for a general degree must take 16 units and cover at least three subjects; between six and eight units must be in the main subject, and at least four in a second subject. Business Studies is one of 13 subjects which offer the six credits required for the main subject of the General degree (typically in a sequence of three non-advanced and three advanced courses). Each unit typically involves three hours of class time, on one evening per week, across the 12 teaching weeks of a 15-week semester. (The SAP involves two evenings per week over six teaching weeks.) A student taking one course per semester (excluding those offered in the SAP) will thus take eight years to complete their degree. Currently, two subjects offer Honours courses, which require an additional six units on top of the 16; Business Studies does not, although this is an issue under consideration.

Business Studies units are provided jointly by two departments, Management & Organisation and Marketing, each of which have a course co-ordinator. There were about 50 students taking the non-advanced unit we studied. We interviewed an administrative officer from the PTDO, one of the heads of department (who also taught on the EP), both course co-ordinators, and five part-time students. We also held a group discussion with part-time students.

English Studies

English Studies had been one of the first departments to contribute to the EP, but withdrew, and subsequently re-entered the EP in 1994; its current crop of students were consequently all in the first half of their courses. Accordingly, no students in English Studies are far enough advanced for Honours units to be made available, although it is uncertain whether English Studies will go on to offer Honours units. As with Business Studies, each unit typically involves three hours of class time, on one evening per week, over the teaching weeks of a semester. There were 12 students on the advanced unit we studied.

We interviewed the head of department (who also taught on the EP), the organiser of the advanced unit, two other tutors (one from the advanced unit), and five students. We also held a group discussion with part-time students taking the advanced unit.

D.1.5 Summary

- The case study institutions comprised one pre-1992 university, one post-1992 university, a large FEC and a small FEC.

- There were two complementary strands of research to the case studies: a survey, based on self-completion questionnaires sent to up to 250 part-time students in each institution and
the OU; and in-depth interviews with a total of 25 members of staff, 43 individual students, six groups of students, eight employers and two family members.
CHAPTER D.2 THE ORGANISATION OF PART-TIME PROVISION

D.2.1 Institutional structure, strategy and change

Three out of the four case study institutions (A, B and C) had restructured in the early nineties. This restructuring had three main benefits for the institutions concerned. First, it allowed the institutions to consolidate their positions competitively as providers in their local area; for example, college B and university C amalgamated with their nearest local competitors. In the case of college B, considerable economies of scale were achieved and staffing costs were cut. Secondly, provision was restructured in such a way as to make it more responsive to the local labour market. In the case of college A, for example, the organisation of the college into five divisions that served the needs of heavy industry in the locality no longer made sense. The college replaced these with nine schools and re-oriented its provision towards the needs of the growing service sector. The move towards greater HN provision in colleges A and B was at least partly explained as a response to the need for higher qualifications in the labour market.

Thirdly, provision was restructured in order to maximise flexibility. Flexibility has a number of dimensions and was linked by interviewees with issues such as openness, access, responsiveness and diversity. All three institutions modularised their provision, making it, at least technically, possible for students to study part-time across all courses. College B went further and arranged daytime courses that were not specifically dedicated part-time provision in half-day teaching blocks in order that students, whether full-time or part-time, might minimise attendance if necessary. In this way they could be said to have made their full-time provision ‘part-time-friendly’. All three institutions were committed to offer courses in a variety of modes. This was easiest for college B and university C where high numbers meant that several classes on one module might be viable. This would not have been possible without uniformity of course structure and content across modes. University C moved to a more flexible year structure by semesterising. However none of these three offered a summer semester or term.

These elements of institutional structure are typical of a model of delivery that we term flexible integration in Part C above. However, these institutions also exhibited elements of flexible differentiation in their commitment to diversity of provision and responsiveness to local labour market needs. This continued to be the dominant feature of provision in the two colleges. Not surprisingly, then, none of the three were pure examples of either model.

These key elements of restructuring were in line with institutional policy which emphasised the institutional commitment to widening access and the importance of links with local communities, particularly local labour market needs. However, differing emphases were placed on these two elements of institutional policy in each of the case study institutions.

In college A, market research had revealed a local demand for part-time provision. There was an emphasis on the needs of the unemployed, perhaps because the majority of its provision was non-advanced and/or as a legacy of the social justice concerns of the local authority prior to incorporation. Radical restructuring of the local labour market - in particular the decline of the shipbuilding industry - had dried up supplies of students in traditional subject areas and there was a concern to meet the needs of the current labour market where the service and care sectors had become increasingly important.

Low local unemployment meant that college B was more concerned to meet the growing demand for qualifications. The emphasis on flexibility and openness arose out of a
commitment to institutional expansion as much as to access. Therefore there was concern about the capping of full-time places and fluctuations in demand as a result of changes in the local economy. The greater emphasis on part-time provision and the on the need to enhance links with local employers may be seen as a response to these concerns.

In university C an enduring commitment to access throughout the institution was of prime importance. The university was one of the pioneers of SCOTCAT. However, links with employers and a commitment to vocational education were also important factors that led to greater flexibility of delivery.

It is perhaps unwise to focus too much on differences in emphases which may be ephemeral in the context of a changing environment. The stress on one aspect of policy rather than another depended partly on the individual being interviewed. However, the central significance of access and responsiveness to local labour markets cannot be denied.

The fourth institution, university D, had not recently restructured. However, provision had always been modularised and semesterised. While it had always theoretically been possible to study part-time on an infill basis, daytime courses, none of which were dedicated part-time courses, were not designed to minimise the number of times that a student needs to attend. For the most part these were delivered in the traditional way - usually one hour sessions (either a lecture or tutorial). Since there are, typically, three hours per week of class contact per unit, this might involve attendance on three separate days of the week for a single unit. This would be unlikely to appeal to a part-time student, even one without other commitments. Nevertheless, the flexible degree structure made possible the development of an innovative PTDP delivered in the evenings that is equivalent or nearly equivalent to full-time courses in terms of content and assessment but which offers a narrower range of courses than is offered during the day. Unlike the other three institutions, university D had attempted to increase flexibility by offering the SAP where both part-time and full-time students could study semester units intensively across six weeks instead of the usual twelve.

There was no commitment by university D to flexible integration as an ideal model of provision. Indeed, a high value was placed on dedicated services for part-time and, particularly, adult students. Part-time provision was flexibly differentiated although there was evidence of some blurring of the boundary between the two programmes. The significance of this is further explored in the discussion of course structure below.

The development of the part-time programme arose out of a commitment to access and a concern for the needs of adult students. Particularly important was the development and growth of a Division charged with innovation in educational practice and which acts as a ‘single door’ for adult entrants. Funding provided by the FITLS was an important factor in getting the programme off the ground, although it began in advance of this funding.

In conclusion, institutional structure and strategy were important in creating the conditions necessary for the development and expansion of part-time provision. The commitment to increase flexibility of provision throughout the institution was a particularly significant factor in college A, college B and university C. Modularisation and CATs were important elements in this increase in flexibility.
D.2.2 Course structures

Eight courses were studied in depth, one of which (Engineering in college A) divided into a variety of different strands. It is not easy to categorise very diverse courses, neither is it possible to identify a typical model of a part-time course. Also, modularisation and flexible degree structures make it difficult to identify and define ‘courses’. In the following discussion we look at degree-level courses, then HNCs.

Degree Courses

Admissions and delivery

University D came nearest to an example of segregated dedicated part-time provision. There were a number of barriers to integration of part-time students with the bulk of the student population. These included the pattern of daytime delivery based on one-hour sessions, the attitudes of staff, and the traditional research focus of the university; all of which would have impeded the culture change required to make the daytime provision more part-time-friendly. While there was no policy to increase integration in this direction, barriers to integration in the other direction (full-time students participating in the part-time programme) had recently been removed. The addition of the SAP had proved equally attractive to full-time and part-time students and regulations had changed enabling full-time students to study all three units per semester in the evening, although at present part-time students still have priority for places in the evening. There are parallels to be drawn here with the Combined Studies degree at university C in that the EP may have opened up the potential for full-time students to participate in a more flexible manner. This is consistent, in university D, with the EP’s sense of itself as offering something over and above ‘normal’ provision rather than campaigning for a transformation of the institution as a whole - for example, some of the units available in the EP are not available during the day. In addition, the segregated model offered specific benefits, such as dedicated services and guidance for part-time students, a ‘single door’ for adult entrants including continuity of support from access to degree study, and flexibility in admissions procedures. Teaching methods in the two subjects studied appeared more flexible, allowing for greater student participation, and deadlines and attendance requirements were applied less strictly. Nevertheless, the segregated nature of provision at university D did reduce the flexibility of provision for part-time students. Options are restricted, illustrating a less favourable trade-off between choice and cost in a segregated model, since smaller classes justify fewer units and make it harder to provide teaching across all specialisms. Staff resistance is likely to be a greater problem and these factors make Honours particularly problematic. There are only four evening slots per semester and this too restricts choice and flexibility.

Combined Studies students at university C had a similar number of class contact hours per module but the time of day will depend on the options chosen by the student. The flexibility of this programme depended on the availability of places and the willingness of departments to accommodate part-time students. Part-time students’ choices were also constrained by the restrictions of a timetable designed for full-time students. Health Studies has always been part-time and is offered on a day-release basis at Diploma level and, in the case of the degree modules, in the evening.

CATs was important in enabling students to study part-time in university C, particularly in the Health Studies programme, because it reduced the total time required to achieve a degree. Of our 11 interviewees at university C, only one was taking more than four years to complete her degree on a part-time basis. The downside to this is that the combination of modularisation and CATs makes progression from one award to another easier, weakening...
the rationale for sticking to a lower award and increasing the pressure towards credential inflation. This might reduce the currency of hard-won qualifications.

In the case of university C we have an interesting contrast between Combined Studies and Health Studies. While Combined Studies is wholly integrated, it remains marginal although modularisation reduced its marginal status. Options depend on the availability of infill places for full-time as well as part-time, and Combined Studies students felt isolated and not part of the mainstream. The move to faculty-based Combined Studies degrees may however resolve the problems of marginality and the difficulty of negotiating places for students. This underlines the need to investigate critically the apparent flexibility of provision in practice.

Health Studies, on the other hand, is dedicated provision designed specifically for part-time students and this increased the flexibility of the programme in terms of the timing of delivery (modules were repeated during the week and students could opt to attend on different evenings as it suited them) and the choice of subjects available. There is an interesting contrast here with the PTDP at university D. While the numbers of students studying on these programmes in each university were not dissimilar (approximately 600 students in Health Studies), they were spread over a wider range of subjects in university D, and this restricted the options which were available. Size matters, therefore, and a higher number of students increases choice and flexibility.

**Resources and staffing**

All three of these degree programmes had considerable administrative and resource implications. A major task in the Health Studies programme is the drawing up of individual student profiles and study paths by academic staff. A similar exercise is undertaken by the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) in respect of Combined Studies. In addition, as Combined Studies students are infill, course choice is limited by places available and CCE staff have the task of negotiating places with faculties and course leaders. There are parallels here with university D which also has dedicated administrative support for part-time students in the shape of the PTDO, which organises classes, registers students and offers advice and information to part-time students. It is located in a dedicated Division with a wide remit including ‘access’ and innovation in educational practice. Academic staff there offer pre-entry interviews on course advice and learning support to part-time students.

The provision of dedicated information and support services may lead to tension between them and staff who provide the courses part-time students are to study. For example, at university C some course leaders were known to be more sympathetic to requests for places for Combined Studies students than others. Similarly, at university D, tension between the PTDO and departments over ‘ownership’ of part-time students was evident. This raises questions about the nature of intra-institutional relationships in such negotiations, in particular the nature of decision making and the allocation of resources with respect to part-time students.

While staff in university C were fairly used to teaching in a variety of modes, evening teaching had been a new departure for staff in university D in the majority of subjects. There appeared to be a range of attitudes and commitment with a small number of enthusiasts and a large number of non-involved staff. Non-involvement of the majority may have simply been a consequence of the allocation of teaching responsibilities given that the PTDP funds one member of teaching staff per Department. However, there was concern amongst some staff about employment conditions and an unwillingness to divert efforts from research, given time pressures. Such concerns may have influenced the decision by some departments not to participate in the programme. Nevertheless, a majority of the departments in the Arts and
Human Sciences Schools were involved, and this was made possible by the additional resources available in terms of staffing.

The small number of staff involved had a number of consequences: it is difficult to offer higher level and especially Honours courses which require inputs from specialist staff, course co-ordinators may do much of the teaching themselves, and heads of departments feel obliged to teach. There is a lack of ownership of the EP by departments, aggravated by the role of the PTDO as the main point of communication with students. When students are released by departments into the modularised curriculum there are implications for the internal allocation of resources, the co-ordination of provision and for student support and guidance. Therefore, considerable staffing resources were required for the management and administration of the programmes and guidance of students in both universities in the shape of the PTDO and dedicated non-teaching Combined Studies staff.

Employer links

None of the degree level courses had strong links with employers. This was particularly surprising in the case of Health Studies since it represented a large set of programmes driven by external changes in the professional division of labour and qualification requirements. While Health Studies is driven by the need to respond to professional changes, the others could be said to be driven by an institutional commitment to widen access to HE and so the lack of employer links was perhaps less surprising.

HNC Courses

Delivery

The Engineering HNCs at college A were offered in a variety of modes that were conditioned by external factors. Only the Automotive strand had no links with employers. Of the three groups of students studying the course, the part-time infill students are perhaps the most interesting because while this group are studying part-time, they would complete the course in one rather than two years. These students were unemployed, and the ESF had funded 16 hours of class contact time which allowed them to study the course at a full-time pace but retain the status of part-time students, according to Department of Social Security (DSS) regulations which governed the payment of their income support. The course was delivered during the day over two and a half days per week. Therefore the provision of ESF funding made the provision of places to unemployed students viable and the number of hours of contact was at least partly conditioned by DSS regulations.

There were strong and long-standing links with the local shipbuilding industry. Originally, provision had been on a day-release basis, but this changed to full-time when the traditional demand from the industry dried up. This was changed again when full-time places were capped, and modules are offered on evenings and Friday afternoons as well as the traditional day-release. The move to evenings and Friday afternoons was a response to the employer’s desire to move away from the expensive day-release mode. By attending on more than one evening, students are able to vary their pace of studying.

The HNC in Social Care at college A was a new course and there were therefore no long-standing relationships with employers. The development of the course was a response to the growth of the care sector where staff are poorly qualified. Relationships with employers were developed when college staff arranged placements for full-time students. Employers showed an interest in gaining access to the HNC for employed staff and the decision was taken to develop a part-time strand delivered in the evenings. Chronic under-funding and low levels of
staffing in the care sector made day-release unrealistic. There was a worry about maintaining employer interest in the wake of local government reorganisation and the willingness to pay fees had been patchy.

The diversity of modes of delivery and relationships with the labour market in college A illustrate very well a pattern of flexible differentiation. The need to respond quickly to segmented markets, the constraints of funding, the restructuring of the labour market, and changes in employer demand and the constraints of DSS regulations all had a bearing on the decision to offer courses in particular modes. Although such changes are often glossed over simply as increasing student choice the reality is more complex and tells us as much about constraints as choices.

In college B, although provision was dedicated it was formally open to all students and so there was formal integration, particularly as day-time provision was timetabled in a part-time-friendly manner. The scale of the institution and its monopoly as a provider in the local area meant that it was possible to offer the same units in a variety of modes simultaneously and so students could combine different modes, which increased the flexibility for full-time as well as part-time students. Both the size of the institution and the standardised nature of HNC units meant that options were not restricted for part-time students.

HNC Accounting is a good example of dedicated provision with formal integration, which provides for flexibility on the margins. All provision is open to all students, but part-time HNC Accounting students have separate timetables. The opportunity to take a mixture of part-time daytime and evening units allowed part-time daytime students to infill on part-time evening classes and vice versa. This allowed the college to meet the needs of a segmented market consisting of both large and small employers not all of whom would be able to release staff during the day. In contrast, student numbers on the HNC Graphic Design were too small to allow a range of modes of delivery and this course was offered only by day-release.

The college had recently set up formal links with employers in the shape of liaison committees (see D.4.4) but it remains to be seen how or if this will affect the nature of provision.

Progression

At college B both HNCs articulated with HNDs offered by the college. In addition, it was possible to transfer credit from the HNC Accounting into a professional award. However, the HND in Graphic Design had no dedicated part-time strand and part-time students would have to study on an infill basis.

There appeared to be doubt about the articulation of the Engineering HNCs at college A into HNDs. There was no employer support for such a progression and college A was unable to offer it. There was no structured progression for the HNC in Social Care which appeared to have a doubtful professional/market currency and which had no relationship with other social work qualifications. The lack of a clear progression route for students following these courses in college A could be said to reduce their flexibility, to the extent that student choice is diminished. This raises general issues about the question of access to HE in general, particularly for students on courses such as Automotive Engineering that are at the extreme of HE, with no academic conditions of entry. Given that only the day-release Engineering at college A appeared to offer a clear chance of career improvement, our findings raise questions about the currency of the HNC.

Resources and staffing
There was concern in college B that capping of full-time places and reductions in budget would limit the institutional commitment to expand. The concern with the need to expand rather than, for example, worry about the need to attract adequate numbers of students as in college A, reflected the college’s size and monopoly of FE provision in the local area.

Neither of the colleges had dedicated administrative services for part-time students similar to those in the universities, presumably because the majority of students in both institutions were part-time rather than full-time. Of course this does not mean that part-time students would not have benefited from dedicated services. For example, in college A full-time students on the HNC Social Care always got to the library books first. This led to the setting up of a small private library for part-time students.

There were differences between the two colleges in staff conditions. In college A, staff were paid for teaching in the evening although there was recognition by some staff that this might be about to change. Needless to say there was resistance to such a change by staff who drew attention to the increases in their workload in recent years, particularly the increases in assessment load. One member of staff commented that this would mean a culture change for college staff because they were unused to operating in a competitive market, as well as simple changes in hours and pay arrangements. College A operates in a highly competitive local environment and this increased staff’s feelings of insecurity. Staff who were interviewed invariably referred to the activities of other institutions and were aware that they might be competing for the same students. It is possible that increased competition had intensified workloads. The HNC in Social Care appeared to be severely under-staffed although the course leader was hopeful that they would be allocated additional staff in the near future. The part-time strand of this course relied heavily on one part-time member of staff employed on a short-term contract basis who combined this with similar contract work at other FE institutions in the area. As this member of staff was paid by the piece during term time and without security of employment, he was obliged to work very long hours. An important dimension of the flexibility of provision in this case therefore was the ability to draw on a flexible source of teaching labour.

In college B, staff were given time off in lieu of evening teaching but not paid. There was a recognition in the college of the need for greater flexibility in staffing and an explicit policy to employ 12-15% of staff on a part-time basis. The Art & Design Sector had tried to increase flexibility in the deployment of staff by introducing team teaching and, as a result, staff taught over a wider range of subjects. There was no sense of resistance to evening teaching on the part of staff, the majority of whom teach in the evenings.

**D.2.3 Summary**

- Institutional structure and strategy were important in creating the conditions necessary for the development and expansion of part-time provision. The commitment to increase flexibility of provision throughout the institution in three out of the four institutions was a particularly significant factor. Modularisation and CATs were important elements in this increase in flexibility.

- Commitments to widen access and to be responsive to local labour markets, while varying in emphasis from institution to institution, were important factors in developing part-time provision.
• Integrated models of provision are not necessarily more flexible than segregated models. Part-time students may be constrained, for example, by inappropriate timetables and delivery designed for full-time students. The apparent flexibility of programmes requires critical investigation.

• Part-time programmes have considerable administrative and resource implications.

• The setting up of dedicated information and support services for part-time students gives rise to new intra-institutional relationships and raises questions about internal allocation of resources.

• Staff’s attitudes to, and participation in, part-time teaching vary with institutional culture, staff contractual duties vary institutionally, and the use of part-time teaching staff is important and requires further investigation.
CHAPTER D.3 STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS AND ASPIRATIONS

D.3.1 Social and demographic characteristics

Of the 43 students whom we interviewed individually, more than half (25) were female and 38 were in full-time jobs (the other five were unemployed). Their ages ranged from 19 to 61, and the median student was in his or her thirties. However, our interviewees are not necessarily representative of all part-time students; they were not selected systematically and their availability and willingness to be interviewed may well have depended upon their attitude to the course, their employment status or other personal characteristics. The survey sample was designed to be representative of all part-time undergraduate students at the four case study institutions, together with the OU. Table D.3.1 summarises their social and demographic characteristics. We present the survey data broken down by sector, that is, for the two colleges combined, the two universities apart from the OU, and the OU. Other breakdowns are reported in the text.

There was an equal gender split among the sample as a whole. The proportion of females was highest in the two (non-Open) universities (60%) and lowest in the colleges (37%), with the OU in between (48%). Our sample reflected the national trend: among part-time undergraduate entrants to HE in Scotland in 1994-95, the proportion of females was higher in HEIs than in FECs - 55% compared with 42% (Scottish Office 1996, p.7). Among sample members, college students were more likely to attend courses during the day, and this helps to explain the gender difference between sectors. Females comprised a higher proportion of students who attended in the evenings only (57%) than of students who attended during the day (44%) or by other modes, which included distance learning (47%).

There was a wide age range among students. As with the interviewees, the median student was in his or her thirties, but the age distribution varied across the sectors: half the college students (50%) were aged 30 or less, compared with 37% of university students and about a quarter (26%) of OU students. Once again, the sector difference partly reflected mode of attendance: 58% of day students were aged 30 or less compared with 30% of evening students and 26% of other modes. The age distributions of male and female students were similar.

About four in ten students had children whom they described as “dependent on [them] for care or financial support”. The highest proportion was among the OU students (48%). Slightly more males than females had dependent children, suggesting that women with dependents were more likely to be deterred from studying, but the difference was small (42% against 36%). Some students had no dependent children but said that a partner (5%) or other adult (3%) was dependent on them.

Three quarters of all students were in full-time jobs. By sector, the largest proportion was among college students (86%), and all the college students were economically active (that is, in a full- or part-time job or unemployed and seeking work). The OU had the lowest proportion of students in full-time jobs (61%) and had a considerable minority of economically inactive students, most of them home-makers or retired.

Students were asked to describe their present or most recent job. Overall, nearly a third (32%) were in ‘associate professional and technical’ occupations, a category which included technicians, nurses and welfare workers. There was a strong contrast between sectors: university students were the most likely to be in ‘associate professional and technical’ occupations (48%), while a majority of college students were either in ’clerical and
secretarial’ occupations (24%) or in ‘craft and related’ occupations (29%). The occupational distribution differed predictably between males and females.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of sample members (percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent adult, no children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No dependents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour-market status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time paid job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time paid job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed &amp; looking for work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to work (e.g. disabled)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time unpaid work at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present or most recent occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management, admin. &amp; professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate professional &amp; technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical and secretarial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft and related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample n (=100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The case studies allow us to put flesh on these demographic statistics by showing how part-time study fitted into students’ individual biographies and their changing circumstances. The students we interviewed included:

- young employees with no dependents who were ambitious for their careers, or who were sent by their employers;

- young-to-middle-aged employees, many with dependents, who wanted to develop personally and/or professionally, often because their careers had seemed to plateau out and they were becoming bored;

- middle-aged or older employees who wished to protect their position in an insecure labour market and against competition from younger and better-qualified entrants;
• people in part-time or intermittent employment, who had more time to study and who wished to consolidate their experience and qualifications to support a return to the full-time labour market;
• the unemployed, whose motives were similar but who typically had less work experience to consolidate and for whom the choice of a specific career path was often more arbitrary;
• adults with more time on their hands, typically as a result of their children becoming more independent or leaving home;
• adults approaching retirement or semi-retirement.

We discuss personal and vocational motives for study in more detail below. The categories of student described above are neither exhaustive nor exclusive. Our case studies reveal the diversity and complexity of the biographical factors which lay behind students’ participation. Part-time study was often the outcome of a complex interaction of occupational, personal and domestic circumstances. For example, one student at university C was not currently able to work full-time because she was caring for a very elderly and frail grandparent. Part-time study complemented her caring role, by providing a challenging way of using the gaps in her timetable, and by helping her to prepare for a return to full-time employment.

D.3.2 Educational backgrounds

Most young people entering full-time education are first-time entrants, with Highers or equivalent qualifications from school, who have not entered any other post-school courses. Part-time students differ markedly from this pattern.

In the first place, a large proportion of all students - more than four in ten of our sample - had already obtained HE qualifications or part-qualifications. The first panel of Table D.3.2 shows that the highest proportion was among university students, of whom 52% reported HE qualifications. The second panel shows that these tended to be nursing qualifications, HNC/Ds or other HE certificates or diplomas, although 10% of university students reported that they had a degree. A significant minority of college and OU students said they had HE qualifications, most often an HNC/D. It is possible that HE qualifications were over-reported, if some students reported either the qualification to which they were currently working or credits already received towards it. This may account for many of the college students who reported HE qualifications. Among our interviewees - whose accounts we could check against this misinterpretation - one college student and ten (out of 21) university students had previously been in HE, including two who had not completed their earlier courses but were using credits from them towards current courses.

Second, among those who had not previously been in HE, a majority of college students, and a significant minority of university students, had left school without achieving Highers or equivalent academic qualifications for entry to HE. In this respect part-time education appears to have fulfilled its conventionally ascribed role of offering a ‘second chance’ for early school leavers.
Table D.3.2
Educational backgrounds of sample members (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Colleges</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>OU</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of academic attainment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Highers or A levels from school</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Highers or A levels</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE qualifications</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-school qualifications</strong></td>
<td>(multiple responses possible)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic qualification below HE</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational qualification below HE</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft or technician apprenticeship</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing qualification</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNC or HND</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other HE certificate or diploma</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other qualification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any post-school qualification</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whether/when studied part-time</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, since 1990</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-90</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before 1981</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample n (=100%)</strong></td>
<td>145</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Third, the vast majority of our interviewees (38 out of 43) and of sample members (88%) had already gained qualifications since leaving school, and many had gained several qualifications. Our interview data enabled us to examine the links between this prior experience and their current course. In nearly all cases their current courses built on these earlier qualifications, sometimes in terms of vertical progression, but often through a sideways move to a related field, for example from nursing to psychology. Many students received credit recognition for their earlier qualifications - especially in university C, where this was an important feature of the Combined Studies course. More than half the survey sample had studied on a previous part-time course.

Our data suggest that the rhetoric of ‘second chance’ education may no longer be adequate to describe part-time HE in Scotland in the 1990s. This tends to assume that HE is the main form of post-school learning, that it is a discrete, undifferentiated and one-off experience, and that normal access to HE is via a single, school-based route. But our study shows that many students have gained other (non-HE) qualifications since leaving school, that there is considerable scope for progression (vertical or horizontal) between levels and types of undergraduate HE, and that access to HE via other post-school courses is a ‘normal’ avenue of advancement for many adults, many of whom left school without entry qualifications to HE. The rhetoric of ‘second chance’ education ignores the diversity of part-time HE, and the extent to which different educational episodes, both at HE level and below, may be progressive and cumulative experiences.

D.3.3 Other characteristics

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Staff in all four institutions said that part-time students were more committed and motivated, took their studies more seriously, and were more rewarding to teach. Many students contrasted their own more serious approach with that of their children or of themselves when previously full-time students. Some part-time students who attended courses alongside full-time students commented on the different student culture, and many felt that the full-timers were less motivated and had less favourable attitudes. Students on largely dedicated part-time courses, as at university D, tended to appreciate the fact that their fellow-students had similar circumstances and motivations; many of them would not have welcomed greater mixing of full- and part-time students. However several interviewees stressed that full- and part-timers alike varied widely in their motivation and attitudes. One staff member felt that the cliché that part-timers were more strongly committed was a slur on full-time students, many of whom were strongly motivated, and many of whom were adults. And some part-time students commented that the financial difficulties and the difficult labour market made the current situation of full-time students more serious than that of earlier generations; their own position was ultimately easier because they had alternative statuses (e.g. employee, member of family or household) and a secure income stream to fall back on.

Some interviewees felt that the different commitment and motivation of full- and part-time students reflected differences in age and maturity; part-timers had already sown their wild oats and had a clearer and more focused purpose for studying. Others felt that the circumstances of part-time study also contributed to the difference. Most part-time students had paid for their courses, or their employers had paid on their behalf, and they felt an obligation to work hard to justify the expenditure. Most part-time students, especially evening students, had further demonstrated their commitment in terms of the substantial time devoted to their studies.

Many staff felt that part-time students were more demanding. They were more mature and could better articulate their demands and expectations. They often had more experience of the subject under study, and were less easily satisfied if (for example) the course was out of date or did not correspond to their own workplace experience. They were more likely to have domestic or work commitments, and therefore valued their own time highly; they were more likely to resent cancelled classes, particularly if little effort had been made to notify them. Several staff commented on the ‘customer culture’ of part-time students, who had higher expectations and felt that deadlines and attendance requirements should not apply to them. A staff member in university D commented: “They feel that because they’ve paid their money it’s their right to come and go as they wish.... If you’ve paid money for a course it does put you in a different relationship... that’s part of the creation of a different kind of culture about education that’s inherent in the whole project.” The customer culture was reflected in the comments of several of the students. For example some students perceived that part-timers were being ‘short-changed’, and that the resources they attracted were not being fed back into part-time provision or facilities.

While reluctant to generalise, staff mentioned other characteristics of part- and full-time students which had implications for their educational needs. These included:

- their initial anxiety, especially among those who had had a substantial break from learning, about their ability to study and to handle assignments; university D encouraged new students to attend study skills courses, which were highly regarded by the students we spoke to;
• their greater experience, for example of the ‘practical’ aspects of many vocational courses, which might require a different approach from full-time courses for young students with no workplace experience;

• a greater willingness to participate in classes;

• less time for study, and especially to read outside the immediate subject of the course, which required a more ‘packaged’ approach;

• more specific guidance needs: part-time students often have a clearer view than full-timers of where they want to go, and “need advice on how to get there rather than on where to go” (acting course leader, college B).

D.3.4 Reasons for part-time study

Sample members were given a list of possible reasons for starting their courses and asked to tick all those that applied to them. Their answers are given in Table D.3.3. A majority in each sector said that the opportunity to gain a qualification was a reason for studying - although this in itself does not tell us why the qualification was itself desired. The next three items in the list are the most directly ‘vocational’, and drew the highest responses from college students, although a majority of students in each sector said they studied “to improve my chances in the job market”. Compared with other university students, OU students were less likely to study to advance themselves in their current job, and more likely to do so in order to improve their chances in the job market. The next three items refer to the more ‘personal’ or intrinsic benefits of study; they attracted the highest response from OU students, and the lowest from college students.

Table D.3.3
“What were your reasons for starting your course of study?
- tick all that apply” (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Colleges</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>OU</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is an opportunity to gain an educational qualification</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was required in my job</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help me get on in my present job</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve my chances in the job market</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of my interest in a particular subject</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is an opportunity to develop generally</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is something constructive to do</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For social contact</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another reason</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample n (=100%)</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The difference between sectors is confirmed by a further question, which invited respondents to underline the ‘most important’ reason (table not shown). Almost three quarters (74%) of college students underlined one of the ‘vocational’ reasons, compared with less than half (43%) of university students and little more than a third (35%) of OU students. Conversely, 15% of college students, 36% of university students and 43% of OU students underlined one of the ‘personal’ reasons.

Most students combined ‘vocational’ and ‘personal’ reasons (Table D.3.4). Nearly three-quarters of college students (72%), and a majority of students in the other two sectors, reported at least one ‘vocational’ reason and at least one ‘personal’ reason for study. There was some variation across sectors, but in each sector a majority of students reported both ‘vocational’ and ‘personal’ reasons. There was similar variation across modes of study, with the day students most likely to report only ‘vocational’ reasons, but more than 60% of students in each mode gave both types of reasons. Older students (in their 40s or later) were more likely to study for purely ‘personal’ reasons (42%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Colleges</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>OU</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocational and personal</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational only</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample n (=100%)</strong></td>
<td>145</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The nature of vocational motives for study

This overlap of vocational and personal motives was confirmed by our interviews with students on the case-study courses. These cast further light on the ‘vocational’ motives of part-time students.

First, in areas or fields where job prospects were uncertain, part-time study was often a defensive strategy. A Shipbuilding student at college A explained: “I’ve just been transferred to the Goods Inwards department from the Machine Shop. At the back of my mind is the thought that if they can do without me in the Machine Shop they might do without me in the Goods Inwards also.” A qualification would make him more competitive on the internal labour market as well as the external one. Several Social Care students at college A, and Health Studies students at university C, wanted higher qualifications to protect themselves against competition from younger and better-qualified people entering the profession. Even where students did not feel their jobs were under threat - as was the case for most students at university D - they often felt that the competition from better-qualified entrants made further qualifications necessary to keep promotion prospects open.

Second, across all four institutions the perceived vocational returns to part-time study were often generalised, long-term and uncertain. Most students hoped for some occupational advantage from their studies, either with their current employer or through a change of job, but they rarely knew precisely how, or when, this would occur. It is perhaps not surprising that they often sought personal returns from their courses as well, as these might be more predictable than specifically vocational returns.
Third, many students felt bored or insufficiently stretched in their jobs. Part-time study could simultaneously provide a personal challenge and stimulation, and an opportunity to increase their personal fulfilment and sense of professionalism within their current jobs. If it eventually led to promotion or a better job as well, that would be an added bonus. For example, some Business Studies students at university D welcomed the opportunity to study the changing context of their administrative jobs. Many Social Care students at college A were motivated by a sense of professionalism; they felt they were making good their employers’ failure to provide the training required to maintain high professional standards of care. This mixture of personal challenge, job enrichment and career advancement was present, in varying proportions, in the motives of many of the students we spoke to. It is well illustrated by the experience of one of the Social Care students, documented in our interview notes:

Lydia chose to do the course because there was no training in the workplace and the level of practice is poor. It was important to her to set high standards of professional practice. She felt that she would be stuck in a position where standards were low and be unable to move elsewhere unless she improved her own training and gained a qualification. She had been disappointed that she had not so far received promotion and hoped for a management position. While these factors had influenced her decision to study the course, later on the personal satisfaction she felt in completing written work was an important factor in sustaining motivation.

This example illustrates a fourth point: that motivations may change over time. Other students also reported that they had increasingly appreciated the more intrinsic or personal benefits of study.

**Other influences on the decision to study**

Partly due to its modular and semesterised structure, the part-time programme at university D provided flexibility in respect of pacing and credit transfer (in and out) as well as choice of units. This flexibility was appreciated by the students, especially those who wished to accelerate their coverage of the programme, but was not a major influence on their decision to participate. Many students were unaware of the flexibility of the course before joining. At university C, by contrast, the credit recognition offered by the Combined Studies course was an important incentive to participate. Several students were using it to upgrade existing qualifications, to gain credit from courses from which they had dropped out, or to move sideways.

Students who were paying their own fees identified the cost of study as a disadvantage. Some suggested ways in which the burden might be eased. For example, students might be allowed to pay in instalments rather than through a single up-front payment, as was required in some of the institutions studied. (Staff pointed out that the current arrangement gave the institution a financial advantage, as it benefited from dropout.) However the general feeling among many of the students we talked to was that fees were less important than the time commitment in deciding whether or not to enrol. It must be remembered, of course, that we were talking to students who had decided to study notwithstanding the fees.

One in seven (14%) of survey students said they had applied, or seriously considered applying, to a different institution. The proportion was highest among university students (21%) and lowest among college students (7%). Most students said they had received information about their chosen course and institution from the institution itself. Other sources
of information included employers (mentioned by nearly a quarter of college students), friends or relatives (mentioned by nearly a quarter of university students) and advertisements. Our interviews suggested that information gained by word of mouth was more influential as it could recommend courses to potential students, rather than simply inform them. One student at university D told us his line manager had been encouraged by his example to enrol on the course.

D.3.5 Summary

- The part-time students whom we studied came from a wide range of social and demographic backgrounds. Except in the OU, nearly all students were economically active and most were in full-time jobs. University students most commonly had technician-level jobs, and college students more often had clerical or craft occupations.

- Part-time HE was typically a further step in a post-school educational career: most students had gained qualifications since school, often by part-time study, and their current courses usually built on their previous qualifications in one way or another.

- Part-time students were generally perceived to be more highly motivated, to be more demanding to teach and to exhibit a ‘customer culture’.

- Most students had vocational motives for study, but in a majority of cases vocational and personal motives were closely interlinked. Vocational motives were often defensive, to protect existing positions in the labour market, or based on a view of the occupational returns to study as long-term, non-specific and uncertain. Many students sought job enrichment as much as career advancement.

- Several students, especially in university C, had been influenced to study by the opportunity to transfer credit for existing qualifications or part-qualifications.

- The cost of study was a concern to those students who had to pay fees, but many perceived the greater cost in terms of their time commitment.

D.3.6 Emerging issues

Our analysis of the demand for part-time HE raises several issues for policy, particularly in the context of the current Dearing review of HE.

First, future policy for part-time HE must recognise and accommodate the enormous diversity of part-time HE students, and of their backgrounds, circumstances and aspirations. There is no ‘typical’ part-time HE student.

Our research suggests that the rhetoric of part-time HE as ‘second chance’ education, and the mode of planning based on this rhetoric, no longer reflects current circumstances. It ignores the enormous diversity of part-time HE, it neglects the variety and extent of post-school learning, and it disregards the extent to which different educational experiences may be cumulative and progressive. In the year of lifelong learning, the rhetoric of ‘second chance’ needs to be replaced by a notion of part-time HE as a ‘further step’, which may be larger or smaller, upwards or sideways.
The courses we studied illustrate the importance of broader ‘generic’ skills for both economic and personal development. In this respect our study is consistent with much recent educational debate. But it also suggests that as generic skills become more important, we need to modify traditional ways of thinking about demand and the market for HE.

One implication is that as concepts of skills become less precise, the market becomes harder to interpret. Most students entering courses expect some occupational returns, but these are typically non-specific, long-term and uncertain. Many enter to defend existing jobs rather than to promote career development; some as a more desperate response to unemployment. Policy must be guided by clearer precepts than such simplistic notions as ‘learning pays’.

Finally, and closely related to this, vocational and personal motives for study are closely intertwined. Generic skills are, by definition, as relevant to personal development and growth as they are to career advancement, and for many of our students these two goals coincided. Others started with more specific occupational goals but came to appreciate the personal returns. Given the uncertain occupational rewards for part-time study, it is not surprising that for many students personal motives were at least as important as occupational ones in their decision to participate. An institution’s marketing strategy - or a nation’s HE policy - will fail if it ignores this duality.
CHAPTER D.4 THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS

D.4.1 Employer support for part-time students

A majority of the students whom we interviewed - about two-thirds of the college students and nearly half the university students - received support from their employers for course fees. In some cases this was partial support, with the student paying the larger share himself or herself. A few students said that their fees were waived, or paid by the DSS or the local authority. The others paid for themselves. University students were significantly more likely than college students to be self-funded, and several of the employer-funded university students were employees of the university itself.

The survey covered a wider range of courses than the interviews, but it tells a similar story: 59% of college students, 40% of university students and 21% of OU students reported that their employers contributed to the cost of their course fees. (A further 1%, 2% and 0% respectively did not receive help with fees but received employer support for other course-related costs such as travel or equipment.) Two-thirds of daytime students (66%) received support for fees, compared with one third of evening students (33%) and one in five studying by other modes (21%). The proportion helped with fees was higher among males than females (49% and 30% respectively), and higher among full-time than part-time employees (50% and 16% respectively).

Employers also contributed time: 52% of college students and 31% of university students reported that their employers gave them time off work to attend classes. Others had time off for specific occasions, such as examinations. Contributions to travel, book and equipment costs were low, varying between 5% and 10%. One solitary student received assistance with childcare. Employer support was higher for men than for women, primarily because of the higher proportion of women in part-time employment.

Predictably, employer support varied according to course type. Thus it was lowest for the OU and for university D, where the courses were least vocationally oriented and only 27% of students received employer support for fees; and highest for college A, where 83% of the students received contributions. In the other two institutions exactly half the students received assistance with their fees.

The interviews illuminated the diversity of support - and lack of it. Some students said that they were able to participate only through the collaboration of their line manager, for example in arranging their shift patterns or allowing them to take time off at peak study times. This kind of support might be official or unofficial, and it might be established as a regular practice or contingent upon the work pressures at the time. Conversely, others said that their shifts could not be organised to give them adequate access, so that they were missing classes altogether, or arriving at the class exhausted.

There is an issue about the relationship between the organisation of work and time off. How far is a decision to give a student time off from work a matter of rule, and how far a matter of organisational necessity? An example comes from Health Studies: one student said that as a community nurse he was able to find time during working hours because of the flexibility of his work, but this would be far more difficult for those working as charge or staff nurses on the wards, where there were more fixed demands which were not susceptible to control by the nurse.
In addition to money and time, there was moral support and encouragement. One college A Engineering student reported how much he had been helped by his supervisor who was himself studying part-time. There was a continuum of this kind of support, ranging from highly active encouragement to enrol, to passive acceptance which barely entails awareness.

Judy, a single Social Care student exemplifies several of these issues, with positive and negative aspects:

Judy works as a Day Care Manager in a day centre for clients with dementia. She has a regular work pattern, with a day which starts at 08.15 and should formally release her at 17.00, but often does not, meaning she will arrive late for the class at 17.30. She gets half her fees paid, but still had to moonlight as a hairdresser to make ends meet. She gets no time off for study, and she laughed at the idea that she could find quiet times at work for studying. But her employer, a voluntary organisation, demonstrates that they value training by taking (full-time) HNC students on placement; our student is proud of her work as their supervisor, which has played a part in her own professional development.

The picture of employer support was therefore one of considerable variability. This may not be surprising, and may reflect general moves towards greater flexibility, in the labour market as in educational provision. It does mean that students could be sitting side by side in very differing circumstances, which will explain some variation in their educational needs and hence in their responses to questions about quality and about costs and benefits. Most of the students on the Social Care course, for example, were paying their own way and getting little employer support in the way of time off. The stresses which this caused meant that many of them were looking for more flexibility on the part of the college; but this was interpreted as laxness by other students who wanted a more tightly run course. The impact of course fees, as we see below, varied according to the level of support, which added complexity to the type of markets in which providers were operating, since some of the customers have only their own resources whilst others are backed by their organisations. These kinds of variability are likely to increase.

**D.4.2 Who is the customer?**

Despite substantial employer support for fees and other costs of study, a large majority of students said that it was “mainly my own decision” to start their current course: 66% of college students and 87% of university students in the survey. (Almost all the OU students, 99%, gave this response.) A further 24% and 8% respectively said it was “a joint decision between me and my employer” and only 10% and 4% respectively said it was “mainly my employer’s decision”. Even among students who received employer support for fee costs, a majority (66%) claimed that the decision was mainly their own. Even allowing for the likely tendency for respondents to exaggerate their own control over their activities, our data suggest that notwithstanding substantial employer sponsorship of courses the decisions of individual students were often critical, and in this respect students were the main customers of part-time HE.

The interviews tell a similar story. Students were the main initiators of part-time study, even if their employers were funding them, and we were told about a variety of ways in which employed part-time students came to decide to study:

- In a few cases, employers suggested it, possibly in connection with a regular appraisal or performance review, or in a less formal context. The students concerned tended to be
young and at the start of their careers, and the courses were those (such as the HNCs in Accounting and Electrical Engineering) with a more direct link to career and professional development. This mode is close to the traditional notion of part-time education (typically day-release) for an apprentice or trainee: in the words of a student at college A “it came with the territory”. However it was rarely compulsory.

- In a larger number of cases, employers had an established policy for supporting part-time study but it was largely up to the individual student to take the initiative. Two of the case-study courses had been set up in response to employer demand. The Shipbuilding Engineering course at college A was run for employees of a local shipyard, and timetabled to fit with their working hours; the employer publicised the course within the workplace, and paid the fees of those who enrolled, but the decision to enter was largely left to the student’s initiative. The Health Studies course at university C had been set up in response to employer demand, but following health service changes employer sponsorship had declined; students had to take the initiative to enrol and some only found out by accident that their employers had a policy to give partial support for course fees. The university employees who took courses at their own institutions also fall into this category, since they took advantage of institutional policies to support staff on part-time courses.

- In the largest number of cases, the decision was entirely that of the students, who may then have negotiated with their employers for support. The outcome of this negotiation depended on the perceived relevance of the course as well as on more idiosyncratic circumstances. For example, one student felt she had been refused because her supervisor did not have HE and felt threatened. Another’s employer agreed to give support on the condition that he took Business Studies rather than Computing. Several students did not ask for support, either because they did not expect a positive response or because they were doing the course for their own benefit and did not want to incur new obligations in respect of it.

D.4.3 Employers’ demand for part-time higher education

Reasons for supporting part-time HE

Employers gave two main reasons for supporting part-time HE among their employees: to enhance the skills and effectiveness of their workforce, and to encourage and reward loyalty. These were almost universal responses. A few employers, notably of Social Care students, also saw personal as well as professional development as a goal.

Employers reported a closer attention to the way in which student participation in part-time HE, as on other courses, fitted with business plans or expectations. Much of the impetus came from a greatly increased concern with quality, and advantages were to be measured against this. Just as for the student there could be positive and defensive reasons for engaging in part-time HE, so there could be for employers. Thus just as they may anticipate direct benefits from a more highly qualified staff, they may also be active in order to prevent themselves from slipping behind the competition reputationally.

For some larger employers, support of part-time HE reflected a more or less explicit human resources policy. Some saw it as a means for securing employee loyalty and commitment in a context of job insecurity. In one case, training was a reward to staff members who could not be given long-term contracts. One employer tried to maintain a balance between more senior recruits to its accountancy department (who would enter with full-time qualifications) and
more junior recruits who would be supported to study part-time. Another said that his company needed “technicians with intelligence”, at HNC level; computers had reduced the need for designers and specialists with high-level knowledge. However for most of the small and medium sized organisations, decisions about part-time HE tended to be \textit{ad hoc} and too fragmented for a clear policy to be apparent.

\textbf{Future trends in employer demand}

Several employers expected that the demand for part-time HE would increase, although some said this would substantially depend on individual decisions of students. Some perceived a large latent demand, which might be tapped by better information and marketing. The employers of students on the Social Care course all referred to the future of funding for public and voluntary sectors as a determinant of future support.

However some employers, and some college and university staff, perceived a decline in employers’ support for part-time courses. Employers were becoming more selective, focusing more narrowly on courses of direct relevance to the company. The balance in support between employer and student was shifting. Employers were more likely to demand a \textit{quid pro quo} from the employee. For example, students might be required to demonstrate their own commitment by studying for the first year at their own expense and/or in their own time, before an employer began to contribute. Instead of employers offering full day-release, they might offer an afternoon on the condition that the student matched it with an evening from his or her ‘own’ time. In other cases, students might be expected to study in their own time in return for employer support for fees. The shipbuilding yard exemplified this trend; formerly it had granted day-release, but now it paid fees while expecting students to study in their own time. The college had scheduled the course for Friday afternoons when the yard was closed.

\textbf{Aspects of provision which influence employer demand}

We asked about aspects of provision which might influence or encourage demand. The responses varied. We interviewed two employers of Graphic Design students. One, a specialist unit within a large organisation, would have welcomed the opportunity to select individual HN units and omit those such as Communications which he considered less relevant. The other needed widely-skilled employees and valued breadth; a very small enterprise, it looked to the college to define the field and did not feel confident to select from this field. Most employers welcomed the flexibility of colleges and their willingness to timetable courses to suit employers’ needs. Flexibility in the time required to cover a course was not always welcomed: it could indicate poor organisation, and day-release entitlements might not be extended beyond the allotted period. For some small enterprises, and for employers in the care sector, fees were an important factor. For others they were a minor consideration: one large employer pointed out that college fees were far below those prevailing in the private sector, and the main cost to the organisation was in terms of students’ time, not fees. This employer would have been willing to pay higher fees for Accounting courses if they were scheduled to match the uneven flow of work, which generated one very busy week each month when students often had to miss classes. However he recognised that this would probably not be cost-effective for the college, because the monthly cycle differed across companies and other companies might not be able to pay higher fees. This comment may reflect a tacit recognition of HE as a public service, which should not be expected to run on purely market lines.

\textbf{D.4.4 The communication of employer interests}

When we asked employers how provision might be improved to respond to demand, it was apparent that many of them had given little thought to this and had not attempted to
communicate their views to colleges or universities. Many employers seemed relatively passive in their relations with institutions. There were several reasons for this:

- as discussed above, in a majority of cases individuals and not employers were the immediate ‘customers’, even if employers were supporting the costs of study;
- employers did not always have a clear, articulated view of their needs: in some cases (such as the small design firm mentioned above) they looked to the college to define the field;
- they often had insufficient information about courses to make customer pressure effective;
- colleges found it difficult to establish effective and continuous communication with employers, especially in relatively fragmented sectors, although employers were appreciative of such attempts as were made;
- employers (especially small employers) might feel powerless in their dealings with the college (one employer told us how he had complained about what he felt was a badly-run course, but his complaint got nowhere);
- small companies had neither the time nor the resources to initiate what could turn out to be a protracted dialogue with the college;
- in fields such as accountancy, professional associations had the main role in defining course requirements;
- the context of provision mattered: of the two colleges studied, one had a local monopoly in a buoyant labour market, the other faced local competition in a region of high unemployment, and was more often described as responsive by the employers we talked to.

The factors listed above all varied according to the size of the employer, the structure of the industry, the state of the labour market and the nature and organisation of the occupation concerned. We did not interview enough employers to analyse these dimensions of variation very systematically. We heard of cases in which employer interests were effectively articulated and colleges were able to respond, for example by providing customised courses. However the circumstances in which this was possible (for example, large employers in stable industries with weak professional organisation) appeared not to apply for most of the employers we met.

The college with the ‘local monopoly in a buoyant labour market’, mentioned above, had a policy of creating Employer Liaison Committees (ELCs) across its broad spectrum of courses. Members were typically invited from large- and medium-sized organisations which currently or historically funded a number of employees for part-time courses. The ELCs for the two courses we studied had only recently been established, and we got the impression that they were still finding their way and not yet in a position to consolidate around substantive issues. The existence of ELCs stemmed from the College’s mission-oriented desire to respond to employer needs, yet on the Accounting course much of the dialogue on course revision was conducted at national level by SCOTVEC and the professional bodies. Consequently we suspect that ELCs may have more influence on issues of timetabling and delivery than course content.
D.4.5   Summary

- Employer support was variable. Payment of fees by employers was quite extensive, but it is important to look at the way different components - financial support, time off and moral support - do or do not fit together.

- Even when supported by employers, most students had taken the initiative to study.

- Employers who supported part-time study typically did so to enhance skills and to encourage loyalty.

- The fragmentation of demand makes it difficult to predict future trends, but employers are expected to become increasingly selective in their support for part-time study and to demand a larger contribution from students in terms of money and/or time.

- Employers expressed varying views on the features of part-time provision which might encourage future demand.

- Employers had been relatively passive in their dealings with institutions, and in communicating their demands or expectations.

D.4.6   Emerging issues

Despite employer support for many courses, in a majority of cases the students themselves were the immediate customers, and the balance is shifting further in their direction. The triangular relationship of providers, students and employers is changing: individual students are acquiring a greater role or (to put it a different way) employers are more reluctant to play the role that had been attributed to them in the past. This raises the question of whether institutional and national policies alike exaggerate the current importance of employers in determining the level and structure of demand.

Recent policies have encouraged colleges and universities to respond more effectively to employer demand. Our research leads us to question the current emphasis on institutional responsiveness, at least as this notion is currently understood, and with respect to undergraduate-level HE. The student, not the employer, is the principal customer of part-time HE. Employers may not have a clear view of their needs; even if they do, the views of different employers may not coincide; and they may fail to communicate them effectively to the college. Employers are often remarkably passive in their dealings with colleges. A focus on college responsiveness may detract from the important potential for college leadership, for example by helping to disseminate technology and ideas in a field and by promoting concepts of learning organisation, especially in more fragmented sectors with weak industrial or professional organisation.

Our point is not that the notion of responsiveness is irrelevant, but rather that as currently understood it does not apply in all contexts. It requires individual employers to play a purposive and proactive role which many employers, in many circumstances, have difficulty in playing. For these other employers and circumstances, different models of college-employer relationships may be required.
CHAPTER D.5  THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

D.5.1  Course quality perceptions

In this chapter we look at the experience of being a student, combining survey data with more qualitative information from the case study interviews. We cover students’ perceptions of the quality of their course and of the institution generally. We look in more detail at some aspects of this, including the relationship between study and work. And we deal with student perceptions of the costs and benefits of studying, both in the present and those anticipated. Quantitative analysis centres round a small number of key variables: educational sector, gender, age and occupational position; the qualitative information is naturally more diverse.

Part-time/full-time

First, we asked a general question in our survey about whether students felt that in their institution the quality of provision was better for part-timers or for full-timers. Significantly, 168 (30%) did not answer this, and almost as many (161) responded by saying that they did not know. Of the 214 that did respond, just over half (109) felt that there was no difference. But of those who did feel that there was a difference, almost all (95 out of 105) felt that full-timers were better provided for. This was especially the case in the university sector, where 30% of all respondents felt that provision was better for full-timers; in the college sector, only 18% felt this, but over half of those who responded said they did not know. In both cases, only tiny numbers - 2% and 3% respectively - felt that provision for part-timers was better. How far this is a matter of the grass being greener on the other side is hard to judge, but the split is heavily weighted in one direction.

So how far are the experiences we report those of part-time students as such, and how far of HE students generally? On some issues we are able to report student (and, occasionally, staff) perceptions of the differences between the part-time and the full-time experience. But for the most part we cannot make confident direct contrasts, since we had no control group of full-timers. There is a further complicating factor. Because our students were almost all mature, many of the staff interviews in effect referred more to their maturity than their part-time status. However, in acknowledging this difficulty, we are reflecting two things: the impossibility of clearly distinguishing full- from part-time; and the heterogeneity of part-time experiences, which is such that it does not make sense to lump them all together in a single category and contrast it with full-timers.

The advantages of maturity were strongly signalled by staff interviews. Comments from university D staff were typical: part-time students impressed with their motivation, seriousness and willingness to participate in class; moreover they had the ability to learn from their own and from others’ experience. These are unsurprising but very important results.

The category of ‘mature’ in itself is overstretched, referring sometimes to chronological age limits - 21 for undergraduate entrants, 25 for postgraduate - and sometimes to personal outlook or behaviour. More of our university students were mature in the conventional social sense, say over 30, and this influences both motivation and perceptions of costs and benefits. But maturity is a relative matter. FECs have a student population which is on average older than that of universities, but for the staff of the Social Care course at college A, part-time students were not only mature, but were to be contrasted with classes of 17 year-olds, where ethos and discipline tended to be closer to a school than they are in a university.
Conversely, the FE students tended more to comment on the staff as being teachers rather than lecturers. In part at least, this reflects the different nature of the two professions, with university staff still more fully concerned with the transmission of knowledge, whilst college staff are concerned primarily with the acquisition of skills. But it is more complex than that; in college A, for example, the teaching involved a strong pastoral component, recognising that many students had been out of education for some time, and had not had a strong educational background initially. In the university sector, the pastoral side was left more to the administrators of the overall programmes.

Related to this is the fact that university students appear to be expected to do more outside the classroom than the college students. This may be a function of the size and nature of assignments required (though size is not everything, and for some college students the completion of assignments was clearly a major affair). The exception to this was Automotive Engineering at college A, but the amount demanded of them was the subject of bitter complaint.

**General perceptions**

We asked students to rate their course on eleven different course factors, from teaching through support services to proximity of the institution and its atmosphere. We put a four-point rating scale, from ‘excellent’ to ‘poor’. If we draw a line between the top two ratings (‘excellent’ and ‘good’) and the bottom two (‘adequate’ and ‘poor’), we can make a rough distinction between broadly positive and broadly negative judgements (allowing for ‘adequate’ being usually interpreted as closer to ‘poor’ than to ‘good’).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table D.5.1</th>
<th>Course ratings (percentages)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course content</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit choice</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of teaching</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of learning materials</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support services</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library book availability</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to home/work</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vary study hours to suit</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study at home</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly atmosphere</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees</td>
<td>5</td>
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Sample n (= 100%): 556 for each row

The overall picture is positive for the institutions. On most factors, the positive ratings clearly outweighed the negative. On course content, for example, nearly 80% rated their own course ‘excellent’ or ‘good’. This general verdict was confirmed by the interviews, where the clear majority expressed definite satisfaction.

There were three factors which did not have an overall approval rating, each significant in its own way.

- Only 5% rated fee levels as ‘excellent’ and another 34% acknowledged them to be ‘good’; the most common view (40%) was that they were ‘adequate’.
This is probably as much as could be expected. Even where people consider that they are getting excellent value for money, the fees themselves are not likely to attract actual applause. But there are some interesting sectoral differences. Over 10% of college students did not know what their fees were, and a further 20% marked this as not applicable, which can only mean that they did not pay their own fees, without this indicating whether or not they knew how high they were. This lack of awareness is confirmed by the interview evidence, where students were commonly uncertain what was being paid. It is only in the non-OU university sector that there is any serious indication of unhappiness, with 11% indicating that they found the fee levels ‘poor’.

Judgements on fee levels are notoriously subjective, however. The interviews revealed considerable difficulties with fee payments amongst college A Social Care students, with both the institution and its staff concerned, for different reasons, about the number of students falling into debt - one result being that the college is now invoicing them earlier. This reminds us that it is not only the level of fees but the flexibility of payment systems which affects students.

The high level of satisfaction expressed by OU students on most other dimensions (see below) is thrown into further relief by a combination of two other factors: 55% of them consider the fee levels ‘excellent’ or ‘good’, compared with 35% and 28% for the other universities and the colleges respectively; and almost four in five get no support from employers, whereas 40% of other university students and nearly 60% of college students do receive at least some support. When this is set against the modal fee levels paid by OU students, of £144 and £288, it amounts to a substantial vote of confidence in this particular institution. (As a minor counterbalance to this, it is curious to note that 14% of OU students felt that they had experienced ‘no significant educational benefits’ so far, and only 27% said that the educational benefits had been ‘very significant’. These contrast with equivalent figures of 8% and 40% for the college sector, and 12% and 35% for other universities.)

- Only 26% thought that library book availability was better than ‘adequate’, well outweighed by the nearly half who found them only ‘adequate’ or ‘poor’.

These absolute judgements on a specific facility can be complemented by broader comparative data from our interviews, which suggested that very few of the part-timers thought that they had better facilities than full-timers. Where they felt able to judge, they generally perceived themselves to have less access to library and other facilities. This could be for institutional reasons, for example where the institution closes its facilities even when classes are operating, or for personal reasons, where the facilities are in principle available but the student is unable to take advantage of them.

Generally, universities have better facilities than do colleges. This has something to do with different traditions of part-time modes: although colleges have a long track record of catering for part-timers, it has traditionally been more in the day-release mode, so that evening or even twilight part-time study may not be accompanied by library and other facilities being open, as is the case at college A. But the main reason is presumably the higher funding for HEIs. One member of college B’s staff, when asked whether part-time students have the same access to facilities as full-timers, replied that she was tempted to say “What facilities?” Like most FECs, they do not have a lot of extra-curricular facilities, though what they do have is technically open to part-timers. This sectoral gap is most noticeable in respect of library facilities, which were generally rated higher by university than college students.
However, the fact that facilities exist does not mean that they are available to part-timers. Availability has two aspects, the objective and the subjective. Formally the library may be open, but the students may not make much use of it, as in university C, where one Health Studies student acknowledged the hours as well as the facilities to be good but preferred to use her local library with its much poorer provision because of the contrasting attitudes amongst the staff in the two places. So despite the sectoral difference in the formal availability of facilities, the issue is one which cuts across sectors.

Finally, some students - for example, most of those in Business Studies - have access to facilities such as computers, or even secretarial assistance, at their place of work, and this affects the importance they attribute to the institution’s provision of facilities.

- The third negative factor rating has a different significance. Student support services were rated ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ by 30%, and ‘adequate’ or ‘poor’ by 37%.

Just as significant as the negative balance, however, is the fact that almost a quarter of students did not feel that they knew enough to be able to answer the question, and for a further 9% it was considered ‘not applicable’. In other words, for one third of the students, support services were simply not a relevant factor. Given all the emphasis placed on guidance and other forms of support in recent educational policy literature, this is a significant finding.

It is strengthened by the responses to a more detailed question on sources of support generally. We asked whether students drew on academic counsellors, course lecturers or tutors; on friends, partners or family members; and on work colleagues or employers. We then asked which was the main source of support. The results are quite clear: domestic sources are far more significant than academic or work ones. Academic counsellors figure hardly at all except in the OU, where over a third of the students use them; course tutors are used in over half the cases, but the most common source is spouse or partner, drawn on by three in five students. The student’s spouse or partner is the main source of support in 45% of the cases - compared with a mere 1% who look on an academic counsellor as the main source. 14% found other students the main support source. If we cluster the remaining categories into academic, family/friends and work, the figures are 19%, 56% and 7% respectively.

| Table D.5.2 |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Factor       | Colleges (%)    | Universities (%) | OU (%)       |
| Course content | 63              | 78             | 95           |
| Unit choice   | 30              | 48             | 77           |
| Quality of teaching | 51          | 63              | 70           |
| Quality of learning material | 35        | 48              | 93           |
| Support services | 12           | 17             | 64           |
| Library book availability | 25        | 31              | 19           |
| Proximity to home/work | 61       | 61              | 35           |
| Vary study hours to suit | 35    | 44              | 94           |
| Study at home | 48              | 61             | 99           |
| Friendly atmosphere | 58       | 61              | 58           |
| Level of fees | 28              | 35             | 56           |
There is an interesting gender difference in relation to support. Men rely more on academic sources for support, whilst women look to friends and family. 27% of men report the course tutor as the main support, compared with 9% of women; whilst 65% of women look first to friends or family, compared with 46% of men. The social, and socially structured, character of support services is very evident.

With these three exceptions, then, the general picture is one of student satisfaction. There are significant sectoral variations in the responses on course quality. The main conclusion in this respect is that the specialist part-time provider, the OU, justifies its specialist position by scoring higher than the other sectors on almost every index of student satisfaction.

95% of OU students rated their course content ‘excellent’ or ‘good’, compared with 78% of other university students and 61% of college students. Equivalent figures for quality of teaching were 70%, 63% and 51% respectively; and for quality of learning materials the gap was enormous: 93% compared with 48% and 35%. This latter is not surprising given the scale on which the OU operates in its production of materials, and the resources it is therefore able to put into them. Also not surprising is the higher rating given to the choice of unit it offers. When it comes to student support services, the OU’s experience and structure also makes its high rating of 64% judging them ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ predictable, but the gap between this and 17% for universities and 12% for colleges is very striking. In both the latter two sectors, over 40% said they did not know about support services, or found the question was not applicable.

There were few sectoral differences in response to a question on the atmosphere of the institution. In all three sectors, close to three out of five students found the atmosphere friendly and welcoming. However, and perhaps curiously, here again the OU could be considered to score higher than the others, since over 20% found its atmosphere ‘excellent’ compared with 13% for each of the other two, and only 22% ‘adequate’ or ‘poor’ compared with 36% and 41% for other universities and colleges. The disparity in the aggregate figures is explained by the 18% of OU students for whom this question was not applicable. This does raise the issue of what is considered to be the ‘atmosphere’ of an institution which teaches primarily in distance mode, but it is not a meaningless question: OU students may have been referring to their study centres or to the tone of correspondence, the telephone contacts or the materials themselves which they received from the institution.

Students in some courses felt themselves to be distinctly more marginal than in others, even within the same institution. This is best illustrated by the contrast between Combined Studies and Health Studies at university C. Combined Studies students are enrolled on their modules on an infill basis. This is negotiated on their behalf by the programme administrators, who conduct a series of bilateral negotiations with the respective course tutors. Decisions on whether a place is available can be delayed until very close to the beginning of term. This means that not only is the student not sure what they will be able to study in the coming semester; almost more importantly, they may not know when they will be expected to be on campus, and this can create major difficulties where they have work or domestic commitments.

Once they are into the course, their experience may be marginalising, for two main reasons, one curricular/pedagogic, and one social, but with significant implications for their educational experience. First, the tutor may teach to the programme rather than the module, assuming that the students have attended previous modules and are studying in a conventional sequential mode, rather than the more aggregative mode which characterises Combined Studies. Secondly, even though the full-time curriculum is also modular, with options and variations, more of the full-time students will know each other and have studied
together before starting a given module. The part-timers can therefore find themselves isolated at the outset, and this may be accentuated by the fact that they often cannot participate fully in the social activities of the class, even at the level of having coffee together whilst waiting for the next class to begin. This is not a matter of social convenience alone, since useful learning and information exchange may occur in these interstices. Being out of the regular class body meant that students could also miss out on information from the course tutor. One student, the only part-timer on a computer studies module, did not hear about the rescheduling of a test and as a result had to take it in an office where staff were having their coffee break; she failed. (Against this should be set the testimony of one staff member with involvement in both the Combined Studies and Health Studies courses, who spoke of having “had to adjust students’ assessment timetables often over the years because children have become ill or the husband’s lost his job.”)

In Health Studies, on the other hand, although the programme is modular, it is dominated by part-timers, and there is therefore no sense of marginality, as least as far as the course is concerned (though there may be in respect of the institution; several Health Studies students portrayed themselves as semi-detached, for example in relation to the library and other facilities). Indeed, several students referred to having had information about the module they were about to take passed on to them by students who had already done it, showing that there was clearly some kind of functioning network.

The perception of marginality was sometimes shared by staff, but speaking from a different angle. At university D, in one of the departments staff offered a picture of the full-time student as the ‘ideal’ model, because of the operation of a ‘departmental culture’ which gave the student a particular identity and affiliation, with the opportunity to read round the subject. Very few part-time students said that they considered themselves as ‘students’, and all had other major commitments to which they generally accorded higher priority than their studies, so this concept of education as an immersion in a culture was not available to them. There is, however, another side to this, namely that the part-timers were correspondingly protected from the negative aspects of the full-time student culture.

Perceptions of course quality can vary within institutions. Thus Accounting in college B received generally favourable verdicts from the students, whilst Graphic Design in the same place had a far more mixed response. Such intra-institutional variation is natural, and not specific at all to part-time study. We should also note that the Graphic Design course was in a transitional period with a high level of staff change, which naturally influenced the provision. More significant is the variation between Combined Studies and Health Studies at university C, bearing in mind the result reported above on marginality. In spite of their marginality, Combined Studies students reported greater satisfaction than did those in Health Studies, where some of the teaching received strongly adverse comments. However, ‘course’ level is too crude to do this justice, since the comments were directed only at one or two specific modules, rather than at the course as a whole. Indeed, it was noticeable that the respondents on Health Studies were not really able to comment on the course as such, but only on individual modules, and their responses were to individual teachers rather than the programme as a whole.

Intra-institutional differences in marginality are also evident in college A, where Social Care students see themselves as completely cut off from the college, arriving at twilight, never mixing with other students, and having access only to basic facilities if that (the availability of a micro-wave oven to make drinks was an issue, since the cafeteria is shut by the time they arrive).

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Finally, variations between individual responses on course quality are striking. Within university C one student referred to the library facilities as ‘a joke’, whilst the next called them ‘excellent’; and within Combined Studies one referred to them as ‘dreadful’ whilst the next found them ‘very good’. As anyone who has been involved with student feedback will recognise, it is indispensable but can be contradictory.

**External influences on quality perceptions**

Student satisfaction is not a function of the teaching alone, or indeed of the set of factors listed above. The survey data do not capture the contexts within which specific courses operate, such as the nature of the local or the occupational labour market. Some of the student dissatisfaction in Health Studies at university C derived from the feeling that they were being almost forced to enrol for a qualification which in their view would not add a great deal to their professional competence, nor do wonders for their professional prospects. Moreover, as one of the staff counsellors pointed out, some of the anxieties and negative feelings were associated with the stresses of change within the NHS, which were transposed onto the course. Thus the dice were somewhat loaded against the course tutors from the start. Nevertheless, against that background there was still significant variation in the warmth with which different modules were received. Moreover, as with motivation, satisfaction can change over time, and more than one Health Studies student reported that their general disenchantment had been at least partially replaced by a sense of satisfaction at studying successfully.

Some of the variation in perceptions may be an indirect function of the course content, in the following sense. Where there is a clear professional link, then the teacher’s expertise is more transparent than where the course is more purely academic. This is accentuated in the case of part-time study, since the student returns to work immediately following the class, and is therefore in a position to make a rapid judgement on the quality of the teaching, at least as they perceive it, and on other items such as the appropriateness of the technology used. The more academic the course is, the harder it is for the student to mobilise his or her professional experience to query, explicitly or secretly, the authority of the teacher. This does not insulate the teacher against criticism, but gives the source of student dis/satisfaction a different character.

There are wider influences on the quality of student experiences. Most of the students doing the Engineering HNC at college A were on social security. Their experience was highly coloured by the problems they experienced with DSS offices over payments and their availability for work. The recurrent interviews were seen as a major hassle, especially at times when assignments were due and as a result the hours they were doing college work clearly encroached on their availability for the kind of work the DSS is interested in. Although there is a certain amount which the college can do to improve their access to benefits, including providing good information on their entitlements, much of this is outwith the institution’s sphere of influence.

**Standards**

In both universities and colleges there is the question of whether part-time students are being assessed at the same level as full-timers. However there is a strong sectoral dimension to it. As far as internal procedures are concerned, in both colleges students remarked that assessment procedures were often loose; work was not marked and handed back quickly, and in more than one college course students were still waiting months later for the results of earlier assignments, so that they might not even be clear of their eligibility for a final award.
Here too there is individual variation; an Engineering student reported that he had pressed for tighter grading of assessments, including firmer adherence to deadlines, and attracted the opprobrium of his fellow students for doing so. Flexibility can be interpreted as slackness, and there is a tension between making allowances for the extra pressures under which part-timers find themselves, and not allowing different standards to apply for the same qualification.

In the universities, the issue of comparability covered admission requirements as well as assessment standards and course content. In university D, staff were concerned that greater integration might involve a danger that the different part-time arrangements would undermine established quality, whilst students were more worried that uniform procedures across part-time and full-time provision might in practice be biased towards full-timers. One staff member felt that standards for evening students might be affected because only General rather than Honours degrees were available.

The issue of standards arises in another context. One college B employer was unsympathetic to the idea of tying pay awards to the award of qualifications because there was no guarantee of the quality of the certificated competence. This was, very indirectly, supported by a Combined Studies student at university C. She had previously done an HNC which she regarded as a ‘doddle’ by comparison; they were given so many chances under continuous assessment that it had been difficult to fail. This suggests the rather paradoxical conclusion that degrees, which by their nature tend to be less closely tied to specific jobs or occupations, may nevertheless be given stronger credibility in relation to pay scales. This is only hinted at in our evidence, but the size of the graduate/non-graduate differential, at national level, does something to support the point.

The two points are connected by the issue of continuous assessment. In one college, it was reported that 100% assessment influences the student/tutor relationship, since the student’s result then depends almost wholly on the tutor’s judgement.

It appears to be the case that part-time students are likely to aim to pass rather than to excel in their course - satisficing, in other words. Since we have no comparable data for full-timers, we cannot judge whether this attitude is particularly pronounced amongst part-timers. It is, of course, explicable by reference to the other pressures which they are under, and the fact that the studying component of their lives is rarely the dominant one, so that achievement here is subordinated to other priorities.

Programme length and recognition of prior learning

The university students are all enrolled on degrees, though not all on Honours degrees, with the slight exception of some of the Health Studies students in university C who may finish up with a professional diploma despite the encouragement of staff for them to complete a degree. The college students, on the other hand, are currently going only for a Certificate, although a proportion of them are likely to carry on to a higher level. (In Accounting at college B, for example, staff expected many students to return to the college to take professional qualifications, since the HNC would give them some exemptions from the foundation level of ACCA.) However, and as a consequence, the recognition of prior learning becomes a more significant issue for university students than it is for college ones. Even though part-time courses do not necessarily last twice as long as full-time ones, the stretch of five or six years is too much for many. University D awards an eighth of the General degree credit requirement to those who already have a degree, in whatever discipline, which gives graduates a slight start. In university C, in Health Studies, it is absolutely decisive for many
that their previous awards and experience are recognised, and a significant task for the course organiser is to ensure that this happens.

The Combined Studies programme offers particular advantages in this respect. One student had already done five years of a medical degree at a different (pre-1992) university but had not completed it and therefore had no qualification. The Combined Studies arrangements meant that with two more years part-time study he could hope to finish with an MA or BSc. This relatively modest amount of extra study will transform him, statistically and personally, from a drop-out to a university graduate.

In Accounting at college B, accreditation of prior learning (APL) was formally on offer, and one staff member was trained in its application. However, it appeared that on the one hand no students had taken advantage of this, whilst on the other hand several of them felt that they were covering ground already familiar to them. So working out the most effective application of APL remains a difficult issue.

**Being a consumer: authority without power**

We have already noted how part-time students are seen by their institutions in more of a customer role, because they are more likely to be paying their own way, and because they tend to be busier than full-timers with other responsibilities. This can bring with it some measure of influence. However as in other spheres of the consumer society, it would be wrong to exaggerate their power as consumers; they may be poorly organised, and the costs of exercising or attempting to exercise their rights as customers may be considerable, or at least not worthwhile.

### D.5.2 Work/study relationships

The relationship between work and studying is often two-way. We looked to discern whether it was predominantly from work to study, or vice versa. For some students, studying helps their work, as they learn things which they can apply directly or indirectly at the workplace. For others, the reverse is broadly the case: they bring to their study experience, from work and elsewhere, and are less likely to find study relating directly to their work. In some cases this is predictable because of the course content, for example in the case of English Studies at university D, but even in the more vocational fields study is less likely to be interleaved with daily practice. In fact the nurse training which many of the Health Studies students had received followed a model of three weeks of teaching followed directly for ten weeks by practice in the wards of what they had learnt; now the block is still 13 weeks, but split between teaching for ten weeks and preparation for assessment for three, with a far looser connection with work - if any, since it depends on what the individual student’s job content is at the time.

This loosening was encapsulated in a comment from one of the Health Studies students on the shift of nurse education into HE, mostly full-time:

“We’re getting students from the [university] out just now on placement. These are third year students who, if successful, register as nurses in September, and this is their first practical experience of working with people with a learning disability. When I was a third year student I was running wards, and personally speaking I feel that’s what nursing is about - the practical stuff. Not so much the carrying out of procedures, but the actual working with people.”
The relationship between work and study is also affected not only by the nature of the student’s occupation, but by the size of the workplace. Thus in Accounting, a student working in a small firm would be likely to have to cover a range of accounting tasks, whereas one working in a large firm might be working in a more limited area. The conclusion is not only that the relationship is a two-way one, but that it can have features which are not immediately predictable. We expand on this below, when dealing with costs and benefits.

There is, however, a broader feature of the relationship which deserves comment, and which provides one of the strongest contrasts between part-time and full-time students. Although we report the stress which many part-time students experienced in combining their studies with a job and usually also with family responsibilities, there is another side to this particular coin: the structural stability which the job provides in their lives. It does this in at least four ways. First, and most materially, it provides them with a relatively stable income, enabling them to sustain a lifestyle which is not too different from those of contemporaries who are not studying. Although full-time students receive a far higher public subsidy, because their fees are automatically paid for, their absolute income levels are likely to be lower; increased levels of student poverty mean that many full-timers are in a very uncertain financial state, and this can prejudice their studying significantly. It is both the absolute levels of income and the fact that the money does not come in on a regular monthly or weekly basis which contribute to this. The regularity of the income of most part-timers provides an important stability for them.

Secondly, the job provides a daily and a weekly structure to their lives which is enabling as well as constraining. The fact that their time is not only limited but outwith their control deprives part-timers of much choice, but provided they can manage to keep on the tracks the lack of choice may assist them. The proviso is an important one - it may be harder for part-timers to regain their position once they slip - but the full-timers’ lack of a job as an external time-structurer makes it, in one sense, easier for the overall structure of their study time to collapse.

Thirdly, part-timers are more likely to have a sense of where their occupational career may be leading, and of the role which education might play in this. As we say elsewhere, the expectations of future benefits were often quite vague, but compared to those outside the labour market altogether, jobholders’ awareness of career prospects is relatively high, and this helps give them some sense of purpose.

Fourthly, the fact that part-time students have multiple commitments - to a job and/or family as well as to the course - can reduce the stress associated with any one of them. Several part-time students commented that, however difficult they found keeping up with course reading and assignments, the pressure was much easier to bear because the course was not, in the last analysis, the most important thing in their lives. However badly they fared on the course, their job or family life would not normally be directly affected. Conversely, the course provided relief from the pressures of work or family: many welcomed the structured opportunity to ‘switch off’ from their other concerns on the evenings when they had classes to attend.

These factors explain, for example, unexpected differential drop-out rates in the Engineering course at college A, where the staff noted that full-timers were placed in a dilemma if they had the prospect of a proper job which might not still be there when they finished the course, and where full-timers were in direr financial circumstances than part-timers.

This phenomenon - the part-timer benefiting from relative financial stability and a stronger time structure - is one which may prove to be increasingly significant when the financial
status of full-time students is still changing, and when the labour market is as uncertain as it currently is.

D.5.3 Family rhythms

Domestic timetables

The pattern of any student’s life is a function of the interaction between classroom and personal study, employment, and domestic responsibilities. In the case of part-timers, the latter two are more likely to play a significant part: employment because they will often have chosen the part-time route in order to retain a job (though we recognise that many full-time students are now working significant hours, even in term time); and family responsibilities because they are older on average than full-timers.

It is encouraging to report that 84% of the sample said that their families were supportive. 12% said they were indifferent, and less than 1% that they actively opposed their participation. However, this does not mean that fitting studying into domestic timetables does not pose significant problems.

“Finding time has been difficult, but it’s all about forming habits” (Combined Studies student, university C). Students develop their own routines, and these have a wide variety of shapes. Tracing these in detail would have been beyond our resources, but our data suggest that there are two common patterns. Firstly, those which have a predominantly weekly character, so that there are set times when they study which remain broadly consistent week by week; and secondly those whose routines are determined primarily by the course rhythm. Typically, this involves a relatively stress-free period, in which there is a minor weekly routine of class attendance, followed by a major burst of activity in order to fulfil the necessary assessments. In this, part-timers probably do not differ from full-timers.

However, stress and the pressure on routines do not derive only from the course requirements but from home life. In the first place, attendance at college may require childcare arrangements, as our case history below graphically illustrates. An Accounting student whose husband runs his own company and is therefore not available for childcare has a babysitter in to allow her to attend evening classes. (The student does the books for the family company - an interesting example of a triple intersection between study, work and domestic life.) There are also travel arrangements, where there are competing claims on a single car.

At home, there are a range of competing claims. As one Social Care student said, “the moment I get the books out, all hell breaks loose.” Others referred to the juggling which they had to engage in in order to fit the studying in with other domestic activities, with greater or lesser degrees of friction. Broadly speaking, such timetables take one of two forms. **Concurrent meshing** means that our students were studying alongside children or spouses, sharing domestic space and time. Studying is done as part of the domestic routine, perhaps displacing watching TV. **Sequential arrangements** refer to patterns where space or time opened up only after other members of the family departed, usually to bed, and the room or the computer then became free. One student worked upstairs at the computer until his wife came up to bed, whereupon he would transfer downstairs, sometimes even taking the computer down with him; not exactly a model of sociability, but a requirement of the demands on him.

Usually the tension is with other family activities which have nothing to do with education; but it can occur where other members of the family are also studying. This can have positive
effects for all; in one case, a youthful (44-year old) grandfather bought a computer both to help him work for his HNC and to learn alongside his grandchildren.

The patterns need to be traced on a template which goes beyond the daily routine. The fullest example of this comes from one of our family interviews, carried out with the wife of Steve N, an Engineering student at college A. It illustrates:

- the complexity of a family schedule where a parent is studying;
- the collective effort involved in Steve’s actually studying;
- the time/money nexus: it is his time as much as the money which impedes them from making more rapid progress with the house; and
- expectations of concrete advantages are not high - it might reduce chances of him being made redundant, and might help him get promotion, but these are quite vague.

**Household structure**

The family moved house two years ago, and one of the consequences of Steve’s studying is that they have not been able to do it up as fast as they would have liked: plans for returfing the garden and building a wall are on hold. The front door opens straight into the living area: a sitting-room with dining-area as the bar of the L, leading into the kitchen. The interior layout matters because Steve does his studying at the dining room table, which is at the centre of the ground floor accommodation. The kids usually eat off their knees in front of the TV.

The immediate family is Mr and Mrs N, Laurence (8) and Deirdre (6). But the wider family is crucial. Mrs N’s parents live close by (but not next door - a 15-minute drive), and both play vital roles. Her mother retired from her job as a care assistant when the first grandchild arrived, and her father works in a printing company.

**Timetables**

The *daily* family schedule is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>06.50</td>
<td>Steve leaves for work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs N takes kids to school, does her own thing - ‘gallivanting’ - in the morning, except on Friday when she helps in Deirdre’s computer class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>She gives the kids lunch, takes them back to school, and three days a week drives on to her job as a midwife at the Hospital, where she works back shift, 13:45-22:00. On Tuesday afternoon she helps in Laurence’s knitting class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>Granddad picks kids up from school, takes them to his house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>On most days Steve comes home, and grandfather delivers kids, on his way. On Mondays and Wednesdays, though, he goes straight to college, so doesn’t get home till 19.45 - in which case if Mrs N is working granddad delivers the kids on his way to nightshift instead. On other days, if Steve cannot get a lift home from college, Mrs N or her father will pick him up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.30</td>
<td>Mrs N gets home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *weekly* pattern involves:

**Tuesday evening:** Laurence goes to karate; Deirdre goes to Girls’ Brigade.
Thursday: At teatime, both kids swim, then Laurence goes to Boys’ Brigade.
Saturday morning: Deirdre goes to dancing; Laurence goes to football.
Saturday afternoon: Mrs N takes the kids to the pictures to give Steve some peace to study.

Two out of every six weeks Mrs N works night shift, 21.45 to 07.45, three nights one week and two the following. This is at the weekend; being part-time, she fits her shifts around the full-timers.

At present, Steve does Wednesday evenings and Friday afternoons at college. Hopefully he’ll get the first HNC in June. But at the start of the new academic year he’ll be back doing Monday evenings, Wednesday evenings and Friday afternoons, for another two years.

**Motive**

Steve started studying in 1993. “I think he was just worried about the job situation, with them laying off so many men. There was people with better qualifications, better suited to jobs. Him being that wee bit older and he didn’t have the opportunity when he was younger. He just came home one day and said he fancied doing it. I don’t think it will prevent him from losing his job - if he’s got to go he’ll go - but at the end of the day he’ll have his HNC behind him. That and if there’s a possibility of him getting promotion.”

How did you feel? “I was a bit worried about having to request all these Fridays off, but the work has been very good, they’ve been very accommodating and I have managed to get most Fridays off. There have been days when we’ve been stuck, but we’ve usually had someone to fall back on, whether it’s one of my friends or one of my brothers.” (Mrs N’s brother works shifts also, as a policeman).

**Current impact**

“He spends quite a lot of time studying, especially when it comes to exam time. He’ll have everything everywhere, and we’ll have big boxes of books that we never had before that we’ve had to find places to fit. This cabinet that used to be full of bits and pieces is now crammed full of leaflets and notes and things.”

Is there a financial impact? “Not really, because he’s still working, and the employer pays the fees.”

As for her own career: “I’ve had to put it on hold, on the back burner. I’m hoping to do a degree in neonatology.” This has not actually been set up yet, so she could not have started before next year anyway. If she does start then, he will still be studying - and that will take some “jiggery-pokery”!

What are the other family attitudes? “The kids are not bothered. It’s just that he’s in there studying and they’re out there playing. My parents kid him on: ‘all this hassle and I don’t know if it’s worth it’ - but when I told my mum that he was not going to go and do this next HNC because it was going to mean another two years and he’d be out on Monday night and Wednesday night she went crazy - ‘Oh for goodness sake tell him he’s to do it, tell him to phone me and I’ll tell him he’s to do it’. So they’re very supportive although they kid him on.”

Support comes from the rest of the family (see earlier, on child care). But in addition: “I do his drawings sometimes. But that’s all - and I do the proof-reading. My mum does the typing - she’s got a computer. I’ll read through what he’s written; it means nothing to me - though I
know everything about ISO9000 now, quality kitemarks and that sort of thing. I'll do his proof-reading, check his spelling.” He writes his essays out in rough, his mother-in-law takes them away, tries to make sense of all the arrows, etc. - she’s never off the phone.

Importantly Steve receives support from his line manager, who is also doing a course.

Children are obviously a major claim on students’ time. Moreover, it is harder for their claims to be settled into a fixed pattern, so that interruptions are more probable. On top of their individual and unpredictable (in the temporal rather than the psychological sense) demands, study can pose a threat to the collective family rhythm. More than one student referred to Saturday as a day when they were expected to join in family activities rather than tuck themselves away to get on with their studying. But children are not the only type of domestic responsibility. Reflecting broad demographic trends, several students had elderly dependants who made similar claims, implicitly or explicitly.

As with motivation, domestic attitudes can change over time. Broadly speaking, two trajectories emerge. One the one hand, family members are initially accepting, but find over time that the demands on the students’ time and energies impinge undesirably on their own claims. On the other hand, and more commonly, there is some alarm or even resistance at first, but this diminishes as new routines are established.

Laura, a Business Studies student from university D, told us that initially her husband was strongly against it and complained that he and their daughter were being deprived of quality time. The first three semesters were “hell”. Since then he has softened. Her daughter couldn’t care less - but perhaps takes a bit of pride in mum. Laura has a cleaning lady - she couldn’t manage the course otherwise. She has a desk in the same room as her husband (who works a lot from home), but can only work when he is not there. She has a routine - Friday is ‘family day’ but she spends Sundays “with my head in a book”, even when preparing meals, etc. They eat a lot more convenience foods now. Social life is affected - they never invite anyone for dinner during a semester.

Even where no children or other family are involved, domestic rhythms can be a problem. This is true even where the partner is also a student - and even where this is on the same course, as was the case with two of our college A students. There were positive aspects to this, obviously, as the couple could discuss common issues; but their patterns of studying at home did not mesh completely, since the woman preferred to have long blocks of solitude whilst the man wanted to check across more frequently.

D.5.4 Advantages and disadvantages

The brief for the study required us to investigate the costs and benefits of studying part-time, for students, institutions and employers. Here we concentrate on the students; the institutional perspective has been largely covered in Part C, and the employer perspective in the preceding chapter.

There are two interrelated issues we should address before reporting on the evidence under this heading. In the survey, we asked students for their current perceptions about the costs and benefits, and their anticipations of future costs and benefits. The survey dealt only passingly with explicit contrasts between full- and part-time, so there is no ambiguity in the
responses on that front. But when it came to the interviews it was not always easy to be clear whether the emphasis of the responses was on study as such, or on its part-time nature. Secondly, we found that responses to the cost/benefit question tended to be narrow, and to repeat points previously made. We therefore switched to asking about advantages and disadvantages rather than costs and benefits.

The survey data is interesting, relatively simple and broadly encouraging (bearing in mind that respondents were more likely to be those whose experiences have been positive). Students saw definite benefits, of various kinds, and although they also reported costs, in many case significant costs, the overall verdict was unambiguously favourable, with benefits outweighing costs. In the survey, we asked about several different types of costs and benefits: financial, career, personal, domestic, social and educational. The relationships between these need further analysis, and are not always obvious. For example, the results on career benefits do not correlate exactly with financial benefit, and this fits very well with our qualitative evidence, which shows that students may expect no financial return but still think that they are occupationally better off. But the qualitative results yield a number of significant points which are not present in the survey data.

First, the distinctions between vocational and non-vocational benefits are very hard to maintain in any simple fashion. The development of generic skills, for instance at the level of general confidence, spreads across boundaries in ways which the individuals can report on with emphasis, but which are almost impossible to measure.

Secondly, studying can give access to certain types of vocabulary and concepts which do not affect the job in specific ways, but which give students a sense of enhanced professionalism; this in turn affects their motivation and competence. Of course, this kind of outcome could take the form of inflated professional jargon, but there is clear evidence that for certain categories, notably in the Social Care course, the positive impact on subjectively undervalued workers was significant. They felt better because they had a grip on the wider context.

Thirdly, as we said earlier, not only is the relationship between work and study two-way, but the relationship has an interesting dynamic. Thus progress in a course which is not job-related may encourage the acquisition of new work skills, and vice-versa; and these interactions may occur in different directions at different points in the course. We are not able to trace these in any detail; but this dynamic needs to be linked to the changes in motivation over time which we have already reported. Moreover, for some students studying comes as a welcome change from working, or from domestic responsibilities; so the difficulties with time management which were regularly referred to were accompanied by (though hardly outweighed by) a positive sense of the value of juggling multiple activities.

As far as costs are concerned, the highest price appears to be a personal one. Nearly 70% said that the personal costs were either ‘significant’ or ‘very significant’. This was followed by financial costs, at 56%, although over half of these said that the costs were ‘very significant’, whereas only one in three of those who flagged up personal costs rated them this highly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of cost</th>
<th>Very Significant</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>Not Significant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table D.5.3
Costs of studying (percentages)
Once again, interpretations of what amounts to a ‘significant’ cost are bound to be subjective. In some instances, the financial costs involved entail the student getting a second job in order to make ends meet; in others it will only be ‘significant’ in the sense that someone paying for a more expensive night out than they are used to would find it so. How is one to rate the fact that a family could not go on holiday in the summer because of study commitments, as one of our English Studies students at university D noted?

Costs vary according to age. Almost uniformly, the various costs are considered to be more significant by those in the middle age range, 31-40. For example, 26% of these report ‘very significant’ personal costs, compared with 17% of the younger and 15% of the older age groups. This of course does not reflect chronological age as such but the classic lifecycle squeeze, as people with families and other commitments find these competing with their study. Only one in three of the middle age group said there were ‘no significant costs’ to their home life.

Not surprisingly, whether or not the employer contributes to the fees makes a difference. Only 10% of those who received such contributions reported the financial cost to themselves as ‘very significant’, and 64% said there was ‘no significant cost’, whereas of those who received no such support, 29% reported ‘very significant’ financial costs and almost the same proportion (30%) ‘no significant financial costs’. This explains why fewer college than university students reported ‘significant’ financial costs, since more of the former receive employer support.

There is a fairly clear, though not large, class split when it comes to financial costs. One in two of those in managerial and professional occupations say that studying incurs ‘no significant financial costs’ for them, whereas the figure for technical and clerical employees drops to around 36%.

Women respondents consistently report higher costs than men, though not always by very much. Thus 67% of women say that they are incurring ‘significant’ or ‘very significant’ financial costs, compared with 46% of men. On personal costs, the figures are 79% and 58%; for home life the gap is smaller, at 61% and 50% for women and men respectively.

The interviews confirmed these variations in other ways. For example stress levels varied between courses within the same institution. Almost all the Business Studies students reported quite high stress levels and difficulties in reconciling studies with some aspect of the rest of their lives, whilst none of the English Studies students did. A similar intra-institutional divergence was apparent in college B, where Accounting students reported very little stress compared with Graphic Design, though both are doing vocationally-oriented HNCs.
### Table D.5.4
Current benefits of studying (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of benefit</th>
<th>Very Significant</th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>Not Significant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>55</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home life</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social life</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work life</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As far as *current benefits* are concerned, one third of the survey respondents reported ‘very significant’ educational benefits, and nearly the same proportion ‘very significant’ personal benefits. Only 12% reported ‘no significant educational benefits’, and 18% ‘no significant personal benefits’. It is very clear, on the other hand, that there is no immediate financial payoff to studying; 86% said that there had been ‘no significant financial benefit’, and only just over one in ten reported ‘very significant’ benefits to their working lives. However, a further 36% reported some ‘significant’ benefit to their working life, so when allowance is made for the numbers who had no occupation-related motives the picture looks more positive - and as we shall see it changes considerably when we come to anticipated benefits.

Qualitative evidence adds predictable depth to this picture. Thus several students said that they did not expect direct and positive benefits at work in the sense that they would gain promotion or extra pay, but that they would improve their chances of retaining jobs in industries or companies where the threat of redundancy was real. This was especially evident in Shipbuilding Engineering, where fluctuations in demand for the product and the competitive nature of the industry meant that there were regular bouts of downsizing; studying for an HNC would not guarantee continuity of employment, but it would raise the probability of being kept on. One student described how colleagues at work had dropped out of courses because they chose, or were obliged, to maintain overtime commitments, which gave them immediate material benefits but at the possible expense of their future job security.

Benefits to social life did not come through strongly in the survey responses, but the interviews shed more light on how the social impact of studying varied. In Business Studies, most students reported that participation in the course had enhanced their social life; they had made some new friends, and/or the course had enabled them to enter into new conversational arenas from which they had previously felt excluded. No such effect was reported for English Studies. It should be recalled that these are both evening courses operating under the same conditions of segregation and the same time constraints. Such variation is perhaps more surprising when one looks at the course labels, as it would have been reasonable to suppose that studying English Studies would open up more conversational and social opportunities, especially since the reasons for doing it were exclusively non-vocational.

There are variations within this general picture. As we have seen in D.3.5 above, fewer OU students have vocational motives for studying. Nearly one quarter of college students have experienced no personal benefits so far, compared with only 13% of OU students; evidence of greater instrumentalism in the former case. If we remove OU students from the picture, the proportions who have already experienced some benefit to their working lives goes up considerably, to 51% for university students and 72% for college students.
When we turn to future benefits, over two-thirds (68%) anticipate some financial benefits as a result of studying. An even higher proportion - 88% - anticipate career benefit; this of course could be interpreted negatively or defensively, in the sense that studying might help them to avoid redundancy rather than to gain actual reward, but it is a strikingly high figure nonetheless. It outstrips even anticipated personal benefits (82%).

The relationship between motivation and anticipated financial and career benefits merits further comment. 40% of those whose motives were solely personal nevertheless anticipated some financial benefit; and this figure climbs to 59% in respect of career benefit. Rightly or wrongly, many people anticipate some kind of career benefit even though that has not been the purpose of their decision to study. This illuminates the complexity of the relationship, and the difficulty in sorting out the world of work from the personal world. One Business Studies student observed during the group discussion:

“Studying it is doing me more good than actually getting it, because I don’t think it’s going to help me in my career. But I think that the fact that on your c.v. you’re saying you’re studying shows that you’re doing something. Whereas as soon as I get a BA it’s going to be out of date within a year and it doesn’t prove anything when I hit my 50. It would still look better at that stage [if] you want to go on studying, and it suits me now to do it at a slow pace, which is a seven-year period.”

There are few significant gender differences in anticipated benefits, perhaps surprisingly few. Women are slightly more optimistic than men on the whole (just as they experience the costs as being slightly higher), and this includes in relation to career and financial benefits. The only gap of significance is in relation to personal benefits, where 13% more women than men anticipate a positive outcome.

How firmly can anyone make the complex set of calculations required to reach an overall judgement about the value of studying? So many of the factors are subjective ones, and others are highly unpredictable. Let us take the example of a student who works in the health sector:

Gillian is doing a Combined Studies degree, which she started in September 1993. She has nearly finished her Level Three modules and is about to take unpaid leave in order to do her Honours level modules. She will do this partly because she wants to do as well as possible, but also because psychology is only on offer during the day; it will mean borrowing off her mother as well as taking out a student loan. To date, studying has actually impeded her career; as a nurse she would have wanted to move out into community nursing some time ago, but could not have combined this with
part-time study. She manages to combine shiftwork with studying, partly because she asks for shifts which are not popular with others, but at the cost of being occasionally irritable at work, and conversely her preoccupation with her assignments irritates colleagues, who want to ban her from using the ‘A-word’. Gillian gets no assistance with fees, except for help with cash flow - her employer pays them up front and then deducts the money from her pay. She is single so there are no family costs, but on top of the financial, career and personal costs, she feels that she has become more boring - “social life? I think I remember that.” There is no guarantee that her degree will bring her a better paid, or even more interesting job, and there is a contrast between her level-headed willingness to trade short-term costs against expected longer-term benefits, and the actual information on which her calculation of those benefits is based.

It is worth concluding the section by noting the overwhelming optimism on the part of our respondents that the benefits would outweigh the costs: 48% were ‘very confident’ and 44% ‘confident’ that they would, leaving only 8% ‘doubtful’. When this is set against the costs which we have described, it is a remarkable endorsement.

D.5.5  Summary

- Generally, students report themselves as satisfied with their courses, from most points of view. Ratings of ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ are far more common than ‘adequate’ or ‘poor’ (though we acknowledge the possibility of some sample bias).

- There are clear sectoral differences in the perceptions of quality reported. It appears that the OU’s specialised experience in providing for part-timers is reflected in generally higher ratings given by OU students than by those in other sectors.

- Many part-timers are not able to compare their experience with that of full-timers. Where they do, there is a strong feeling that full-timers are better provided for in terms of facilities; however, part-timers remain generally positive about their part-time status and the advantages which this brings.

- Part-time students experience marginality for a number of reasons, practical or cultural. They may have lesser claims on staff attention or module places, and feel isolated amongst full-timers; socially and because they are not following the same sequential curricular paths. Or they may feel marginal for organisational reasons, for example because of the timing of their classes which excludes them from full institutional life. Some of this is an inevitable consequence of their own crowded lives.

- The student experience changes over time: along with motivation, satisfaction and perceptions of quality can change. This highlights the continuous interaction between the student experience, the internal and institutional course contexts and the changing occupational and domestic circumstances. Any simple model of linear progression is unlikely to reflect the reality.

- The part-time mode allows a closer integration between study and work. Students bring past and current experience into the classroom, and constitute active sources of learning for each other, but this is mediated by a number of factors. These include the extent to which past and current work is recognised, especially for credit purposes; the structure of the workplace; and the quality of the teaching.
Part-timers can benefit, relative to full-timers, from having the financial stability of a regular income and the temporal structure of fixed working hours.

Students find their primary sources of support in their social milieux rather than from academic quarters. Academic counselling as a specialised function plays a minimal role, especially for women.

Studying can involve the whole family, indeed the extended family, in transport, childcare, use of domestic space and equipment, and of course time and money.

Significant costs, financial and personal, are reported during the course of study. These are higher for women than for men. The single biggest pressure is time, as most part-timers combine multiple commitments.

Current benefits are not reported to the same degree. However, students are overwhelmingly optimistic that the outcome will be beneficial overall; that at the end, benefits will outweigh the costs.

D.5.6 Emerging issues

Responsibility for the quality of the students’ experience

Student satisfaction levels are quite high, overall. But their experiences as part-timers are naturally influenced by a very complex, and often unpredictable, set of factors, only some of which fall within the purview of the education system or institution. Families and employers can play a large part, and both often bear part of the costs: the former in terms of the personal pressures on the student; the latter more usually in financial terms, but also in time. So a first issue concerns how far and in what ways the system, or the institution, can link up with families and/or employers in order to sustain the quality of the experience. Employer support takes myriad forms. This is inevitable and reasonable, given the variety of workplace circumstances. But the variability is not always logical, and students can feel unreasonably undersupported in ways which undermine motivation. Public discussion on models of good practice, for example on flexibility of working time patterns, would be a help. Links to families is a more problematical area, but some of the link-building which occurs with employers might be extended to include family members.

Status of part-timers

Up to a point, most part-timers seem quite happy with a relatively marginal status. However, there is a set of quite practical issues to do with access to facilities where positive action could do much to confirm their status as full members of the institution, and to provide for the needs of people whose timetables are often very awkward. Staff development may be a significant issue here - ensuring that all staff members who come into contact with part-timers respond to their needs and status. But this is not likely to be solved by individual staff development initiatives; it is more a matter of corporate change. Greater institutional commitment to ensuring that facilities are as available to part-timers as they are to full-timers is a predictable but important issue.
Advantages/benefits: perceptions and reality

Students are generally optimistic about the outcomes of their study, if only in the sense that it will help them preserve their jobs. There is no strong sense from them of impatient demand from employers, actual or prospective, for their greater skills or qualifications. Even where this occurs, as in the health sector, it is seen to amount to a requirement for higher qualifications rather than more skills. So there is a twin danger: of indifferent demand on the one hand, and of credentialism on the other.

Assessment: flexibility and standards

There are some difficulties in applying the same rules in relation to part-timers, in respect of deadlines, and possibly in the more significant arena of standards. Because they have legitimate other demands on them (more so than most full-timers), it may be necessary for the tutors, and perhaps the institution, to make allowances. Moreover, where part-time programmes are discrete, it is possible for a discrete set of standards to emerge, even though the syllabus and the teaching staff may be the same as for full-timers. Different does not necessarily mean worse; on the other hand, it would be doing part-timers no favours to allow a two-tier set of standards to develop.
PART E       CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

CHAPTER E.1   REVIEW OF ISSUES

E.1.1   Introduction

In this concluding Part, we draw together some of the main issues arising from our study. We do not repeat the summaries of our findings, presented in the executive summary and at the end of each chapter, but identify some of the main issues which they raise. We refer back to the questions we posed at the beginning of the report (A.2.1), concerning the demand for and provision of part-time HE, issues of quality, and advantages and disadvantages.

First, we should remind the reader of a number of limits to this research. This is not by way of apology or excuse, but simply a recognition that any piece of research has to be bounded. The constraints are of rather different orders.

We did not investigate postgraduate provision. If we had done, this would have given a very different picture of the distribution of part-time provision between sectors, and between the different institutional categories which we identified. It would have given an even stronger sense of the wide range of provision which ‘HE’ covers, and the forms of employer support. Part-time HE at undergraduate level is part of a diverse but articulated array of educational provision, and most students in our study had taken previous post-school courses; this diverse pattern of provision extends into postgraduate study.

Secondly, we pay only brief attention to continuing education, in either its personal or professional development form. It is likely that the face of part-time provision will change very considerably in the next few years, statistically and in practice, if only because of the accreditation and mainstreaming of much CE. Some of this will involve the recasting of existing provision to form part of undergraduate programmes, and some development of new structures and provision. It is too soon to be able to do more than trace out these possibilities, and it will be for future research to track their development.

Thirdly, and on a rather different tack, we spoke only to current students, and to staff members who had some more or less direct involvement with part-time provision. We did not speak to people who had considered studying and decided against it, nor to those who had enrolled but were no longer studying, either because they completed the course or because they had stopped or dropped out. This has inevitable implications for our comments on the quality of the provision, and on the commitment of institutions to part-time provision. A wider sample would have brought other perspectives to the study.

Fourthly, our case-study institutions, especially the universities, already had a relatively high level of engagement in part-time provision. This is the nature of case study work; it means that our analysis is of universities and colleges which are towards the forefront of any movement towards part-time provision. On the one hand, therefore, elements of our analysis which appear critical must be interpreted in this context; and on the other hand the position of part-time HE in the system as a whole may be substantially less developed than those of our case studies.
E.1.2 Demand and supply

Our analysis of the trends and issues in part-time HE needs to be set in the context of the massive expansion which has taken place in HE over the last decade. Student numbers have grown enormously in both FECs and HEIs, and in both full-time and part-time modes. Demand and supply interact, of course. The growing responsiveness and customer-consciousness of HE and FE make the supply of opportunities increasingly sensitive to actual or latent demands. Conversely, the provision of more places means that more people become interested in the possibility of studying, and the articulation of their latent demand elicits further supply, though not necessarily smoothly so. However this spiral is not fixed, in shape or direction. The relationship between the two can change, for example in the proportions of full-time or part-time places which constitute the supply; and the direction may change in the sense that expansion may be halted or even reversed, for the system as a whole or for different sectors, institutions or modes within it.

We noted in our discussion of the literature the kinds of arguments which have been made in favour of part-time HE. One effect of this value commitment is that the case for part-time provision is customarily given rather more articulation than the arguments against it, or the explanation for why in the UK context it has been so marginal. We cannot claim to have covered a full range of attitudes (see point 3 above: we did not, for example, sample staff members generally for views for and against part-time provision), but one lesson from this study is that the logic of part-time provision is far from pervasive in its grip. Part B confirmed that part-time provision constitutes a relatively low proportion of all HE. Part C showed the factors which influence the thinking of institutional policy-makers, including the general desire to expand supply; the pragmatic necessity of searching for ways of increasing resources for the institution; and a variety of cultural attitudes towards part-time provision and its place in the institution’s mission. We have indicated that these can change quite rapidly, especially in response to changes in government funding, and this makes the provision of part-time HE quite unpredictable. Part D has illustrated how provision may be valued by those involved, without being able to root itself firmly in the institution’s heart.

These institutional factors help us to understand the dynamics of the interaction of supply and demand. They need, however, to be linked to wider factors, notably changes in student finance, and in the labour market generally. Attitudes to HE qualifications are shaped, amongst other things, by the perceived rewards which accrue to them, and their perceived costs, material and otherwise. Arguably we are going through a time of high volatility as far as these are concerned. Firstly, there is great uncertainty about current and future student funding systems, with a number of options being floated. This uncertainty is heightened by the imminence of a general election, and of the Dearing Report. Secondly, there is uncertainty about the demand for part-time HE from employers. This uncertainty is felt at two levels: employers’ support for part-time students, in the form of contributions to fees or time off work, is becoming less dependable and more conditional; and students are often uncertain about the precise occupational returns to part-time study, even if they still expect them to be positive. Thirdly, our study has demonstrated the importance of personal development and of the more ‘generic’ skills, both for students themselves and for employment. But often such skills are recognised and appreciated by students only after they have started to study, and play less role in shaping their initial demand; moreover, we have an impression that such skills are not well recognised, supported or rewarded by existing labour-market arrangements, and that employers are increasingly confining their support to courses whose specific relevance can be demonstrated. This further increases uncertainties about future demand.

All of this means that the future of part-time HE is hard to predict - a typically cautious researchers’ conclusion. However, that caution nevertheless allows a categorical statement of
a quite specific kind, for it is clear that in Scotland part-time provision has not yet put down deep roots throughout the HE system. If we consider its development against the backdrop of the explosion of HE over the last decade, what is significant is the way it has continued to occupy a marginal position. It has grown in absolute numbers, but shrank as a proportion of total numbers, and it remains concentrated in FECs, post-1992 universities and the OU. As far as the traditional core of the HE system is concerned, the present is still full-time.

One way of looking at the future is to permute growth, decline and stability against full-time and part-time provision. Both modes could grow, one could decline and the other grow, or one or other or both could remain stable. A third dimension is the sectoral one, with growth or decline in either mode occurring differentially across sectors. We cannot predict what will happen; we can say that there is likely to be great unevenness in the patterns of future development. This may be no bad thing - indeed, there is a strong case for diversity within the system in relation to part-time provision as in many other respects. But whatever the rhetoric - strong and loud at the moment - for yet more expansion of education and training, there is no certainty that this will translate into effective demand or effective supply. And whatever the rationale - which we believe to be powerful - for strengthening part-time provision as a component of the whole, there is equally no certainty that this will materialise, whatever the intrinsic merits of the case. The arguments will continue to have to be given prominence; more than that, they will have to be backed up by suitable carrots and sticks if they are to prevail.

There are at least two push factors which may increase demand for part-time provision. The first is the growth in part-time employment, now one of the best-known features of the occupational landscape. Whilst it is true that many full-time students take part-time jobs and the growth of these jobs therefore does not benefit part-time students only, it clearly makes part-time study more possible, as people look for combinations of work and study. Secondly, as attention is increasingly focused on the effectiveness of learning, the productive interaction between education and work that part-time study offers can only assume greater prominence, and win support from employers and students alike.

However there is a third factor which is the ‘joker in the pack’ for the future of part-time provision. How much longer will the original administrative/financial distinction between full-time and part-time provision be maintained? In other words, when will the fee-paying discrimination in favour of full-timers finally crumble away? And if this bias were to be removed, how much would demand shift in favour of part-time study? The students in our study felt that time rather than fees were the main disincentive to study, but these were the students whom the present fee structure had not deterred from studying part-time. Finally, if funding changes led to a switch in the balance of demand, how far would the institutions be equipped to respond?

E.1.3 Quality, standards and attainment

We are in a period when discussion of standards is politically and philosophically contentious, and the issue of quality is the source of much internal concern, not least in the impact which approaches to its assessment and assurance have had on academic and administrative workloads. This has brought to the surface concerns about comparability, across subjects and institutions (and across continents, with the franchising of degrees and the marketing of distance learning courses). Suggestions that there might be diversity in the standards of part-time provision are therefore potentially hazardous.
As with supply and demand, there is an inherent interaction between the nature of the student body and the question of quality. There are two aspects here which are central to the question of standards. Firstly, our study has confirmed a general difference between full-time and part-time students which is broadly equivalent to the distinction between young and mature. Whilst there are many mature full-timers, there are relatively few young part-timers. Part-timers therefore generally exhibit most of the advantages and disadvantages of maturity when it comes to studying. Our study shows the former to outweigh the latter very considerably, at least in the eyes of the staff we talked to. Part-timers are more motivated, bring more experience to bear, teach each other more and absorb less unproductive energy on the part of the teacher. They may also be less sure of themselves academically, have less time to explore and develop their ideas and skills, and be less able to build a culture of studenthood.

The second aspect is more specific. It derives from the assumption that learning which allows and draws on interaction with other aspects of life is likely to be more effective than that which does not. This is of course a generalisation, and we acknowledge that there are many courses and subjects where interaction with the outside world is of no advantage and may even impede the in-depth development of thought. A job is the most obvious arena for such interaction, which partly explains why part-time provision is more prominent in subjects which have a direct link to defined occupations - as with several of our case study courses. Doing the accounts is likely to help those studying accountancy, just as delivering nursing care is likely to help those studying health. However the wider contexts of social life offer similar opportunities for more general subjects.

Intrinsically, therefore, the interaction afforded by part-time study offers advantages. Against this must be set the time pressures which often exist on part-time students. This is not a necessary function of part-time study. For example, the students who were on traditional forms of day-release had no particular conflict, any more than being in a job imposed on them; coming to college for the day was like going to work, except possibly more relaxed (this also reflects the fact that those studying in this mode were generally younger and without family responsibilities). But the vast majority - over 80% - of our students were working full-time, and there was therefore a constant claim on their time and energies. This is why it was common to find them satisficing rather than aiming for the highest grades.

We do not consider it possible to offer any research-based view on the narrow issue of whether standards are higher or lower, or indeed different in any salient respect between full-time and part-time. But it is possible to make the point that the value added is likely to be higher for part-time students, even where their attention is divided between the various parts of their lives. In other words, a relatively small amount of teaching can have a very substantial effect. Enrolment at an institution changes a person’s attitude; converts external experiences into potential sources of learning; and converts that person also into a source of learning for others. All of this happens with full-timers, but it is fair to argue that it happens more commonly, and to a greater extent, with part-timers. That said, part-time provision gives an added complexity to the issue of academic standards and the extent to which they can be defined on a singular scale. The diversity it implies adds another item to the quality agenda for the future.

E.1.4 Advantages and disadvantages

We have discussed the advantages and disadvantages of part-time HE, as seen from different perspectives, in several places in this report, notably in Part C (from the perspective of institutional policy-makers), and in chapter D.5. Below we present a diagrammatic overview of the advantages and disadvantages of part-time HE reported by our respondents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Advantages</strong></th>
<th><strong>Disadvantages</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>To the student</strong></td>
<td><strong>To the student</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Access - a chance to study without surrendering job and income</td>
<td>• Time required to study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Career benefits</td>
<td>• Strains on family and social life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal gains - self-confidence, sense of achievement</td>
<td>• Fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Educational benefits - using work and other experience</td>
<td>• Marginality in institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Having a stable financial and temporal framework to study within</td>
<td>• Narrowness: no time to read outside subject, miss social experience of student life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social benefits - meeting other students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To the institution</strong></td>
<td><strong>To the institution</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Achieving mission: e.g. access</td>
<td>• Conflict with mission: e.g. research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Means to expand</td>
<td>• High administrative costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strengthening links with employers and community</td>
<td>• Development and overhead costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Efficient use of resources</td>
<td>• Quality issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Broadening student composition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To individual staff</strong></td>
<td><strong>To individual staff</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Satisfaction from teaching mature and motivated students</td>
<td>• Unsocial hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing new teaching approaches</td>
<td>• Increased workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contact with employers and occupational practice</td>
<td>• More demanding students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To employers</strong></td>
<td><strong>To employers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More skilled workforce</td>
<td>• Time off job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rewarding loyalty</td>
<td>• Fees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The question “What are the (dis)advantages of part-time higher education?” can have several reference points. The point of comparison might be with full-time study or with no study at all, or it might be interpreted in a non-comparative way. We do not try to separate these out; there is often a running together of different factors.

A strong and deceptively simple framework for analysing advantages and disadvantages can be constructed using the two dimensions of time and money. We concluded the section on demand above with the prospect of the collapse of the discrimination in student funding between full-time and part-time students. Part-timers receive less of a public subsidy than full-timers, so that one clear advantage of part-time study is to the state. In this sense, part-time participation allows the externalisation of costs, with the student assuming the burden in place of the public purse. This is undoubtedly the case, and we have at least illustrated the types of stress which can follow from this. But on both time and money the issue is not straightforward.
Both dimensions have quantitative and qualitative aspects. There are more or less simple calculations to be made about the amount of money spent on studying, directly or in income foregone; and similarly about the amount of money to be gained, though this is necessarily more speculative. Yet even with money there are qualitative aspects, for example in the relative significance of different costs and benefits according to the social or lifecycle location of the student, especially where it is the household rather than the individual income which is at stake.

Time is naturally more complex, and we can only illustrate here the way in which this dimension can be applied. One of the more surprising discoveries was the way in which part-timers can enjoy the advantage of a strong time structure, at several different levels. At the daily and weekly level because most of them were working, and working full-time, the time structure was supplied by their job. But employment also gives many part-timers a sense of continuity, however precarious the job may be - and even where their study is not linked at all to the job. This is in contrast to the full-timers, who may be preoccupied with what the future will bring for them, and whether they should bring the future forward by leaving their studies. In short, and as a generalisation, although full-timers necessarily have the edge on part-timers as far as duration and speed of study are concerned (though not by as much as might be supposed), the position is reversed when it comes to temporal perspective.

The diagram above summarises the advantages and disadvantages to the different parties concerned. There remains the question of the extent to which part-time education generates a win-win set of circumstances, or whether it favours one party at the expense of others. We have already said that in general the state can expect to be a gainer, which prompts the query why there is not stronger official support for part-time provision. For the other parties, the answer may well depend on the form of part-time provision. Thus employers are shifting away from day-release, primarily because of a clearer appreciation of the relatively high staff costs compared with the payment of fees for study done in the employee’s own time. This constitutes a partial transfer of costs from employer to employee, but the deal may still be to the advantage of both. We have provided the occasional insight into consequences for family life; this is an area where further in-depth investigation would be particularly helpful.

The complexity of assessing advantages and disadvantages can be gauged if we point out that at least the following need to be taken into account in any comprehensive calculation: the criteria - implicit and explicit, material and non-material - used by the participants; the range of people regarded as having an interest (the effects on families, as we have just observed, are often ignored); the extent to which their perceptions are based on fact or supposition; and the extent to which they are liable to change, both during the study and after it has concluded. Finally, we must reiterate that ‘part-time’ covers a range of types of provision, which may generate different sets of advantage and disadvantage and the balance between them.

Having said all that, and bearing in mind the reservations made at the beginning of this Part, we are happy to conclude this report by saying that we have no doubt that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, and that we are confident that the more attention is focused on them, and the more they are compared with full-time education, the stronger will be the case for enhanced part-time provision.
REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY


Scottish Community Education Council (1994) *Scotland as a Learning Society*, Edinburgh: SCEC.


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