Part-time undergraduates in higher education: a literature review

Prepared for HECSU to inform
Futuretrack: Part-time students

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1 PART TIME UNDERGRADUATES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

1.1 Introduction

Part-time students have been recognised for some time as a very significant section of the HE student population. The Dearing Report noted that the overall proportion of part-time students in HE was approximately 37%, and that this had remained constant for some time (NCIHE, 1997). Davies suggests that since the mid 1990s part-time enrolments have been increasing faster than full-time (Davies, 1999). This section of the student population is extremely heterogenous, varying from each other in numerous respects, notably the qualification aimed for, the proportion of full-time equivalent credits studied at a particular time, the level of study, the length of the full course, and how study is funded. Details of the characteristics of current and recent part-time students can be found in work by Mason (2007) and Ramsden (2006).

However, as pointed out by a number of authors (e.g. Tight, 1990, Brennan et al. 1999, Davies, 1999, Woodley, 2004), until recently there has been very little specific research on the experiences of this group of students. This has begun to be rectified, though as this review will show, although more is now known about the aspirations and study experience of part-time students, there is still very limited research on careers and career outcomes of this group.

The review was commissioned by the Higher Education Careers Service Unit and the Department for Innovation, Universities, and Skills as background to the Birkbeck, University of London and National Institute of Economic and Social Research Project entitled *Futuretrack: Part-time students* on the career decision-making and career development of HE students. It is restricted to part-time undergraduates, which is the focus of that study.

This review focuses on the following aspects of the literature on part-time students:

1. part-time students' reasons for studying and their experience of study

2. links between part-time students and employment in terms of employer support, negotiating work and study, and career decision making in relation to their studies.

3. careers services' and employers' approaches and responses to workers engaged in part-time studies

1.2 Methodology

This review was not carried out as a formal systematic review but literature was searched from a wide range of sources. The search strategy consisted of following up references in published sources and grey literature, which had already been identified, in preparation for the project. Websites of organisations concerned with developments in higher education, careers guidance, career management, and careers advice were searched, as were general and specialised databases and online catalogues of appropriate institutions. Search terms focused on part-time students and related terms such as mature students, widening participation, lifelong learning, distance learning, and on careers guidance. Potential studies identified

which were not centrally concerned with part-time students were then searched electronically if possible, or otherwise searched through indexes and contents pages to see if any reference was made to part-time students or part-time studies.

Inclusion criteria for the review consisted of virtually any reference to undergraduate part-time students or part-time modes of learning, which did not specifically *exclude* them from the work in question. Thus empirical studies of students were included if they were of part-time students only or of both part-time and full-time students. Studies of full-time students exclusively were excluded. Sometimes the type of student in such studies was not explicitly specified, but the focus was on the form of delivery, for example distance or work-based learning. In such cases, part-time study was inferred from the content of the study. Some studies referred to mature students and increasing diversity (in various ways) in the student population so a pragmatic approach was taken to the inclusion of such studies that had relevance in relation to part-time students.

In the case of empirical studies of part-time students, the review draws out the main issues discussed and some of the central findings and their implications. It does not seek to evaluate the validity of their findings.

The search for literature addressing careers guidance, careers management, and employers' views explicitly in relation to part-time students yielded surprisingly few results. So although one of the main aims of the literature review was to examine that area, the results and findings are sparse – an important finding in its own right.

Three main types of studies were identified. The first were research studies of part-time students' views and experiences from a range of disciplinary perspectives and concomitant difference of emphasis; the second were policy reviews and analysis of part-time studies with a range of policy foci, from concern with widening participation to employability and careers guidance strategies. A third type consisted of studies informing professional practice and development that were intended to be more practical than analytical.

2   STUDIES OF STUDENTS

Although the policy pressure which has informed recent attention to part-time study has been primarily in relation to issues of funding and cost, as well as barriers to entry, there are relatively few studies, which consider wider issues that affect part-time students. These include factors affecting quality and nature of their experience and ability to study such as cost, time constraints, support, and employment situation. Other factors include the motivation to study part-time rather than full-time, the triggers and barriers back to study such as support and confidence in their ability to succeed, and their responses to different modes of delivery and pedagogy. Some, more sociological studies focus on the impact or prospect of part-time study on students' identity.

Wide-ranging surveys or discussions of the characteristics of part-time students recognise the diversity of the part-time student population, including the fact that around a third are already graduates (Mason 2007, Callender et al. 2006 (a), 2006 (b), Davies 1999, Ramsden 2006). However, despite this, one of the striking findings of the review is that within the broader literature on students in HE, part-time study is often subsumed under discussions of widening participation and barriers to access, and yet, within the studies of widening participation little

attention is given to part-time students. An exception to this is the review of barriers to widening participation by Gorard et al. (2006) who acknowledge the distinctive role of part-time study as a particular means of widening participation, and the tendency to ignore this group of students in policy making and research.

Because of the diversity of part-time students, most studies which do deal with this group only select for examination a sub-group of the entire part-time population. For example, Jones' 2003 study concerns access to HE of people with few prior qualifications within disadvantaged wards in South Wales, while the study by Feinstein et al. (2007) and colleagues of Birkbeck and Open University students show that 23% and 18% respectively of the students surveyed were graduates, with the proportions rising significantly for students gaining undergraduate certificates or diplomas (51% and 22% respectively). Because of this, conclusions of such studies are not easily transferable to the full range of population groups engaged in part-time study.

Another important factor to note about these studies is that even where the study deals explicitly with part-time students, the "part-timeness" of their studies may not be the central focus of attention, but other factors, notably students' characteristics as mature students may be at the heart of the study. (e.g. Jones 2003).

The following sub-sections address factors affecting different stages of the part-time students' experience, starting with factors shaping the entry to study, including motivation and barriers to access, and recruitment strategies, followed by the experience of study itself, and finally with the consequences of part-time study on students' lives and careers. Few studies cover this whole ground, though longitudinal studies offer fascinating insight into the links between motivation to study, courses selected, and different kinds of outcomes (e.g. Jamieson, 2007, Adshead and Jamieson, 2007).

2.1 Entering part-time HE

2.1.1 Recruitment

The review found very few studies of access that pertained to part-time students at Higher Education level. The Open University has responded to the pressures to widen access and participation with new models of work-based learning (Dey et al. 2004, Hart et al. 2006). Dey at al. report on an initiative by the Open University to develop an open and work-based distance-learning route to Diploma in Social Work aimed at students with limited formal and higher education and attainment. The students often have practical experience but little theoretical background. The authors note that this programme attracts 10% more men than the average Diploma in Social Work and a high proportion of students working in residential care together with 6% more students from black and minority ethnic groups. The programme is run through a consortium that includes both statutory social work departments and voluntary organisations such as Barnados.

Another project that focuses more explicitly on recruitment of part-time students is the *Union Learning Clubs Project* (ULCP) partnership, set up in Manchester between Unionlearn, an organisation whose remit is to help unions open up learning opportunities for their members,

AimHigher[1], and the Open University (Hart et al. 2006). ULCP encourages union members who have not previously participated in higher education, to access a variety of Open University short courses at year 1 undergraduate level.

These two studies are both about work-study links, which are of course, of particular relevance for workers who want to return to study but want to continue in full-time employment.

2.1.2   Deciding to study part-time: motivations and barriers

This section discusses barriers and motivation to *begin* studying, rather than to continue. There are several questions here which need to be disentangled but which often are not in the literature, particularly in terms of why students chose to study part-time rather than full-time, and what the triggers are to the decision to return to study and/or to study part-time. There is a difference between the reasons which part-time students give for wanting to study, and their reasons for wanting to study part-time. Of studies which have explored the latter question, not all have explored the former and vice versa.

The longitudinal study by Feinstein et al. (2007) retrospectively surveyed 3000 graduates of part-time degrees. It explored the characteristics of part-time mature students at Birkbeck University of London and at the Open University in order to find out why the graduates chose to study, what economic and social benefits they gained, and whether there was a relationship between the characteristics of graduates, the reasons they gave for studying, the types of courses they studied and the benefits they experienced afterwards. However, the survey does not address the question of why they chose to study *part-time*. A limitation of this study is that both motivations and benefits were elicited *after* graduation so that respondents may have reported similar reasons for and outcomes of study. Of the students surveyed, Feinstein et al. found that the most common positive responses to suggested reasons for studying were interest in the subject, self-development, and to gain a recognised qualification (over 80% for each reason at both institutions)[2]. The authors carried out factor analysis on motivations and found that enjoyment, progression, and personal development were more likely to be reported than finding a new job, improving their current job, and employment requirements. Enjoyment was more important among Birkbeck students who wanted to meet people, presumably reflecting attendance rather than distance systems of learning, with concomitant opportunities for socialising.

Further cluster analysis of motivations showed that "enjoyment" reasons were most popular among students who were not funded by their employers. Such students were most clustered in "improving the current job" rather than in "changing job". At the same time, students who were carers when they began their studies were very motivated by employment reasons. Schuller et al.'s earlier study in Scotland of 556 part-time students found similar personal reasons for studying, such as interest in the subject or personal development, as well as vocational reasons, particularly for enhancing their promotion prospects or to protect them

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[1] Aim Higher is the main government strategy to widen HE participation among underrepresented groups by raising educational aspirations. It is particularly focused on school-age teenagers.

[2] Only 71% of Birkbeck graduates gave getting a recognised qualification as a motivation for studying.

from redundancy (Schuller et al. 1999). However, like Feinstein et al. this study also did not explore why these students chose to study part-time.

Callender et al. (2006 (a)) investigated both why students wanted to study and why they wished to study part-time in a similar sized (2654) sample to that of Feinstein et al. However, they used a broader sample survey of current part-time students from old and new universities and HEIs, the Open University and FE colleges. The reasons given for studying were fairly similar to those in the study by Feinstein et al. In the analysis of the distribution of preferences, Callender et al. also included the prior level of qualification and respondents' intensity of study, namely what proportion of a full-time course students were undertaking. They found that interest and gaining qualifications and skills were not mutually exclusive, though instrumental reasons were the most important, particularly for those with low or no prior qualifications.

Callender et al (2006 (a)) found the reasons for part-time study were overwhelmingly financial; 82% said they could not afford to give up their job. Family commitments were also very significant especially for lone parents. Nearly 2/3 of the sample found part-time study "more convenient", especially distance learners, students over 40, and those with dependent children. Part-time provision is thus especially important for those who cannot move away to study either because of employment or family responsibilities.

Stratton et al. (2004) challenge the view that direct financial considerations are paramount in deciding on the mode of study. In a study of a sample of part- and full-time US college enrollers, they found that age and contextual economic factors especially the local unemployment rate rather than cost considerations *per se* affected the choice of mode of study once the decision to study had been taken. Older students and those in areas with lower rates of unemployment were more likely to decide to study part-time. Women with school age children were slightly more likely to choose full-time study. It would seem that for women, marriage and the age of children were more likely to affect the decision to study rather than the mode of study. Though Stratton et al.'s methodology may be replicable in the UK, the demographic and institutional differences between the two countries may make their findings less significant in the UK.

Fuller (2001) focuses on disadvantaged adults returning to study part-time. She argues that such students' motivation to return to study reflects the opportunity to realise aspirations which are not narrowly vocational. They see HE as a resource for their labour market position in the face of uncertainty, or to broaden career options not just through the acquisition of skills but also through personal growth (Fuller, 2001).

Nearly all studies that consider motivations to study consider them as attributes of atomised individuals. However, Schuller et al. (1999), from the qualitative part of their study, suggest that the motivation to study is not easy to separate from the decision to do so. The latter may be much more collective, with family encouragement playing a significant role. Similarly, some students have described being encouraged by employers to take an HE course. Schuller et al. suggest that some students experience this as pressure, and feel they could not get promotion without higher level qualifications. The nature of such pressure would merit further research.

Other studies of barriers and motivation have also concentrated on the less qualified groups of entrants. Davies et al. (2002,) surveyed 866 full and part-time mature entrants and a smaller number of "potential entrants" who could not be differentiated between part- and full-

time. Of the entrants, part-time respondents constituted 36% of the total. However, comparison between these two groups was not central to their analysis though important differences between them were highlighted. Motivating factors were similar between full-time and part-time students, with career prospects and interest, the most commonly rated primary motivations. There was also a difference between the two groups in terms of perceived barriers to enter HE. Part-time students were significantly more likely to have seen lack of time as a barrier to study, with few other clear differences in terms of barriers.

Davies and Williams (2001), and Davies et al. (2002), also address more subjective factors influencing the decisions to enter higher education which may act as barriers to entry. They refer to this as the "fragility of decision making" and the risk that is involved in the complex balance between perceived rewards and the costs of study, particularly in time and money, and the difficulty of translating motivation into self-belief. Other barriers are risks of failure on a number of dimensions, in terms of unachieved rewards, or lack of appropriate support services. These considerations are particularly great for people with children, jobs, or major financial commitments. Unfortunately, Davies and Williams (2001), and Davies et al. (2002) did not fully explore the factors affecting perception of risk or how or whether these differed between full and part-time students or according to students' age, gender, or subject area.

2.2 The experience of study

2.2.1 Identity, transition and continuity

Inevitably many of the issues shaping decision making discussed above carry on after entry to an HE course, and shape students' experience of their studies. In addition, limited evidence from mainly small-scale and qualitative studies of part-time students suggest that students from non-traditional backgrounds and disadvantaged groups face considerable challenges to their identities which can affect their experience and progress even in part-time or distance learning courses Bamber & Tett (2000), Jones (2003). Bowl (2001) described a disjunction between the ethos of different HE institutions where working class black women had undertaken full-time and part-time higher education courses, and their own experience in a qualitative study of community-based, flexible access to higher education project in Birmingham.

To some extent these studies echo other studies concerned with the problems faced by "non-traditional" students in HE generally. However, several writers adopt a positive stance on such life changes or "transitions" involved in entering higher education rather than seeing them simply as barriers. For example, Fuller focuses on "non-traditional" students over 30 (both part- and full-time) as active agents exercising their capacity to choose new routes in life by making "mid-life transitions" (Fuller 2007). Other writers discuss the need for poorly qualified students to develop a new sense of identity in order to progress, and suggest that it can be facilitated if student needs are appropriately addressed (Bamber & Tett 2000, Jones 2003).

Bamber and Tett (2000) studied a community based project to enable working class, disabled, and minority ethnic local activists in Lothian to enter HE. They observed that to have a "successful experience of HE", students for whom HE was an "alien environment" needed to negotiate a series of stages or transformations. These involved changing their perceptions of their entitlement to HE, their approaches to academic knowledge and the relationship

between theory and practice, and their sense of what it meant for them to become "professionals". For this to happen, they argued, requires the provision of sustained support to the students concerned. This can come in the form of intensive practice, help and feedback from tutors, introductory level courses and opportunities to work collectively (Bamber and Tett 2000, 2001). Similar findings are reported from other community, union or workplace linked projects (Jones 2003, Dey et al. 2004, Hart & Nelson 2006).

These studies focus on or include part-time students, but their concerns are less about part-time study than about retention and support for students starting with low levels of qualifications. The community based projects described have in common a rootedness in students' own experience and environment which may favour learning, despite very different forms of learning support. A rather different study by Buckler et al. (2006).on developing study skills for professional entrants with non-traditional backgrounds also notes the importance of ensuring that students do not feel isolated while developing the capacity for independent work.

Gorard et al. (2006) discuss barriers to widening participation in HE in relation to both part-time and full-time students. They provide further examples of community based projects to facilitate entry to under-represented groups. Interestingly, because their study addresses widening participation in relation to both full-time and part-time study, they also ask whether part-time study could help younger working class people access HE but found no evidence to suggest that it would be suitable or attractive to this group.

All these studies are concerned with widening the participation in HE of underrepresented groups. However, as the data on part-time mature students show, a significant proportion of them do not belong to underrepresented groups, and already have first degrees or other higher education qualifications (e.g. Callender, 2006 (a), Mason, 2007). Their entry into HE may represent less of a "mid-life transition" or identity challenge than many writers suggest. Instead they conform more closely to conceptions of lifelong learning which suggest *continuity* rather than dislocation, fracture or even mid-life transition with its connotation of transformation. This is particularly true of qualified professionals wishing to upgrade their qualifications (e.g. Bredee 2006, Brennan et al. 1999, 2000, Feinstein et al. 2007, Osborne et al, 2004, Schuller et al. 1999).

Osborne et al. (2004) explored negative and positive factors that influence mature applicants' decision making when applying to higher education, including the decision whether to study part- or full-time. They identify six discrete though often overlapping groups: 'delayed traditional students', 'late starters' following a life changing event, single parents, 'careerists', 'escapees' and 'personal growers'. For some the decision to study represented a life transformation, though particularly for the 'careerists' (those currently in employment and studying in order to progress in their careers) and the 'personal growers' (pursuing intrinsic study goals), it also represented continuity in the sense of moving on as much as changing direction. Careerists were particularly likely to study part-time.

In their study of Scottish part-time HE students, Schuller et al. (1999) found that few part-time students considered themselves as 'students' either because they saw studying as part of their jobs, in the traditional model of day release, or because other major commitments took priority in their lives (Schuller et al. 1999 pp141,152-3). As a result they did not feel excluded from the mainstream of student life, nor did they have to deal with conflicting identities. However, other authors regard the absence of a student identity as problematic.

Cloonan (2004) suggests that the shift from being a member of a learning community to being a "solo learner" through distance or other forms of flexible learning undermines the acquisition of a "learner's identity" (Cloonan, 2004 p184).

Similar findings come from a study dealing with a very different group of students but one which is also not disadvantaged. In a small study for Aston University to identify factors which would boost recruitment into part-time foreign language degrees, Ulrich surveyed part-time language delivery in ten universities (Ulrich 2004). She found that the students studying foreign languages on part-time courses had very different social characteristics and expectations from those recruited in the widening participation projects referred to above. Their motivation to study languages derived from general interest rather than hopes of career enhancement; they tended to come from privileged backgrounds and often had previous degrees. Unsurprisingly, minority ethnic groups were underrepresented among them. Potential future part-time language students were also interviewed to elicit their needs and preferences. It was found that they not anxious about academic challenges, and expected "to take responsibility over their study and time arrangements and be treated as adults" (Ulrich 2004, p4).

These kinds of findings no doubt reflect extreme ends of a spectrum but do suggest that part-time study poses different types of personal and "cultural" challenges for different types of students depending on their social background and situation, their reason for study, their prior qualifications, previous exposure to HE, and the type of course they are following. None of the literature reviewed dealt with how the diverse meanings that students bring to part-time study actually play out within particular courses and teaching and learning situations.

2.2.2 The learning experience

A key source of data on students' learning experiences and satisfaction with HE is the National Student Survey. This survey includes both full and part-time students. However, the 2006 survey did not include a sufficient number of part-time students for separate analysis in reports on the survey findings. It is hoped that in future NSS there will be enough part-time respondents to allow for some comparative analysis of part and full time students' experiences of HE – the focus of the NSS.

Generally, it is difficult to separate the learning experience from the preconceptions and positive and negative "baggage" that students bring with them into part-time study, or from the financial and social circumstances which can either facilitate or impede it. Some studies show very clearly how these factors serve to shape learning experiences. For example, in a case study of a mature part-time woman student, Gass (2007) illustrates the impact of travelling over 50 miles twice a week to university, and how childcare commitments curtail her day. Both her participation in student life and her choice of modules and access to extra activities provided for the course are constrained. Gass (2007) emphasised the importance of community based higher education to extend choices for women.

In some courses and contexts the pedagogy or form of delivery is tailored to specific needs so that some of the conflicts of activities and time constraints can be avoided. However extra-curricular conflicts and pressures always form a backdrop to any discussion of learning experience and need to be borne in mind.

Jones' (2003) qualitative study linked to the same community-based project as Gass', focuses on similar factors which serve as barriers to success among adult learners into part-time higher education in disadvantaged communities in South Wales. In particular, it addresses the role of fear of failure in students with few or no qualifications who entered part-time higher education on a community-based project for Level 4 (Cert HE) education. He found that the students with the highest fear of failure were those with the lowest qualifications, and that the longer the period without education, the greater the fear of failure became. Because this fear of failure diminished with success, the key concern of the study was to identify the factors which helped people with significant lack of confidence to continue. The study identified high levels of support from peers within the small communities where the project took place, as well as from staff, in addition to short courses dovetailed to school terms and prompt feedback, as further factors which helped people overcome significant fears on entry and often continue onto more advanced levels of higher education.

Part-time study comes in different forms, and often any one student experiences different types of delivery within a single course or programme. For instance, distance learning institutions like the OU also hold group and individual tutorials, day and residential schools for their regular degrees. Their widening participation initiatives include other combinations which link work-placed learning with different models of distance learning support (Hart and Nelson 2006, Nixon et al. 2006). Support in distance learning is seen by several writers as crucial. Bray et al. (2007) argue that distance learners need to have opportunities to participate in active learning. Cloonan (2004) questions the claims made for ICT as "flexible" pedagogy, and also argues that electronic delivery requires more, rather than less student support.

Apart from the OU and work-based learning, most students do have to attend HE institutions physically in order to follow their course. Callender et al. (2006(a)) found that 72% of their English sample were on traditional courses delivered through face-to-face contact, while 28% were on mainly distance learning courses. Of these, over half were studying at the OU.

Callender et al.'s (2006 (a), 2006 (b)) surveys indicated that 47% of part-time students in England and 60% in Wales were taught alongside full-time students. Approximately half the students they surveyed in each study also experienced other varied forms of delivery such as day release, workplace learning, or day schools, with day release representing just under 25% of all part-time study. There is no parallel systematic study of how students *experience* these different modes of delivery, so this information has had to be gleaned from a range of studies dealing with particular projects or particular forms of delivery.

The most comprehensive UK study of part-time students which addresses the student learning experience is that of Schuller et al.(1999) in Scotland. Although this study was carried out over ten years ago, because of the lack of subsequent studies of the same breadth and depth, it remains a valuable source of information. It is based on an analysis of four Scottish HEIs, selected because they include a significant number of part-time students, and which offered a variety of part-time courses or programmes at advanced (post-graduate) or first degree level. The HEIs comprised a small and a large FE college, and one pre- and one post-1992 university. 250 part-time students at each of these institutions were surveyed as well as 250 Scotland based OU students. In-depth interviews were also carried out with staff and students on two courses or programmes in each institution, and if possible with employers and students' families.

This study asked students to compare the quality of full-time with part-time provision. Although over half either did not answer this question or did not know, nearly all those who felt there was a difference believed that full-time students were better provided for than part-time. Unfortunately Schuller et al. did not explore what this may have meant for students. However Bowl (2001), in her small qualitative study of mature, mainly minority ethnic non-traditional women entrants to part-time and full-time higher education, offered vivid images from a student who felt that a part-time course offered little support and was "stapled onto the margins of higher education." This student felt that tutors, who had already worked all day in full-time teaching jobs, "arrive, over-worked and tired. Do part-time students get the `left-overs'?" she asked (Bowl 2001). As with many of these studies, the description is powerful but there is no basis for comparison.

Schuller et al.'s (1999) survey reported that part-time students were satisfied on most of 11 variables, of which eight related directly to the learning experience. These were course content, unit choice, quality of learning material, flexible study hours, friendly atmosphere, support services and library book availability, Only the last two of these factors did not receive an overall approval rating (Schuller et al. 1999). Lack of library books is a frequent complaint of full-time students, and may be exacerbated for part-timers unless compensated for in some other way. In itself it is also not a very good indicator of satisfaction. For example, library book availability had a very low rating among OU students, but has little meaning as an indicator since OU students receive all necessary materials for study as part of their course.

Schuller et al's survey addressed many of the issues discussed here that have emerged in other studies of part-time students, such as sense of belonging, confidence, inadequate tutor support, course content, quality of teaching, and appropriateness of learning materials and form of delivery However, studies that addressed pedagogy from the student's point of view were, with the exception of Schuller, invariably concerned with students from underrepresented groups.

Buckler et al. (2006) reported an action research study to compare and develop study skills for mature students with few formal qualifications on part-time, mainly vocational, Foundation or Honours degrees or access programmes. The study addresses the particular needs of this non-traditional type of student, noting their anxiety and lack of confidence in relation to study. The authors identified a detailed study skills framework for progression, which distinguish between mechanical (technical) skills, personal skills, and academic skills. Their recommendations focus not just on the place of study skills within the curriculum but also on the need for a tutor with responsibility for this curriculum and for staff development in this area. The development of study skills also represents a movement from more to less support as students become independent learners and reduce their initial dependence on tutors.

Bamber and Tett (2001, 2004) focus on how teaching staff can support non-traditional students in their general learning. They argue that universities must accept that the implications of offering access to non-traditional students does not end, but rather begins, at the point of entry. This means providing sustained support to students throughout the course in relation to the external and internal factors that affect the learning process. The Lothian Apprentice Scheme Trust (LAST) project included a number of factors to support students with negative prior learning experiences. These included premises where students had access to books and course materials, emphasis on individual tuition and guidance, flexible

assessment procedures, and encouragement for students to develop systems of mutual support. In addition the authors stress that non-traditional students need introductory level courses, intensive practice, written feedback on draft work, and coaching on how to improve work prior to submission and course materials set at an appropriate intellectual level. They recognise that this kind of approach is highly labour intensive and recognise that it is unlikely to be replicated on a large scale.

Tutor feedback as an issue is rarely mentioned though Bray (2007) notes the importance of timely feedback in distance learning to reduce the isolation inherent in this form of study. Implicit in Bray's concern is the support generated by communication with the student.

The concept of support appears in most accounts of the student experience, largely in relation to the problems of non-traditional students returning to study, but as Castles (2004) notes, while most research has identified support or lack of it, it is not defined nor is it shown how it affects persistence or drop-out. She suggests that more research is needed into both the meaning of the term and what students perceive as 'support'. Support was often presented in psychological terms, emphasising students' sense of belonging (Kember et al, 1995) or in terms of helping students overcome their lack of confidence and fears of inadequacy in an alien environment' (Bowl, 2001). One of the case studies presented by Bowl described a student facing serious financial problems who complained that there was no support from the institution, but it is not clear whether she meant moral support and practical support to help with the results of these problems, for example a sympathetic ear and an extension on an assignment, or practical support to resolve the problems such as financial support from a hardship fund or advice with benefit problems. In addition, sustained support as discussed in the widening participation projects referred to above, certainly includes pedagogical as well as psychological understanding and intervention.

2.2.3 *Family as a factor in part time study*

All studies of part-time students recognise that study is only part of students' lives, and that it is necessarily integrated with other activities, notably paid work and family responsibilities. These may conflict with the demands of study or provide support, or do both in a range of ways. Both family demands and employment are the main reasons given for choosing part-time over full-time study. In Callender et al's (2006 (a), 2006 (b)) surveys, domestic and caring responsibilities were cited as reasons for part-time study by 45% and 47% of respondents respectively.

Family pressures are frequently referred to in general discussions about mature students, especially in relation to conflicting demands on time and money. However, those studies which investigated the relationship between family and studying part-time identified both positive and negative relationships between study and the family, whether family of origin or procreation, in terms of pressure or support. Caring for dependants, especially children, is undoubtedly the biggest domestic pressure. At the same time, several studies comment on the importance of children in motivating study, especially but not at all exclusively, for lone parents in trying to create a better life for family, in order for parents to become better role models, or to be able to obtain more family-friendly and secure jobs. Jones also found that children provided a motive for students to keep going when it was tough, (Osborne et al. 2004, Jones, 2007)

Schuller et al.'s Scottish survey reported that 84% of students said that their family was supportive of their studies. They also commented on how much collective effort by families is involved in part-time study, in terms of time and money, childcare, or other forms of input including proof-reading, typing or editing, and even workspace within the domestic environment. Schuller et al. distinguish between "concurrent" and "sequential" ways of meshing part-time study with domestic activities. Concurrent meshing involved studying alongside family and often in the same physical space while sequential meshing meant that studying took place when space or time was released within the domestic environment (Schuller 1999 p161). Morgan-Klein and Gray, (2000) show in more detail how patterns of meshing reflect differences stemming from gender and employment situation of students as well as of the nature of institutional provision.

Feinstein et al. (2007) suggest that part-time study improves "family functioning", in spite of the burdens it imposes. However, in spite of the recognition of family tensions and conflicting demands faced by part-time students, with the limited exception of Feinstein et al. (2007) and Schuller et al. (1999), there was remarkably little attention in the studies reviewed to how part-time study affected relationships.

Several studies show a positive impact on children's learning, a finding echoed and amplified in Jones' study of the Community University of the Valleys partnership, which found that children of students became more interested in learning, and that parents who had studied empathised more with their children's study problems, and became involved in school activities despite starting with very negative attitudes towards schooling (Feinstein, 2007, p77, Jones, 2007).

Osborne et al's (2004) study of mature students distinguishes a range of positive and negative factors affecting the decision to study among different categories of students. They found that "delayed traditional students"[3] often benefited financially if they were able to live with their parents. Osborne et al. uniquely recognise that men's lives are also gendered and that male breadwinners face gendered dilemmas. "Careerists", especially men with partners and children, experienced a tension between study and family life as studying was added to employment as time away from the family. "Lone Parents" had to juggle responsibilities the most between work, study and family, but also saw their children as the rationale for making the effort.

Some studies explored the problems of childcare and concomitant "time poverty" as serious constraints on study. This is highly gendered and is especially severe for single parents when combined with financial poverty (Bowl 2001, Callender et al.2006 (a), 2006 (b)). By contrast, the Welsh widening participation project with its short courses, and school friendly times was seen by its participants fitting in conveniently with childcare demands (Jones, 2003).

A rational response to "time-poverty" among full-time students would appear to be part-time study, but the organisation of such study did not always make it an attractive option, nor can it guarantee to overcome time poverty. Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) report full-time inner city students moving in and out of studies, and swapping full-time for part-time studies. However this pattern was barely reported in the other studies reviewed here.

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[3] Probably less likely to be studying part-time

Callender reported that over 70% of part-time students in her study found their course more time consuming than they expected, and 77% were "too busy at home", second only to "too busy at work." They suggest that many students were not well-informed in advance of the time commitments which their course involved (Callender et al. 2006 (a)). Time pressures were also exacerbated by low qualifications because it took students longer to complete assignments.

Schuller et al. (1999 pp162-164) gave a detailed case example of the logistics of part-time study in a family which attempted to integrate domestic and work demands with those of studying. Using Schuller et al's and other data, Morgan Klein and Gray (2000) tried to develop a typology of flexibility to explore the relationship between the responses to demands of study, work and domestic commitments. They argue that "achieving flexibility in one category such as work and learning may depend on the flexibility of other – typically domestic – arrangements" and that this may be differentiated by gender and social class (Morgan-Klein and Gray, 2000). In spite of the importance of this issue, none of the studies showed the impact on performance or retention of the balance of family pressures and family support.

2.3   Employment and Part-time study

A striking characteristic of part-time students is that most are in employment, predominantly full-time but with a significant proportion part-time. Very few students in part-time study were found to be unemployed per se (Feinstein et al. 2007, Woodley 2004, Brennan et al. 1999) though there were somewhat larger numbers who were not in employment, particularly women with caring responsibilities (Callender 2006 (a), 2006 (b), Bredee 2006). Bredee grouped the students in his study into four clusters based primarily on working status. Two groups were working full-time, but one group planned to stay with their employer, while the other hoped to change their jobs as a result of studying. A third group were not in work, and the fourth were in part-time work , frequently with young dependent children.

Students not in employment during their part-time studies can be divided into those who hope to gain qualifications to improve future employment prospects, as against those who are studying for enjoyment rather than for career purposes. Both groups are frequently combined. For instance, non-working students in Bredee's (2006) study were the cluster with the lowest household income, and with the oldest mean age - almost half were over 50. A third were hoping to get a job, and two fifths planning to continue studying.

Bredee's (2006) report does not contain full cross-tabulations but it may be that those wanting a job comprised the younger members of this cluster and may consist largely of single parents of young children, while the older two fifths are also the ones who are studying for interest rather than for employment reasons. Feinstein et al. (2007) found that about a quarter of the students in their sample were not economically active, but this included both "unemployed" and "carers", who might be seeking employment immediately or following the course, as well as "retired". Carers, particularly, might also be involved in some kind of informal employment.

All the surveys of part-time students considered the relationship between study and employment in terms of a number of factors such as motivation, employment status at the start of study, during study, and after completion (Bredee 2006, Brennan et al. 1999,

Callender et al. 2006 (a), 2006 (b), Feinstein et al. 2007, Schuller et al. 1999). Some studies also investigated the influence of study on career progression or change, and subsequent changes in income (Brennan et al 1999, Feinstein et al. 2007). Brennan and colleagues (1999, 2000) and Woodley (2004) in particular explored inequalities in financial or other support for studies by employers while Feinstein et al. (2007) explored links between subject or course studied, and motivation in terms of employment. Social Science and Business students were most likely to be in clusters that gave most salience to employment requirements or career progression motivations for studying. Callender et al.'s (2006 (a) and 2006 (b), and Schuller et al.'s (1999) studies explored the pressures of work as barriers to study.

Many studies sought to establish correlations between these kinds of factors but there are also some broader contextual issues which were considered. For example, Schuller et al. (1999 pp 158-9) argued that the fact that part-time students were largely employed, had a stabilising effect in terms of income, organisation of time and career expectations. They suggested that the importance of work and family in part-time students' lives was an important differentiating factor for them compared with full-time students, and made it easier to cope with the pressures of studying.

A number of common findings emerge from the studies linking student experience with employment. The most striking is that the best qualified students with the highest household incomes receive the most assistance from their employers in terms of financial and other support, especially time off work (Bredee 2006, Osborne et al. 2004, Callender et al. 2006 (a), 2006 (b) Woodley, 2004).

According to Bredee (2006), such students are as likely to be women as men. As a group they have the fewest dependents, and the highest qualifications on entry. On the other hand, Callender et al.'s (2006 (a) and 2006 (b)) studies found that more male than female students were in full-time employment and thus more men benefited from financial support from their employers. Although women working full time were just as likely as men working full time to receive employer support. Brennan et al. (2000) draw attention to a sharp disparity between both men and women and between white and ethnic minority students in relation to receipt of employer support. 60% of men compared with 34% of women received time off and a contribution to fees. Woodley also found that women in full-time employment were less likely than men to have their fees paid by their employers (Woodley, 2004).

Among ethnic minority students only 15% obtained fees support from their employer compared with 51% of white students (Brennan et al. 2000). This is in spite of the fact that ethnic minority students in the study are younger and more likely to be studying to enhance their careers (Brennan et al. 1999). They also found that, not surprisingly, employer support varies by size of company, but the authors do not indicate whether women and ethnic minority (men and women) were more likely to be employed in smaller companies.

In Bredee's (2006) study students wishing to advance their career in their current job were most likely to receive employer support. In Bredee's clusters, students in full employment but wanting explicitly to *change* jobs were fairly similar in terms of educational background, qualifications, though more were married or cohabited and had dependent children. This group also included more students on Foundation degrees than all the other clusters. Far fewer were studying business and administration (Bredee 2006). However, less than half of them had all their fees paid by their employer, compared with 83% who were studying for career advancement reasons. Little et al. (2004) found that part-time students who were

studying with the main aim of moving out of their current employment had deliberately not sought employer support for their studies. Feinstein et al. (2007) also distinguished between job change and improvement of the current job and found a similar pattern in funding, though their sample excluded students on HNDs/HNCs and Foundation degrees.

Woodley (2004) found that employers tended to pay for all of a student's fees or nothing. 51% of his sample in full-time jobs had all their fees paid, while only 7% had part of them paid.. Employers were also more likely to pay fees for students on vocational rather than on degree courses (Callender et al. (2006 (a), Woodley, 2004)

One third of both these groups of students were *required* by their employer to take the course (Bredee 2006). Few other studies indicated whether this was the case though Schuller's (1999 p138) study suggested that some students *felt* that they were pushed into studying by their employer. Schuller et al. identified three types of cases where students and employers *shared* the decision to study: where employers suggested that the employee take a course, but this was rarely compulsory; more commonly employers had a policy for supporting part-time study but it was left to the individual employee to take the initiative whether to take a course. Most commonly the decision to study was taken by the student who then had to negotiate for support with employers (see also Anie et al.2000). Students who received support from employers were, not surprisingly, more likely to be studying courses which would support career advancement, particularly business or administration or Foundation Degrees though neither Feinstein et al.'s nor Schuller et al.'s studies included Foundation degrees (Bredee 2006, Feinstein et al. 2007, Schuller et al. 1999, Brennan et al. 1999).

Given the fact that most part-time students are in employment during their studies, there is little in the literature about the changes that occur in their employment situation during this time. Brennan et al (1999), despite caveats about the conclusions one can draw from their data, found that after two years of study one third of current students had increased their income and that many current as well as former students had progressed significantly in their careers during their courses. Such career benefits were linked both to the reason they gave for study and the type of course undertaken. Thus students studying science, technology or business related subjects had a stronger career orientation than social science or humanities students, and reported higher levels of career improvement.

Part-time workers were mainly also caring for dependents and wanted a career change. They were less likely to be required by their employer (8%) to take a course than did the full-time workers, despite wanting to study for career reasons (Bredee 2006). Feinstein et al's (2007 p23) study distinguished full-time work, part-time work, self-employment, and "carer" as distinct non-overlapping categories, and as "economically active", so that carers were elided into the same category as retired and unemployed. This is likely to be an oversimplification as carers are routinely involved in part-time work (e.g. Bredee 2006). The part-time workers/ carers in Bredee's study were predominantly women (81%).

One interesting difference between full-time and part-time working students is noted by Callender et al. (2006 (a), 2006 (b)) who found that nearly half full-time students in England and Wales spent some time studying at their workplace, but only a quarter of part-time workers did so.   However, the surveys do not show what kind of or how much study took place at work, particularly whether students answering this question were including work placements, or using office equipment such as computers in or out of work time, or whether

study took place in quiet times or lunch-times. Security staff, for example are often also students and have many hours to while away during which they can study.

The conditions of study of students who combine caring, studying and part-time work, especially single-parents, are often referred to in general terms, particularly in relation to "juggling" responsibilities, but do not appear to have been explored in detail. For example the time poverty of full-time workers may be greater than that of part-time workers, and the domestic commitments of students with children, especially lone parents, greater than of those without children (Callender et al. (2006 (a), 2006 (b)).

No study reviewed actually attempted to examine either the degree of time poverty experienced by those where these pressures were cumulative, or the strategies used to mitigate the problem. However, Morgan-Klein and Gray (2000) explore the notion of flexibility in relation to part-time students, highlighting how different forms of employment and domestic life impinge on study. They illustrate how different types of workers may be forced into variable working times, increasing hours, and/ or intensity of work in ways that differentially affect their capacity for part-time study. For examples some students benefited from flexible working hours by being able to leave early or take longer breaks. Others, however, particularly women, worked flexibly by increasing their working hours to pay for the costs of studying. Such constraints, they argue, are likely to disadvantage women particularly since they are less likely than men to receive financial or time support from their employers (Morgan Klein and Gray, 2000, p49) .

In spite of the high levels of employment of part-time students, and the financial and time contribution employers make to their study, most employers have little connection with HEIs. Anie et al. (2000) found that over two thirds of employers of part-time students had no other links with the university.

3   OUTCOMES OF PART-TIME HE STUDIES

The study of the outcomes of part-time HE study raise a range of challenges. First, there are few such studies. Secondly, the few that do exist are difficult to compare as they have different purposes and examine different types of students on different kinds of programmes at different periods after their studies (Adshead and Jamieson, 2007, Brennan et al., 1999, 2000, Feinstein et al., 2007, Jamieson, 2007, Woodley and Simpson, 2001, Woodley and Wilson, 2002). All have a primary orientation to exploring the impact of part-time study on some aspect of subsequent employment, though all the studies reviewed point out that employment benefits are not the only ones of importance.

The focus of all these studies is on whether and how graduates of part-time studies had benefited from their courses. It was noted by Feinstein et al., (2007) that part-time studies might be burdensome but this was seen as a trade-off for subsequent benefits. No authors reported any negative outcomes of part-time study either with respect to employment or other aspects of life. However, students who drop out and do not complete their courses are not examined. In relation to the concern of this study with careers guidance, it should be noted that none of the studies considered careers guidance as a variable affecting employment outcomes.

A further potential source of information on the outcomes of part-time study is HESA's Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE). This is a survey that looks at the destinations of HE leavers up to three and a half years after they graduated. The first full-scale longitudinal survey was of alumni who left university in 2002/03 and took place in 2006/07. The survey includes graduates who studied both full and part-time. However, to date, significantly none of the published reports have analysed part-time students or compared them with full-time students.

3.1 Earnings

Given general policy concern with the relationship between higher education and the labour market, and especially the returns of HE, there are surprisingly few studies that examine the impact on part-time HE on the postgraduate earnings of students who studied part-time. The review found only two such studies which included data on earnings after graduation (Brennan et al.,1999, 2000, Woodley and Simpson, 2001).

Brennan et al.(1999) carried out a survey of part-time students and recent graduates of part-time degree and diploma courses in five post 1992 universities and the Open University (OU). The study explored various aspects of changes in former and current students' employment situation, of which income change was only one. However, income change, like other aspects of employment and career change was related to other factors, notably age, gender and ethnicity of students and their reasons for study, and employer support.

The study found that former students' income had increased by 28% between entry into HE and the time of the survey.[4] However, younger aged, white ethnicity and male gender showed the strongest positive associations with income, as with other factors relating to career improvement. The authors suggest that employer support favouring these groups is the intervening variable explaining this, and express concern that part-time study may actually be the basis of continuing labour market inequality (Brennan et al.,1999, 2000).

Woodley and Simpson's (2001) study of rates of return to OU students found significant gains in earnings following graduation. They carried out a postal survey in 1996 of students who had graduated with Honours or Ordinary degrees between 1990 and 1995. Controlling for age and gender, they found that those graduates who remained in paid work after graduation generally had increased their earnings more than the general population. The groups benefiting most were women who moved into management, those who were studying with the express aim of changing their career and increasing their income, and those who had graduated earliest. A small relative increase in earnings during the graduates' period of study was also observed, but without further exploration this could not be attributed to their studies.

Their study excluded both a disproportionate number of students who began their studies aged over 45 and who had retired either before, during or after studying, and those who were unemployed or working part-time during their studies. This may have included many people caring for children, or people with illness or disability. In this paper Woodley and Simpson (2001) only compared earnings at the time of the survey with those at graduation. This does not take account of income on entry to the OU, so it is not known how OU students' income on entry compared with that of the general population. However, since a third of OU

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[4] They did not control for "expected" rises in income or inflation.

students had some HE qualification already, it is likely that the sample already constituted a relatively highly paid group on entry.

Woodley and Simpson's (2001) study complements that of Brennan et al. (1999, 2000) in that it studies students far longer after graduation than the latter's, allowing consideration of the impact on earnings of the length of time since graduating. On the other hand, Brennan et al. drew from a much wider sample, and included results by ethnicity which Woodley and Simpson did not examine. Considered together, the two studies suggest that part-time HE students do increase their income after completing their courses, and Brennan et al. provide some confirmation that incomes also increased during the course of part-time study.

It is difficult though, to draw firm conclusions from these two studies. The studies differ in their estimate of who the main beneficiaries are; Woodley and Simpson found that women increased their incomes more then men, while Brennan et al. found the reverse. The methods and aims of each study are very different; for example Woodley and Simpson did not use age as an independent variable while it was central to Brennan et al.'s study. Brennan et al. also address important policy questions by linking the economic benefits of part-time study to employer support and show significant variation in such support according to gender, age and ethnicity.

3.2   Career development and change

Three studies discussed other positive employment outcomes of part-time study as well as higher earnings, such as increased career opportunities, job or career changes, increased job satisfaction, and promotion (Brennan et al. 1999, Feinstein et al. 2007, Woodley and Wilson, 2002). In two studies employment outcomes were balanced against non-career personal and social objectives such increased self-confidence and self-development, better health, more community involvement, improvement in children's schoolwork or improved relationships with family and friends, greater involvement with organisations and increases in social capital (Feinstein et al. 2007, Woodley and Wilson, 2002).

All three studies discussed how complex the relationship is between career improvements of any kind, individual characteristics and motivations. All the studies found that career improvement as a motivation for study was positively associated with career outcomes. They also all explore how socio-economic and demographic variations between students are related to career outcomes. Woodley and Wilson (2002) were primarily interested in comparing career outcomes by age and by type of institution. Their data implies class and gender differences between students at different types of institution but this is not specified or developed. Feinstein et al. (2007) attempted to link the benefits from study including career benefits to the socio-demographic characteristics of students, their reasons for studying, and their course type and subject.

Brennan et al. (1999, 2000) focused only on post-graduation *employment* benefits of part-time students, but also explored these in terms of differential student attributes and students' access to financial and time support. They found similar inequalities of outcome to those discussed above with regard to earnings, in relation to other indicators of employment such as career progression or changes in managerial responsibilities. They argue strongly that employment outcomes should not be used as "bald, absolute" measures of different courses, institutions or cohorts without reference to inequalities in the social composition of their students. They also imply that funding policies which favour employer support, will result in long-term disadvantage to part-time students who are less well placed to secure it.

Woodley and Wilson surveyed over 4,000 mature graduates (aged over 21) three years after graduation, from a UK sample of universities and colleges and divided them into full-time, OU part-time and "other" part-time. This distinction is useful because "other" part-time were more likely to have taken a more vocational and less flexible course at a local university or college. They then constructed a typology of graduates according to age and modes of study. Here we consider only their findings in relation to part-time students over 25, classified as "Young mature" (25-29), "Middle mature" (30-39) and "Older mature (over 40).

The authors found that OU "Middle mature" students, despite having jobs, high incomes, and average job satisfaction, nevertheless felt frustrated at not being able to use the knowledge from their degrees in the labour market. However, they had often not aimed for career change, and had studied subjects unrelated to their jobs. This contrasted with both "Young" and "Middle mature" "other" part-time graduates who felt that their studies had satisfied most of the career objectives. A smaller proportion of "Older mature" OU graduates were employed - they had retired, or were looking after families or studying further. If employed, they had high incomes, and were in permanent jobs, self-employed, or working part-time. "Older mature" "other" part-time graduates reported more use of degree skills in their jobs than their OU counterparts (Woodley and Wilson, 2002).

Feinstein et al. (2007) studied graduates in the OU and Birkbeck only a few months after graduation. Like the other two studies, they found that the degree of career-oriented motivation for studying determined both course of study and employment outcome. Partly corroborating Brennan et al.'s (1999) findings, they found that minority ethnic graduates' expectations and motivations towards employment outcomes were higher than those of white graduates and that they were more likely to have selected courses to improve their employment prospects. In spite of this, their actual realisation of employment benefits was no different from those of white students. They also found that graduates funded by employers reported more employment benefits.

3.3   Personal and social benefits of part-time study

Feinstein et al.'s (2007) study, more than the other two discussed above, pays particular attention to personal and social outcomes of study, including, particularly, improvements in skills such as writing and communications. Personal development, greater self-confidence and happiness were also reported as important outcomes of studying. A significant social benefit was being able to help children with their education. Their study also found that graduates enjoyed learning more than formerly, and that 60% intended to continue with further studies. This is confirmed in a longitudinal study of Birkbeck students which followed students' "study pathways" between 1994 and 2005 (Adshead and Jamieson, 2007). The authors followed students enrolled on certificate and diploma courses and non-assessed courses in 2000-2001, and questioned them about their study experiences between 1994 and 1999 retrospectively. Over 80% of students continued studying for five years after their initial enrolment, and nearly 50% had studied "regularly or continuously" over the same period. Many of these students had primarily intrinsic motivations for study, but the authors found that some students who did not have career-oriented reasons for studying when they started, became more employment-focused as they continued and gained confidence.

Adshead and Jamieson's short briefing on their findings shows that outcomes of study are not necessarily discrete or easily separable into work and non-work benefits or effects. In a three-

year follow-up survey of Birkbeck graduates, Jamieson (2007) similarly reported that 88% of 431 respondents had engaged in further study after leaving Birkbeck as well as most of them having improved their employment status. Respondents also said that their health and well-being had improved as a result of their time at Birkbeck.

Although few in number, these studies of outcomes are important in demonstrating longer-term personal benefits of part-time HE. All the authors insist that one must recognise the variability of goals and circumstances among this diverse group of students in evaluating the meaning of outcome data. "An investment model is very limited when dealing with people across a huge age range, with a concomitant range of aims and personal circumstances" (Woodley and Wilson, 2002, p345). Several studies also draw attention to undesired variability, such as the gender and ethnic inequalities identified by Brennan et al. (1999, 2000). Undoubtedly further research is needed to extend and refine empirical findings and to develop satisfactory explanations of the trends and patterns found in these studies.

4   CAREERS GUIDANCE AND PART-TIME STUDENTS

It is evident from the studies reviewed that most part-time students hope to advance their careers in some way as a result of their studies. This is common to both full and part-time students. Where part-time students differ from their full-time equivalents is that most of them are already in employment, with many already established on clear career trajectories.

At the same time, as student numbers, including those of part-time students, have increased, there has also been an enormous upsurge in policy and research interest in the role of career services in enhancing graduate employment, through appropriate careers advice and guidance (e.g. Butcher et al. 1998, Hustler 1998, Killeeen and White 2000, Watts and Van Esbroeck 2000, Harris 2001, Maguire 2005, Rolfe and Nadeem 2007). Attention is directed to enhancing "employability" within higher education institutions (e.g. McDowell 1993, Harvey et al. 2002, Morey et al. 2003, Booth 2004, Brown et al. 2004, Little et al. 2005 Stapleford et al. 2005, Bimrose et al. 2005, 2006, Bimrose 2006, Bimrose and Hughes 2007). In turn, this has been attributed to concern with global competitiveness, an agenda of widening participation and equal opportunities, competition between universities, increasing private financing of studies, and the development of a discourse of "lifelong learning". These concerns have found expression in major national and international policy documents (e.g. NCIHE 1997, Harris 2001, OECD 2004, OECD and European Commission 2004, Leitch 2006).

The "new" careers and employability literature is concerned with the restructuring of guidance provision, developing new forms of delivery, appropriate pedagogies for skills and employability, quality assurance, and training and career structures of guidance professionals. In addition to the policy concerns referred to, this literature seeks to respond to the changing nature of the graduate labour market in the light of globalisation, the massive increase in student and graduate numbers, and the change in social profile of the student population in the context of the restructuring of the delivery of higher education, especially through new types of institution, changing boundaries between further and higher education, and different kinds of qualifications.

It is therefore surprising that with very few exceptions, this literature largely ignores part-time students as a major potential group of recipients of careers guidance in spite of a rhetoric

of the need to develop "career management skills" (e.g. Hustler et al.1998, DfES 2003, Stanbury 2005, Stapleford et al.2005, Bimrose and Hughes 2007). This is the case even where studies' main foci are on diversity and widening participation (e.g. Harvey et al. 2002, Morey et al. 2003). Indeed, where these are central concerns, part-time students are almost always subsumed under either "mature" or "non-traditional" students, or both (Harris 2001, Harvey et al. 2002, Morey et al. 2003, OECD 2004, Maguire 2005). Even when the fact that part-time students are mostly in employment is recognised, its implications for service delivery are generally ignored (ASW Consulting et al. 2003, Booth 2004).

The current review covers a wider range of issues than careers and does not claim to be a systematic review, but it is striking that a systematic review of research into career-related interventions for higher education made no specific reference to part-time students, confirming the near absence of this issue within that literature (Bimrose et al. 2005). However, to be fair to Brimrose, "part-time" was not a word included in the literature search. We have therefore examined the very small literature that deals explicitly with careers information and guidance for this group, and have drawn on references to the striking absences of part-time students from the wider literature where we have found them.

There is one very useful review of employability concerns drawing on studies of part-time students which recognises their variability (Little et al. 2005). It explores the implications of the characteristics of part-time students on ideas of effective learning for employability. The authors draw on a study by McDowell who found that many part-time students were resistant to work-related skills development (transferable skills) inputs, and found them a waste of time as they felt they used such skills every day at work. Rather than making links with the "real world", they preferred to learn to abstract and reflect (McDowell, 1993).

However, Little et al. (2005) also consider part-time students who are not supported by employers and who may have different concerns. Referring to research findings that employer support is not equally available to all students, they suggest that students who study primarily to *move out* of current employment might especially benefit from parallel "co-curricular activities." The value of Little et al.'s report is that it recognizes the different work situation and work experiences of part-time students from full-timers and the need to focus on concurrent workplace experience. It argues that the career development activities in HE institutions which "prepare" students for employment need to be re-oriented towards preparation for career advancement or career change. This may mean giving more appropriate placements to students who already have work experience and providing extensive local labour market information, particularly as part-time students are less mobile than their full-time counterparts (Little et al. 2005).

Butcher et al. (1998) comment on the lack of special attention within general careers guidance policy to the needs of ethnic minority students or "work-based, part-time, mature, and distance students." They comment that it is institutional policies rather than professional priorities that determines the quality of careers provision for these groups. Thus the extent to which careers services are tailored to the needs of such students depends on how much they are prioritised by the institutions and have careers resources allocated to them. They do not, however, spell out how what changes are needed to provide better guidance to part-time students.

Morey et al. (2003) observe that the needs of mature and part-time students are not being met with respect to employability. A careers advisor is quoted as saying, "No-one is ever going

to give me a promotion or a new car for succeeding with part-time students," yet part-time students are not mentioned in their recommendations. Although their concern is much more with the integration of part-time work into full-time study, than of full-time work into part-time study, the same team does advocate that government, Regional Development Agencies and Sector Skills Councils should enable their employees to engage in work-based learning on part-time higher education courses (Harvey et al. 2002).

Killeen and White's (2000) study of experiences of career guidance and part-time students relates to pre-entry advice. They found that employed adults benefited from guidance through an increased entry rate into both full-time continuing education and training, and through increased participation in other (part-time) education and training not arranged by their employers. The overall effect of this was that recipients of guidance obtained more qualifications (Killeen and White 2000). However, their study did not make clear the level of the courses or whether "additional" education and training were short or part-time courses. Guidance at low entry qualification levels is also emphasised in studies discussed above about part-time students' experience (e.g. Bamber and Tett, 2000, Jones, 2003, Hart and Nelson 2006).

Another study suggests that with improved local labour market information, some young full-time graduates would have preferred earlier information on opportunities (or the lack of them) open to both A level students and graduates in their disciplines. Some felt that they would have been better advised to enter their chosen sector earlier and follow a part-time training route, rather than opting for a traditional degree (ASW Consulting et al. 2003).

It is clear that very little information exists as to the contribution that careers services can or do make to the career decisions of part-time students. There is little reference in the literature to career advice *during* studies for part-time students despite evidence from studies such as Brennan et al. (1999) and Morgan-Klein and Gray (2000), as well as many other studies which address the time conflicts of work and part-time study. The emphasis on career management skills in current careers debates, in the context of both flexible and lifelong learning, needs to include discussion of how to manage one's career during a course of part-time study.

5   CONCLUSION

This review has brought together two main bodies of literature, with many works not fitting easily into either. On the one hand there is the social and education policy and sociological literature which looks at government and institutional policies towards part-time students, and the aspirations, experiences of such students and the benefits or otherwise to them of having studied. A second body of literature was reviewed relating to careers guidance.

Within the first body of literature the review has identified an important conceptual and practical difficulty in the literature on part-time students in HE. A general neglect of the importance and diversity of part-time students, linked to a preoccupation with widening participation, has resulted in much discussion of part-time students being subsumed under other headings. Thus "part-time" is often added to descriptions of students as diverse as, non-traditional, working-class, mature, or having low entry qualifications.

This has the effect of seeing part-time students as just another disadvantaged group within the literature on widening participation. "Part-time" ceases to be seen as a mode of study, but becomes an attribute of students. However, even where part-time students are included among these groups, the *specific* barriers they face, and, even more, the *different* needs they may have, are often not specified.

In recent years, much of the careers guidance literature reflects a preoccupation with adapting careers services to new circumstances, including especially, non-traditional HE students and new labour market conditions, as well as new systems of student funding which means that many full-time as well as part-time students work during their courses. Careers Service departments have also traditionally been marginal to the main emphasis of universities, and, in response to a much stronger emphasis on employment in HE policy, part of their discussion of adaptation also involves their own repositioning within the institutions.

The literature reflects the profession's concern to address student diversity, and many reports recognise that part-time and mature students are often not catered for. However, like the more sociological and social policy literature, with some exceptions, they also tend to subsume part-time students under other characteristics, particularly mature or disadvantaged, without addressing in detail their different needs from those of full-time students. These relate, above all, to the fact that part-time students are predominantly already in full-time employment, and therefore may have needs for advice with career advancement or career change, rather than first introductions to the labour market.

There clearly are an increasing number of studies concerned with different aspects of part-time students in HE. The complexity and variability of the students, their courses, their situations and background can make comparison between them as difficult as between them and full-time students. This review has attempted to disentangle some of the many issues that the studies in the review have dealt with, hopefully drawing attention not just to the findings but to the gaps that still exist in our knowledge. In particular more needs to be known about part-time students' experience of study in difference situations, the impact that part-time study has had on their lives, and of how career decisions are made and assisted in the course of their studies. Further studies are an important means of encouraging a more nuanced approach to part-time students in HE. We need to differentiate more clearly the varying needs and trajectories of different groups among them and use this knowledge to challenge the undifferentiated assumptions embedded in the concept of the non-traditional student, to which part-time students are too often confined.

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