VCSEI Final report

Capturing Mature Students: Do flexible pedagogies/capture technologies support progression for mature students between levels 4 & 5?

Strategic Objective: How can we increase progression between levels 4 & 5 for mature students by 5% by October 2017?

Executive Summary

A possible link between flexible pedagogies and benefits for mature students was observed during the 2014-15 Capture Technologies Pilot Project. The objective of this VCSEI project was to build upon the initial evidence and investigate whether flexible pedagogies/capture technologies may have supported the progression of some mature students from level 4 to level 5 during the 2014-15 academic year. The starting point for the project was to establish the institutional position for the progression of mature students through analysis of the HESA data from 2011-12 to 2014-15. Analysis of these data revealed the following findings:

- There is very little difference between the progression rates of mature students and students aged under 21.
- On average, the percentage of students who withdraw at the end of level 4 is slightly lower for mature students than for those under 21.
- Male students are overall marginally less likely to progress than female students.

The data were then differentiated between full-time and part-time students. Analysis of these data revealed:

- The progression of part-time mature students is significantly lower than for part-time aged under 21
- There was a significant drop in progression of mature students during the 2012-13 academic year, coinciding with the reform of the student funding system and the introduction of higher fees. During the same year the progression of part-time students aged under 21 saw a significant increase.
- The progression of part-time students aged under 21 has been equal to or higher than the progression of full-time students in the same age bracket since 2012-13, with male students aged under 21 consistently more likely to progress to level 5 when studying part-time than when studying full-time.

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with mature and part-time students known to have participated in modules that engaged with the 2014-15 Capture Technologies Pilot. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed the following findings relating to the teaching and learning aspects of their course:

- Part-time students see the main benefit of their mode of study as the pace of the course, but often opt to take extra modules in order to complete their course more quickly. Female students regularly made reference to their age, feeling an urgency to complete their studies and avoid any delays such as retakes.
- The threading of content between modules as part of an integrated curriculum means that part-time students often feel disadvantaged due to regular references to content covered in other modules.
- Employer-sponsored students on part-time courses will often seek support from work colleagues who have previously studied on the programme to compensate for gaps in the support they receive from the University. Those students that do not have colleagues to turn to for support can feel isolated, leading to a lack of belongingness which may affect retention and progression.
- The availability of academic support through tutorials and appointments is crucial for part-time students' satisfaction, general motivation and successful progression, but they must be at convenient times.
- There was a strong dissatisfaction with long traditional 'chalk and talk'-style lectures.
- Students resent using their time on-campus for activities that could easily be done at home.
- Ongoing opportunities for formative and self-assessment were seen as beneficial by part-time students, as they often don't have the same peer support from other students that they can use to check understanding.
- Online content made available via the VLE which is consistent with the content presented in on-campus sessions was perceived as having a positive impact on attainment.
- 8 out of 9 participants said that online video or captured content had a beneficial impact on their studies.

In response to the findings, the project concludes that flexible pedagogies, through the increased use of capture technologies and the VLE, may help to increase the progression of mature and part-time students; however, these strategies need to be considered alongside the more general issues identified with the integrated curriculum and available support.

Background and context

One of the University's strategic priorities for the VCSEI projects is to increase progression between levels 4 and 5 for mature students by 5% by October 2017. A possible link between flexible pedagogies/capture technologies and benefits for mature students was observed from evidence collected during the evaluation of the 2014/15 Capture Technologies pilot. Findings from the pilot evaluation survey suggest that students valued the flexibility afforded to them by captured content (e.g. live streamed and recorded lectures). In response to the question "How have capture technologies helped you in your studies?" free text comments included examples of students with work and family commitments who might otherwise have missed out on engaging with learning content and activities that were delivered purely on campus. Given that mature students are more likely to have such responsibilities in addition to their studies, this project was proposed based on the hypothesis that there may be a positive correlation between flexible pedagogies (such as using capture technologies) and the progression of mature students.

Building on the initial evidence that flexible pedagogies may have supported the progression of some mature students from level 4 to level 5 in 14/15, this project aimed to expand this work by gathering qualitative data on students' perceptions of different styles and approaches that had either helped or hindered their progression.

Research Methods

The project aim was to determine whether the increased adoption of flexible pedagogies may have a positive impact on the progression of mature students from levels 4 to 5.

The objective was to evaluate student perceptions on aspects of the course delivery that supported, or hindered, their study and progression from level 4 to 5.

The research questions were:

- To what extent do flexible pedagogies support progression of mature students from level 4 to 5?
- To what extent do capture technologies support progression of mature students from level 4 to 5?

The first stage of the project was to determine the current institutional position for the progression of mature students between levels 4 and 5 using HESA data. This information would be used to identify any differences in the progression rates between different age ranges and genders.

The findings from the HESA data were used to inform questioning in a series of semi-structured interviews with mature students who had successfully progressed from level 4 to level 5. Students from modules known to have engaged with the capture technologies pilot were invited to participate in the interviews. Invitations to participate in the study were made by direct email. A participant information sheet and consent form was provided to each student who responded to the invitation. Audio recordings of each interview were made and transcribed. Transcriptions were anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

Findings

Establishing the institutional position – Analysis of HESA data

The first step for the project was to determine the current institutional position for the progression of mature students between levels 4 and 5. HESA data from academic years 2011-12 through to 2014-15 were provided for analysis.

The table below shows the end of year status for students at the end of level 4 within the past 4 years. Figures have been split between traditional age students and those defined by HESA as mature i.e. aged over 21 on entry to their course. It shows the total percentage of students who successfully progress onto level 5 at the end of level 4 and the most common statuses for those who do not progress.

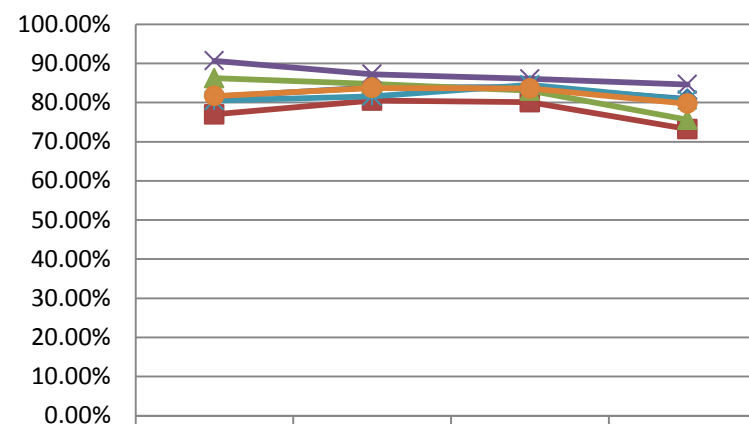| Under 21	2011-12		2012-13		2013-14		2014-15	
Total	2787		2875		2584		2753	
Progress	2176	78.08%	2299	79.97%	2070	80.11%	2114	76.79%
Withdrawn	91	3.27%	132	4.59%	85	3.29%	109	3.96%
Transfer	109	3.91%	45	1.57%	14	0.54%	88	3.20%
Repeat	411	14.75%	399	13.88%	415	16.06%	442	16.06%
21 and Over	2011-12		2012-13		2013-14		2014-15	
Total students	562		872		1016		1203	
Progress	438	77.94%	697	79.93%	799	78.64%	917	76.23%
Withdrawn	25	4.45%	26	2.98%	33	3.25%	34	2.83%
Transfer	14	2.49%	7	0.80%	20	1.97%	32	2.66%
Repeat	85	15.12%	142	16.28%	164	16.14%	220	18.29%
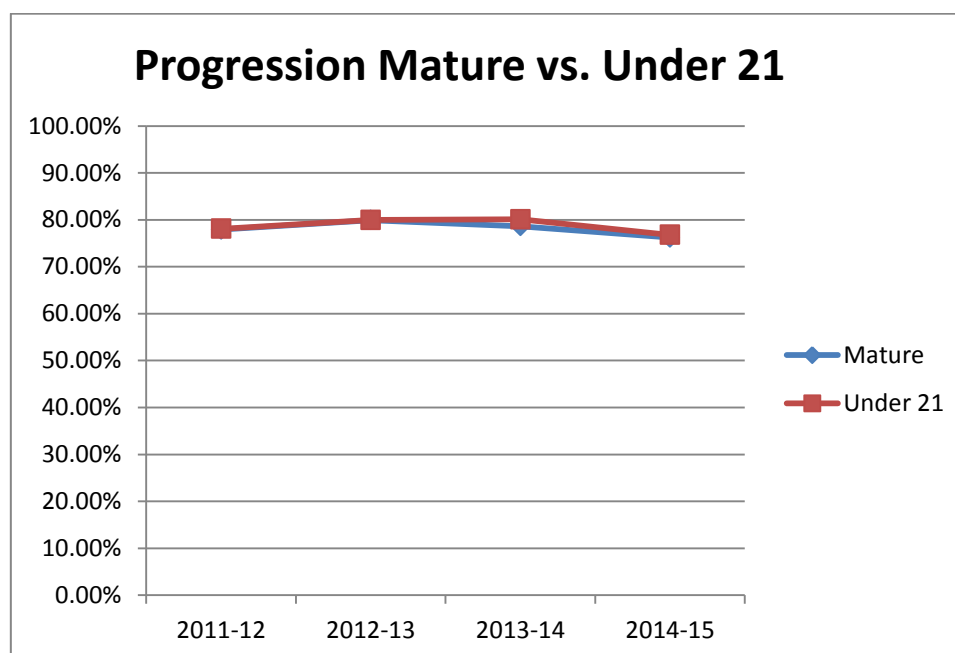
The data show very little difference between the progression rate of the two groups. Of those students who do not progress, the percentage of students who withdraw is between 2% and 5%. On average the percentage of students who withdraw is slightly lower for mature students than for those under 21. In order to determine whether particular demographics were less likely to progress than others the data were further split into smaller age groups and by gender. This is shown in the tables below.

Male Progression
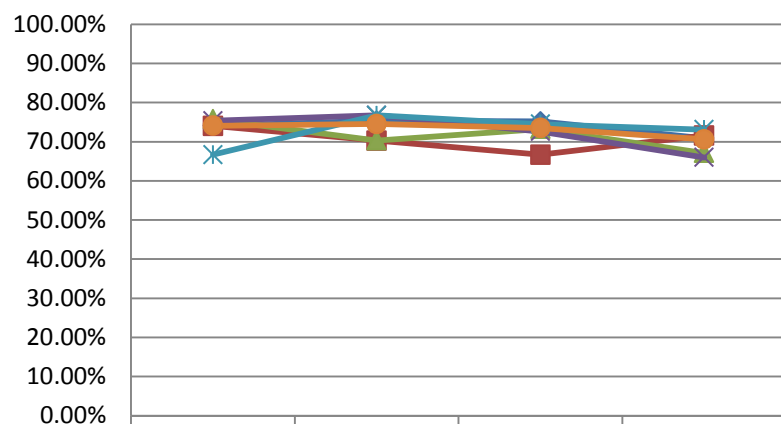
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Male under 21	74.07%	75.34%	75.18%	70.87%
Male 21 - 24	74.02%	70.28%	66.67%	71.58%
Male 25 - 29	75.71%	70.31%	73.24%	67.12%
Male 30 -39	75.36%	76.71%	72.62%	65.98%
Male over 40	66.67%	76.74%	74.47%	73.08%
Male Overall	74.07%	74.53%	73.52%	70.61%

Female Progression

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Female under 21	81.53%	83.84%	83.94%	80.93%
Female 21 - 24	76.97%	80.48%	80.07%	73.20%
Female 25 - 29	86.21%	84.77%	83.04%	75.60%
Female 30 - 39	90.67%	87.23%	86.06%	84.64%
Female over 40	80.49%	81.58%	84.55%	80.67%
Female Overall	81.69%	83.73%	83.59%	79.72%

The data indicate that progression rates have remained relatively constant over the past 4 academic years. It also shows that male students are slightly less likely to progress than female students, with a variance of between 5% and 20%.

In female students, those aged 30 – 39 are consistently more likely to progress. Females aged 21-24 are consistently less likely to progress than females in other age groups.

Progression rates for male students are less constant and there is no clear pattern of a particular age group more or less likely to progress than another.

Based on the above data, there is no evidence to suggest we need to invest particular effort and resources into increasing the progression of mature students. In order to make a thorough analysis the HESA data were then differentiated between full-time and part-time students.

The table below shows the end of year status for part-time students at the end of level 4 within the past 4 years. Figures have been split between traditional age students and mature students. As with the previous data, it shows the total percentage of students who successfully progress onto level 5 at the end of level 4 and the most common statuses for those who do not progress.
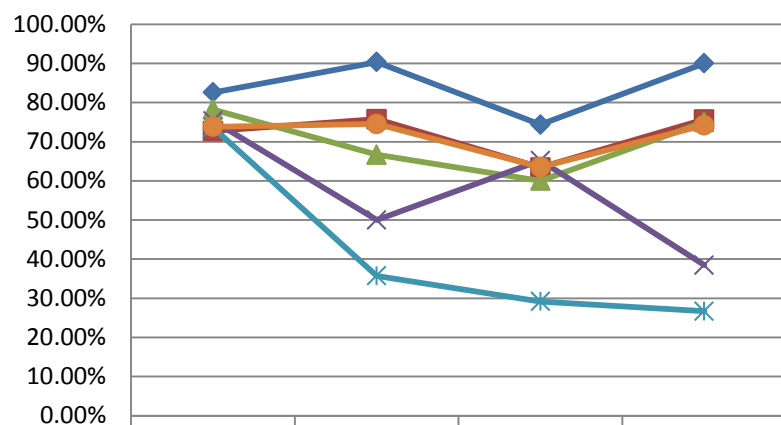
Under 21	2011-12		2012-13		2013-14		2014-15	
Total	179		167		150		132	
Progress	133	74.30%	141	84.43%	120	80.00%	109	82.58%
Withdrawn	21	11.73%	7	4.19%	9	6.00%	7	5.30%
Transfer	2	1.12%	2	1.20%	4	2.67%	5	3.79%
Repeat	23	12.85%	17	10.18%	17	11.33%	11	8.33%
21 and Over	2011-12		2012-13		2013-14		2014-15	
Total students	281		254		286		270	
Progress	166	59.07%	118	46.46%	132	46.15%	121	44.81%
Withdrawn	14	4.98%	31	12.20%	20	6.99%	21	7.78%
Transfer	4	1.42%	1	0.39%	3	1.05%	7	2.59%
Repeat	97	34.52%	104	40.94%	131	45.80%	121	44.81%
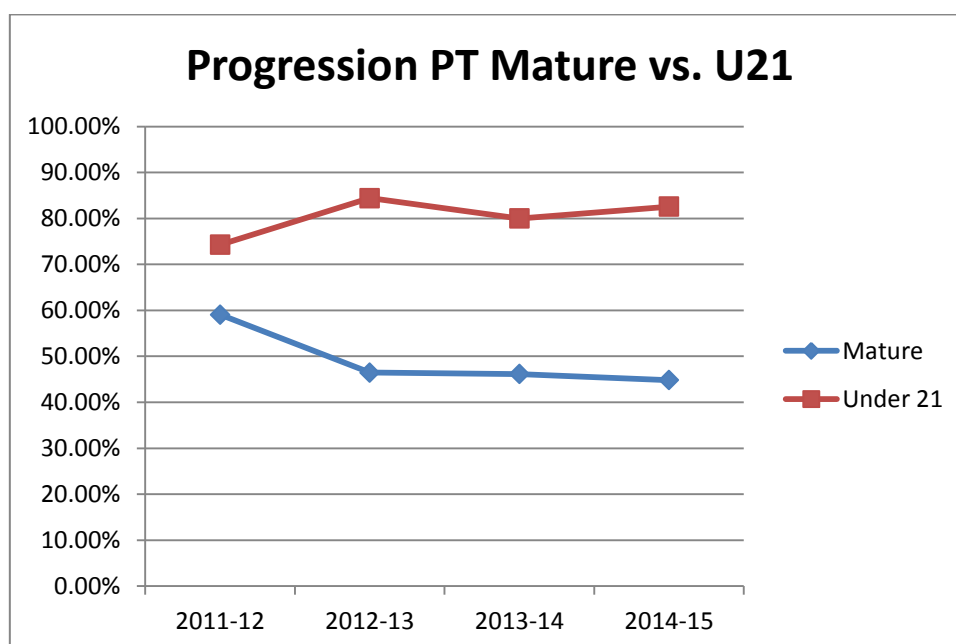
The difference between the progression rate for part-time mature students is immediately obvious. There is a significant drop in progression of mature students during the 2012-13 academic year. This coincides with the reform of the student funding system and the introduction of higher fees. Despite the introduction of fees these students still chose to enter higher education so fees are unlikely to be the only factor affecting their progression. During the same year the percentage of students aged under 21 progressing to level 5 saw a significant increase. In fact, the progression of part-time students aged under 21 has been higher than or equal to the progression of full-time students in the same age group since 2012-13.

In order to get a more detailed picture of the scale of the issue, the data were differentiated by age group and gender.

Male Progression

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Male under 21	82.56%	90.36%	74.36%	90.00%
Male 21 - 24	72.73%	75.76%	63.41%	75.68%
Male 25 - 29	78.26%	66.67%	60.00%	75.00%
Male 30 -39	75.36%	50.00%	65.22%	38.46%
Male over 40	73.68%	35.71%	29.17%	26.67%
Male Overall	73.81%	74.53%	63.54%	74.19%

Female Progression
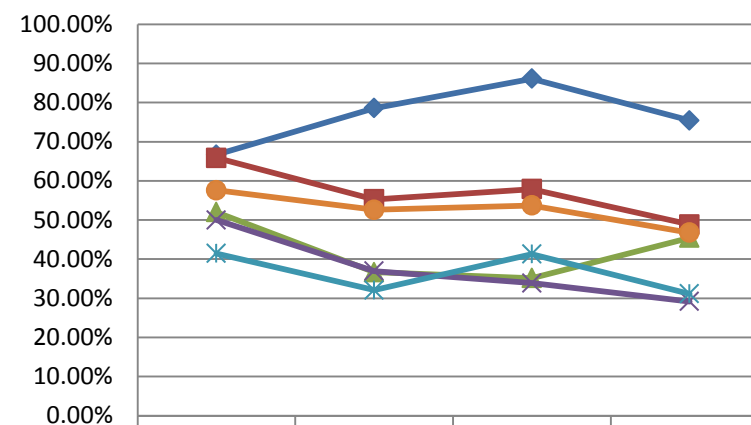
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Female under 21	66.67%	78.57%	86.11%	75.41%
Female 21 - 24	65.85%	55.26%	57.89%	48.84%
Female 25 - 29	52.00%	36.67%	35.14%	45.45%
Female 30 - 39	50.00%	36.96%	33.87%	29.17%
Female over 40	41.46%	32.08%	41.30%	31.15%
Female Overall	57.60%	52.59%	53.73%	46.75%

Differentiating the data by age and gender reveals some interesting findings. The data show that progression rates for part-time students are more erratic over the past four academic years than can be seen in full-time students. In 2011-12 the difference in progression rates between different age groups was grouped much more closely together than for subsequent years. It also shows that female students are slightly less likely to progress than male students overall when studying part-time.

Males aged under 21 are far more likely to progress when studying part-time than when studying full-time. The progression rate for part-time students is consistently higher by up to 20% than their full-time counterparts.

The most affected male part-time students are those aged over 40, with those aged 30-39 performing below the male average. Part-time male students aged 25-29 progress at close to or just below the male average. The most affected female part-time students are those in the 30-39 age group showing a steady decline over four years, with the over 40 age group and those aged 25-29 also performing below the female average.

Part-time students who do not progress to level 5 are more likely to withdraw than full-time students. The percentage of part-time students who withdraw at the end of level 4 is between 5% and 12%, compared with 3-5% of full-time students.

Interviews with mature and part-time students

Following the analysis of the HESA data and establishment of the institutional position the project proceeded with the planned interviews. In light of the findings from the HESA data, participation in the interviews was open to both full-time mature students and part-time students of any age.

In order to give context to the answers of participants, the interview questions were designed to ask about their motivation to apply to university, the timing of their entry into higher education and the reasons behind their mode of study. They were also asked about their performance in their modules, and whether some teaching approaches and technologies used in some modules were more accommodating to their needs than others. In order to avoid influencing the participants' responses they would not be asked direct questions about flexible pedagogies or capture technologies.

The project plan included time and resources for conducting and transcribing up to ten interviews with students, lasting for approximately 30 minutes each. By the end of the project interviews had been conducted with 9 mature and part-time students from a range of backgrounds. The demographics of the participants are included below.

Total Participants	9						
Gender		Age		Nationality		Mode of study	
Male	4	21 - 24	7	UK	7	Full-time	6
Female	5	25 - 29	2	International	2	Part-time	3

The demographics demonstrate a fairly equal gender mix. All the participants were within the HESA definition of mature, but all were in their twenties. The majority of the students were UK students with two international students. Despite a second email invitation targeted specifically at part-time students, only three part-time students volunteered to participate in the study.

Motivation to apply and factors for success

All the participants responded that their motivation to apply to university was in some way linked to career prospects. Some were sponsored to complete the course by their employers. Others were driven by aspirations of a specific career path. A couple of respondents were less specific about their aspirations but they still described attending university as a way to get ahead and improve their prospects.

> *"you get to a point where you can't do anything without a degree […] you can only get to a certain stage. So then I got to that stage where I thought, I need to go on and do a degree in order to get somewhere further."*

All the participants had passed their modules at level 4 first time and progressed immediately to level 5. When asked about the factors that had contributed to their success, most of them said that it had to do with their personal motivation, determination and attitudes to study.

> *"Sheer determination more than anything […] That's the only thing that's really got me through."*

Female students regularly made reference to their age. Despite being in their 20s they felt an urgency to complete their studies and avoid any delays such as retaking years. Many of the part-time students had opted to take additional modules in order to complete their studies sooner.

> *"I think it was just the motivation I had to be like, okay, I need to do this, because I'm, like, 24, 25 now, and I can't afford to lose a year out and retake again."*

> *"When I first started this, I thought, I'm going to be 30 by the time I finish this. It was so daunting. I had second thoughts straight away."*

None of the male students commented on their age as a factor in motivating them to succeed; however, one male student commented on pressure from his employer/sponsor. Male students were more likely to refer to financial motivations, such as employer sponsorship or increased salary upon graduation.

Several students also acknowledged support and encouragement from academic staff and personal tutors contributed to their motivation and determination to succeed.

> *"don't want to imply negative connotations by saying pressure from lecturers […] I would lean closer to inspiring you to say, what you get at the end of the course is equal to what you're putting in."*

> *"my personal tutor for year one, he was just so good. I made one appointment with him, just to get to know him and things, and then after that he'd keep emailing me […] I didn't need to go, but he sent me links to a few people and there were a few tutorials that they had on ways to revise, and things like that."*

Mature students: benefits and challenges

All students were asked whether they had experienced any benefits as a direct result of being a mature student. There were several comments about being more motivated and focussed after having time out of education to evaluate their personal ambitions.

> *"I think I'm a lot more motivated now than I would have been when I was 18. When I was 18, it was almost as if you go to uni just because everybody else is going[…] but now I feel like I'm actually here for a purpose, like, I need to do well in order to carry on and do well, whereas before I would have just thought, like, you just come to uni, because if you get a degree you'll get a better job. But then you realise how important it is, later on."*

Other benefits of being a mature student included the observation that those students who were employed in a related career noted that they got increased confidence from knowing something about the subjects being taught. Those with work experience in an unrelated career benefitted from being able to compare the hard work of university with the hard work of a job they didn't enjoy.

When asked about the challenges of being a mature student, it was revealed that some of the challenges stem from a feeling of being left behind among their peers.

> *"I almost dropped out once. I was just like fed up of all the studying and all the exams and stuff, and I was just like… because obviously the people I went to school with have either finished uni or they're all in full-time work and stuff, and I was just, like, is it even what I want to do?"*

> *"it's not difficult but because a lot of my friends have finished uni or they're working while I'm still here […] I've just moved in with my girlfriend and she's working full-time. But I'm still a student so it makes it a bit harder financially."*

There was an acknowledgement among most of the participants that there were some challenges to getting back into education after taking time out.

> *"There were some challenges. There was obviously getting back into education. That was quite difficult, because some of the stuff that you study in the first and second year carries straight on from A level. So, everyone else had just done it a few months ago and for me it had been a few years. So there was stuff that I couldn't remember or I hadn't done recently."*

Part-time students: benefits and challenges

Part-time students were asked to discuss the benefits and challenges they had experienced as a result of studying part-time rather than full-time. The main benefit for part-time students was the pace of study, although female students did seem to worry about the extra time it was going to take them to complete.

"We part-timers tend to just concentrate on the one module, so for me that's better, because once I'm at work, I'm at work. When I'm not at work, I'm doing uni work … but then the idea of getting everything done in three years is appealing."

All the part-time students noted that they often felt disadvantaged studying alongside full-time students. Reference to content covered in other modules or during practical activities was a particular issue as there was no provision of an equivalent experience or source of information.

"When we have lectures and they do often say things like, but you've covered that [in another session] so you don't need me to go over it again, and I'm thinking, I need you to go over it, I haven't done it."

"A lot of the time they'll be talking about, oh you're doing this in such and such a module, and we're like, but we're not doing that until next year or the year after, and that bears no correlation to us."

Working students on part-time courses sometimes feel like their professional experience is not recognised when they are part of a larger group with full-time students. This causes a difficult conflict because in some cases they may feel like they are already sufficiently knowledgeable about an area of their studies and are covering old ground, whereas in other areas they feel that they are missing out.

"I think other tutors just assume you've come straight from school or college and then straight into uni, you've not really got any practical life experience in the field, which probably most of the students won't have. But we have, because we work in that area."

"From a part-timer's point of view I think my course could've been tailored a bit more, because you have to be employed […] to take part in the part-time course. It's a requirement, so could they not have tailored it a little bit more to a work-based qualification? Perhaps like mini-portfolios and then come in for the odd lecture, and perhaps send us on placement to the other areas […] rather than just come in for lectures and miss out on all the practical stuff."

Part-time students often feel they lack support in many areas, particularly in relation to access to appointments with tutors. The impact of student funding reforms is also amplified by insufficient access to support that might make up for the disadvantages felt by the integrated curriculum that they study alongside full-time students.

"we get appointments which are limited to ten minutes I don't think that's really enough when we're only in once a week to have a good chat with our tutors. A lot of the tutors that I do see have been really supportive when I have spoken to them, but it's difficult sometimes to try and even get an appointment with them because they only have certain days, which doesn't help me if it's not on the day that I'm in"

"I think if I was paying for it myself I would be getting a little bit more irate with it, because my friend who up until recently has done the same modules as me, she's been paying for it herself and I think she was getting quite frustrated with not being able to make appointments on the days she's in […] with that and then the same thing with not being part of practical sessions. So, I'm missing out on that."

Where part-time students are sponsored by their employers, they often turn to work colleagues who have previously studied on the programme to get support in areas that they are finding it difficult to access from the University. Students who are self-funded or are not working with previous students can feel isolated. As a result, part-time students might lack a feeling of belongingness to their cohort or the University, which studies have shown can impact on retention and progression.

"I had the opportunity to work with people who have also done this sort of course and done it part-time, so any questions I've naturally leant on their shoulder to ask. Whereas if I was a completely independent part-time student I think that may have been a bit daunting."

"I could take my coursework and show it to people at work, and get them to proofread it, and sometimes you struggle to get information from journal articles and things, but I could just use the internal [resources] I have."

"I'm one of four part-time students and that's it. And we all work in different [places] all over the shop, so what am I supposed to do? It's not like I'm in a lecture hall with 600 people who are all doing exactly the same thing as me, it's not like I've got 100s of people I can go to and ask, there isn't."

Teaching approaches and learning technologies

The participants in the study have mixed experience of academic support from their lectures. For part-time students in particular, being able to access support during the limited time they attend university is perceived as critical for their ongoing satisfaction, general motivation and success.

"I know I can drop an email to particular lecturers and be like, I'm struggling with this, what do you suggest? And they will get straight back to me. Whereas other lecturers will literally just ignore you point-blank. You can send them emails until you're blue in the face and they will ignore you full-on."

In terms of course delivery, six out of nine participants expressed a strong sense of dissatisfaction with the traditional 'chalk and talk'-style lecture. Students were keen to engage in more interaction with the lecturer and each other. Some also resented spending their time on campus participating in activities that could have been achieved at home.

"[The lecturers] tend to split into two camps really. There are the tutors that just stand there and talk to you for hours with lots of slides with lots of writing on, and then the other tutors are really interactive and they make it fun, and they put videos on which I think… I'm more of a visual person and I don't think I'm the only one in the class that's going to benefit from that."

"who can sit through a four hour lecture and absorb it all without needing matchsticks to hold your eyelids … do you know what I mean? You've got to have some kind of activity rather than someone just pointing at things and talking for four hours."

"if they just have, like, their lecture notes in just like blocks of text and their presentation is just reading off it with no extra information, you don't feel like there's much point to it, because you feel like you could've just read that at home in half the time."

Participants valued the opportunity to engage in formative and self-assessment activities, both in class and during independent study. The interactive polling tool Socrative was mentioned by four out of nine participants as having a positive impact on their confidence and general understanding of the subject.

"They had… was it Socrative? They had that, and that was a really good tool to get involved and see what other people were thinking, because a lot of the time I was in a lecture on my own, I didn't really know anybody, and to think that everybody else knows what they're doing and I'm sitting there thinking, I don't know the answer to that, knowing that other people don't really know either makes you feel more comfortable about it, and you think, all right, I'm not as thick as I thought I was."

"what really helps me is on WOLF they put a lot of content on there. I usually get 70% on a module if there's loads of things and loads of tests that I can test myself on, whereas I won't do so well if there isn't."

Participants placed a high value on the online content that is made available in the VLE. The extent to which online content is provided seems to vary between different modules and students are convinced that the provision of online content has a direct impact on their attainment, particularly for those who are part-time with demanding work and family commitments.

"they'll say, oh, but you can do it from home, which is brilliant. All the lectures are on WOLF, but then what I've realised is that … I've booked days off as annual leave just to go and sit in the lecture to see what they're like and you get to the lecture and you realise what you've got on WOLF and what they're actually teaching is two different things. On WOLF you've got 32 slides and you go in and they've got 65, and it's not on WOLF, and you're like, how can I work with that? […] I've failed modules because of it."

Eight out of nine participants discussed the use of online video or capture technologies as being beneficial to their studies. In general, the students find the visual medium of video content both engaging and helpful to their understanding whether it is captured content recorded by lecturers or videos from online sources such as YouTube. Where capture technologies were not in use students will make their own recordings using mobile devices.

"I'll tell you the most fantastic resource that they've, sort of, employed … it was not this year but the year before, they were trialling where they record the presentations and then you could play them back on WOLF at a later date, and I think that was one of the most innovative and useful revision techniques, particularly for a part-time person, because I imagine full-time, being at uni, you're constantly completing modules all of which probably overlap in subject matter. So, part-time where you're having three hours a week, let's say, I think it is nice to go back and review what was said in case you've missed anything."

"I think it was really, really good, because first year there were so many people, and there were so many disturbances … Sometimes you're sitting in the lecture and you want to focus, but you can't, because people are making so much noise […] everybody did say, oh, yes, we'd want to see it more. But that never happened, and this year nobody's done it at all."

"I would love it if they recorded their lectures and put them up […] I've changed jobs in between studying and where I was originally at we had a placement student who was here and he would record them, and he'd send them to me because he knew I could only go in one day a week."

Conclusions, Recommendations and Future work

The project has identified progression is an issue for mature students who are studying part-time. In 2014/15 there were 270 mature part-time students entering level 4, of which only 44.81% progressed to level 5.

Interviews with both full-time and part-time mature students conducted as part of this project identified a number of themes. Comments from participants have identified possible areas of good practice and opportunities for improvement. Owing to the small sample size and limited subject areas included in this study, an initial recommendation from this project is to use these findings to inform the design of a University-wide survey of part-time students and their experiences.

Reducing the impact of the integrated curriculum through flexible pedagogies

Flexible pedagogies could be used in a variety of ways to counteract the negative impact of the integrated curriculum on part-time students studying modules alongside fulltime students. Examples include providing alternative or equivalent experiences for part-time students such as bite-sized captured materials covering key concepts or issues that are covered in other modules, or using capture technologies to record demonstrations and examples of practical activities that take place in sessions that are not available to part-time students. It is possible that in some subject areas these types of material already exist but have not been repurposed for the support of part-time students. Another approach would be to make better use of the VLE and to replace some elements of the traditional lecture by 'flipping the classroom' and using on-campus time for the more interactive and practical activities that part-time students feel they are missing out on.

Improving student experience and satisfaction through learning technologies and flexible pedagogies

Learning technologies could be used to reduce the feelings of dissatisfaction with traditional 'chalk and talk' lectures by increasing interactivity through technologies such as Socrative. Improving the provision of online content available via the VLE so that it is consistent with the content delivered in face-to-face sessions would allow more flexibility for part-time students to study at home where necessary, while simultaneously providing additional resources for full-time students. Online content should include opportunities for self-assessment allowing students to check their understanding; this could have particular benefits for part-time students who may have less peer support from other students. The provision of captured lectures would provide benefits for part-time students with additional commitments; however, it may be useful to consider restricting the time that recordings are available for to encourage positive study habits.

More flexible support for part-time students

It may be necessary to increase awareness among some academic staff of the issues that part-time students face. More flexibility in the availability of lecturers outside of teaching hours for tutorials and appointments would have a very positive impact on part-time students and could help to increase progression. Appointments do not necessarily need to be face-to-face and could be facilitated through email, telephone or online tools such as skype. The development of guidelines for good practice in supporting part-time students might help to raise awareness of the specific support needs of this particular group.

Increasing pride and belongingness for part-time mature students

It may be also be possible to have an impact on the progression of part-time mature students by promoting the benefits of part-time study and overcoming the negative feelings of being 'still only a student' through internal marketing campaigns. This may be more relevant for the 21-24 and 25-29 age groups that were represented in this study than for older students but further work would be necessary to investigate the scale of this issue. More opportunities for part-time students on largely full-time programmes to communicate with each other may be of benefit, possibly facilitated through social media to provide flexibility and easy access to peer support.