

**DON'T FORGET US:
THE LIFELONG LEARNER'S FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE**

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ABSTRACT

The contribution of part-time degree programmes and opportunities to engage with lifelong learning in higher education greatly enhances the diversity of university student populations and does much to take forward the social inclusion agenda. Nevertheless, these students remain the “Cinderella” of higher education (Cook, 2006) as the spotlight continues to focus on their full-time counterparts. This paper explores the first year experience through the eyes of staff and students involved in lifelong learning through part-time study at two Scottish universities. Despite significant differences in the histories missions, structures, current provision and culture of the two institutions, many similarities have emerged in the factors which influence the first year student experience.

A student life cycle approach has been adopted to data analysis, thus factors which impact pre-entry, during the induction period, over the first few weeks and at the time of first assessments are identified. Impact factors include the need for access to pre-entry information and guidance; the need for opportunities to develop social relationships with colleagues; the importance of relationships with staff; the importance of flexibility; and the challenges of juggling study, work and other commitments.

These impact factors have also been debated in a wider consultation across the university sector in Scotland and institutional strategies to enhance the student experience are reported. It is apparent that much commonality exists within strategic approaches to address the factors identified and that the dissemination of good practice is active within this area.

INTRODUCTION

Widening access, increasing participation and improving retention in higher education are crucial to the Scottish Executive's education agenda (McConnell, 2007). The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) aims to provide the opportunity for successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it, arguing on the grounds of social inclusion, active citizenship, social justice and economic competitiveness. SFC funds a range of widening participation initiatives which seek to address the large discrepancies in the take-up of higher education between different social groups (see the Scottish Wider Access Regional Forums website at <http://www.swarf.ac.uk>). However, despite the contribution part-time study programmes make to the widening participation agenda (Knox, 2006), little emphasis is placed on the role of part-time study.

Although almost 34% UK undergraduates study on a part-time basis (HESA, 2006), part-time students remain the "Cinderella" of higher education (Cook, 2006) as the spotlight continues to focus on their full-time counterparts. This is particularly true in the context of present sector-wide attention on the "First Year Student Experience". For example, at the First European First Year Student Experience Conference held in Middlesbrough in April 2006 and at the nineteenth First Year Experience Conference held in Toronto in July 2006, there was little mention of the first year experience of those who study on a part-time basis.

For many adults, part-time study is their only option (Calder, 1993) and if becoming a lifelong learner involves higher education, studying on a part-time basis is the only feasible reality.

The University of Paisley

The widening participation agenda has been central to Paisley's mission over recent years and, as a consequence, the University has a student profile which is distinctive across the HE sector in Scotland. Within its student population, more than 50% study on a part-time basis, the majority of whom attend classes in the evening. The University's provision is based on credit accumulation and transfer and fully embeds the principles of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), hence the University has a record of success in recruiting non-traditional students into HE

through flexible entry routes based on Recognised Prior Learning (RPL). All part-time provision is managed through the Centre for Lifelong Learning.

Part-time students may be registered for a University award and have a degree as their educational target, or, because of the inherent flexibility of Paisley's provision, part-time students may be enrolled as 'lifelong learners', that is they are studying individual modules, or groups of modules, on a stand-alone basis for personal or professional development purposes.

The University recognises that many particular issues arise from its distinctive intake and high proportion of part-time students, most of whom are mature students and come from low participation neighbourhoods (University of Paisley, 2005). For example, concerns about debt and other financial matters and the need to juggle study with family and work commitments are cited more frequently by Paisley students than students in the Scottish HE sector as a whole (MORI, 2004). The University acknowledges the potential impact of these concerns on the learning experience of students, on their support needs and on retention.

The University of Aberdeen

As an ancient institution, the University of Aberdeen has a more traditional student profile with the majority studying full-time and entering from school. The Centre for Lifelong Learning provides the majority of undergraduate part-time study opportunities and widening participation and access provision. With a longstanding tradition for providing distance learning, the Centre for Lifelong Learning serves a broad geographic area with a varied socio-economic mix.

The majority of students are mature and studying for personal development or career/employment progression, they may be registered for a range of awards from individual subject study modules to degrees.

Retention within lifelong learning programmes is high reflecting the support provided by the one-stop shop approach: marketing, recruitment, registration, advice and guidance and programme co-ordination are all provided by staff within the Centre.

LITERATURE

As part of this Project, a wide range of international, national and local resources have been consulted and a number of conferences, workshops and briefing sessions

have been attended. The key resources underpinning the direction of this study include:

- University of Paisley Access, Retention and Value-Added Project (Foster *et al*, 2002, Houston *et al*, 2003, Houston *et al*, 2007);
- The University of Paisley First Year Student Experience Project (Knox and Wyper, 2007);
- Explaining Student Retention: The case of the University of Aberdeen (McCausland *et al*, 2005);
- University of Teeside Retention Study (Nutt, 2005);
- QAA Enhancement Theme Report on Responding to Student Needs (QAA, 2005);
- QAA Enhancement Theme: The First Year Student Experience (QAA, 2006);
- Higher Education Academy First Year Student Experience Literature Review (Harvey and Drew, 2006);
- Higher Education Academy First Year Experience Survey (Yorke and Longden, 2006);

Universities UK publications on Part-time Students and Part-time Study, Strands 1-3 (UUK, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c).

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Project objectives are to:

- Identify factors which impact on the first year student experience of lifelong learners in two Scottish universities;

Identify effective strategies to enhance the first year experience of lifelong learners.

METHODOLOGY

Phase One

A qualitative approach was adopted to the extensive data collection undertaken, which involved gathering data to reflect institutional, lecturer and student perspectives.

At each University, interviews were conducted with a Senior Manager from the Centre for Lifelong Learning and two lecturers who are involved in teaching first year part-time students. Interviews were unstructured and addressed the open-ended

question: *“What factors impact on the first year student experience of lifelong learners within your University?”* Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

Five student focus groups were held, three at the University of Aberdeen and two at the University of Paisley. In all, eleven Aberdeen students and seven Paisley students took part in the study. Students were asked the open-ended question *“What factors have impacted on your first year experience as a student at Aberdeen/Paisley?”*

A mix of students were involved in the focus groups, including those enrolled on Access modules, those following part-time degree programmes and those who were studying standalone modules for personal or professional development purposes. These different kinds of student define ‘lifelong learners’ for the purposes of this report.

Definition

The term ‘lifelong learners’ refers to students who study on a part-time basis, regardless of their point of entry or educational goals.

Phase Two

It had been anticipated that a peer learning seminar (Thomas *et al*, 2005) would be held to discuss the strategies in place at a range of Scottish universities to address the impact factors identified in Phase One (see Appendix 1). However, the tight timescale of the Project precluded setting a suitable date for an event, hence the wider consultation with the sector was achieved by conducting telephone and face-to-face interviews with colleagues from Centres for Lifelong Learning across Scotland (see Appendix 2).

FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

Part-time students cannot be categorised as a homogeneous group (UUK, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c). Within any institution’s part-time student population, diversity will be evident and the Universities of Paisley and Aberdeen are no exceptions. Given the differences between these two institutions with regard to their histories, missions, institutional structures, current provision and culture, it might be anticipated that the

factors which impact on the first year student experience would be vastly different at each institution, yet this has not been found to be so. As this is not a comparative study, no differentiation of institution will be made in discussing the project findings.

Broadly speaking, a student life cycle approach (Layer *et al*, 2002) has been applied to the first year student experience (Knox, 2007). Thus, the data analysis explores impact factors through the lens of the first four stages indicated in Figure 1:

- i. Pre-entry;
- ii. Induction;
- iii. First few weeks;
- iv. First assessments.

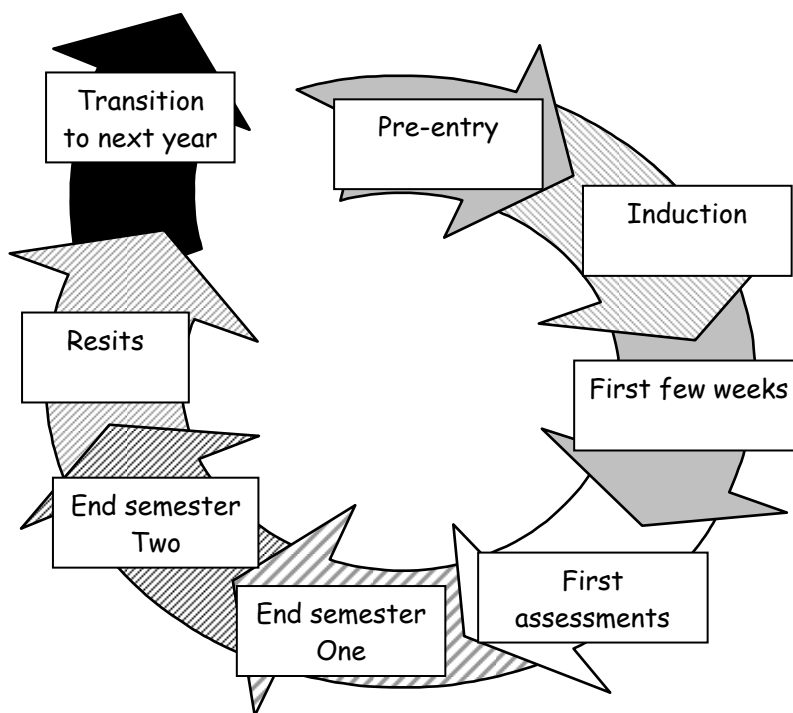


Figure 1: Student Life Cycle Model applied to the First Year Experience (Knox, 2007)

Pre-entry

Two impact factors emerge from the data at the pre-entry stage: first, the availability of information to prospective students; second, the extent to which students have access to advice and guidance in making course and module selections.

There is evidence, for example Yorke (1999), that a major contributory factor in early withdrawal of both full- and part-time students is that they feel they are on the wrong

course. Thus the provision of timely, accurate and robust information is essential to ensure that potential students make informed choices and select the course which is most suitable for them.

Many part-time students have to negotiate their learning to fit with other responsibilities in their lives, in particular childcare and employment schedules. Once negotiated, these arrangements cannot easily be unwound and rearranged:

My programme of study was jeopardised because there was a late timetable change. It was a daytime class and was changed from morning to afternoon after the first week. That nearly led to me quitting, but I managed to get my Mum to pick my wee girl up from school, so I can carry on studying. It really unsettled me in that first class when the change was announced and I didn't really get down to working for the first few weeks in case there would be another change and I'd not be able to continue. (Student).

Of course, institutions offering part-time study routes whereby students can join on-going cohorts of full-time students on a flexible basis, do face a dilemma. They must engage in a planning process to ensure classroom and staff resources are used effectively and efficiently and make last minute adjustments in the light of enrolment figures. However they must also remain mindful of the potential impact such late changes may have on students with other commitments to fulfil.

Part-time study offers many choices and students may be bewildered by the range of provision on offer. Hence ready access to advice and guidance is crucial. Students and staff stressed the importance of having a single, authoritative point of contact when queries arose:

For part-time students, decisions are needed right away. They need decisions on financial matters, if they can get a fee waiver or a fee reduction, before they go any further. We need to answer that question, not refer them on to the finance staff. Then they need to know about module choices, what's best for them. They need to know that right away, not be referred elsewhere. They don't have time to be put on hold or sent from pillar to post trying to get their questions answered. (Staff).

It's really good to have one person to contact in the Centre. [X] is very helpful and answers even the daftest questions. (Student).

The benefits of a single point of contact extend well beyond the application stage:

When they start, students often feel all at sea. They have formal support structures provided by the university, but many dislike the rigmarole of using them. They much prefer personal contact with people they know so that the system is not faceless. (Staff).

Students agree:

I still phone here. She's approachable. She's my first port of call. (Student).

The fact that enrolled students continue to use familiar sources of support places additional resource demands on Lifelong Learning staff. However, such resources may be well spent as ready access to support enhances the student experience and could prevent the withdrawal of some students who might not otherwise have sought help (Anderson, 2003; Harvey and Drew, 2006). The reliance on Lifelong Learning staff may be further compounded by the lack of availability of many teaching staff outwith class times.

Induction

On admission, students are required to go through a formal registration process and are offered an induction programme. The efficiency and effectiveness of these processes impact on their initial experiences.

Where the formal registration processes take place electronically, part-time students are well served, however if registration relies on attendance at the university, many part-time students feel disadvantaged. Having to make a journey to the university for such formalities is seen to be wasteful of their time, particularly if they have to join lengthy queues:

Enrolling was a bit of a nightmare. I didn't really know what was going on, I just seemed to be joining one queue after another. The whole process seemed to take hours. (Student).

Both Universities hold induction sessions for new part-time students. These give a formal introduction to the facilities on campus, take students on a tour of the facilities, help them to access the university's computer systems and so on. The induction programme was well received by all campus-based students who attended. However, while every attempt is made to hold induction at a convenient time for part-time students, inevitably not everyone will be able to attend the scheduled session. Induction packs and Handbooks are sent to students who are unable to attend, however missing the actual induction event is perceived as a disadvantage:

I missed induction day and it was hard to catch up with what the other students seemed to know that I didn't. I had a Handbook and that was useful, but being in the university and meeting people before classes started seemed to give the others an advantage over me. (Student).

Most staff are aware of the dangers of information overload during induction and many innovative approaches are being taken to distribute some of this information over a longer period of time, including building some elements of the induction programme into other support systems or into the curriculum (QAA, 2005).

However, some crucial information is needed at the outset, for example, most part-time students are juggling family, work and study commitments, hence they need to know about the time they will be required to devote to their courses. In general, students underestimated the workload and many were surprised at the time they had to commit to study in addition to timetabled classes. The need to engage in group work also compounded the difficulties experienced in managing time for part-time students, who had not anticipated being required to be on campus outwith class times.

First few weeks

Among the students involved in this study, the majority felt ill-prepared by school, college or other prior educational experience:

It was a real shock to the system coming here. The whole system of learning is totally different to college. (Student)

In their first few weeks, students had to adjust to the university learning environment, not least of all its dependence on electronic media:

Getting used to computers, the library and its electronic catalogues, Google, wikis. I'd never heard of wikis six months ago. It was all very different, very challenging. I'm starting to improve now, but the assumption was made that I knew all about these things. I didn't. I didn't even have a computer at home when I started. (Student).

The same issue was raised by staff:

Students need to access the University's VLE, use the electronic catalogues in the library, do Internet searches and so on. Some of our students, especially the matures, are not very computer literate, but we all assume they are. (Staff).

The use of technology to support learning was thoroughly discussed in all the focus groups and by the members of staff interviewed. It was generally agreed that attending induction had been very beneficial in introducing the technology but that there was little additional support for those who had missed the formal induction sessions or who subsequently experience difficulties.

As well as having to become familiar with the technology, estates issues also had to be addressed. For example, for some students, their lectures and/or tutorials were delivered by audio- or video-link to remote off-campus locations. While this is a major advantage for students who live at a distance from the campus, it means a reliance on facilities and technology which are not necessarily within the control of the University. As one member of staff commented:

We're at the whim of other agencies. We're dependent on study centre availability and access at our off-campus locations. If there's a local holiday, the centre closes regardless of whether or not it's during our semester. We also have to rely on local security staff being available and that can present problems. For example, we couldn't deliver Saturday classes at one of our remote locations because the janitor didn't want the overtime. (Staff)

Some students found coping with the technology difficult and were unsure who to ask for support if problems occurred when they were on their own rather than in a classroom situation. In general, they did not have time to spend in campus-based computer labs or in the library and particularly among those who lacked confidence in using electronic media, this gave rise to much distress:

I spent a huge amount of time early on trying to get to grips with the Internet. I hadn't a clue where to start. I hadn't a clue what was good and what was bad. All I knew was that we had been warned not to trust everything we found in a Google search. But where do you start? There wasn't any time to teach us this. I got quite scared that I'd do the wrong thing and fail. (Student)

There are guidelines for Internet and VLE usage in institutional Handbooks, but some students do not find them particularly helpful. This may again be an issue of lack of confidence, particularly among mature students (Hayes *et al*, 1997)

Estates issues also arose for campus-based students. These ranged from the need for adequate on-site lighting to the condition of classrooms. Researchers, for example Tinto (2003) and Taylor *et al* (2002), have postulated that institutions which are serious about improving their retention should look to the quality of their accommodation:

Teaching accommodation is poor in some areas of the campus. This has an effect on all students, but particularly the part-time students who may have come in from high quality working environments. The accommodation matters. It really matters. (Staff).

Students also drew attention to the limited evening and weekend access to library, computer and canteen facilities. Students at both universities highlighted the difficulties they experienced in relation to library regulations:

The library borrowing regulations do not suit part-time students. The books in high demand are put on a one-day loan. The one-day loan is no use to us, we aren't here every day. I would rather pay the fine than make a 40-mile round trip to return a book. The fine's cheaper than the petrol. (Student).

Socialisation is important (Thomas, 2002) as is the opportunity to form peer support networks (Thomas and Webber, 2001). However part-time students report feeling that they are missing out on these aspects of university life:

Everyone's scattered. We're not all together in classrooms all day long. We can't learn off each other in the classrooms or on campus. We're not all doing the same courses. Yes, we're pretty much on our own. (Student).

Staff also perceive part-time students to be missing out:

Besides the academic benefits of interaction, students gain confidence from other students. This can be lost to part-time students. (Staff).

First assessments

After the first few weeks of settling in, getting to grips with the university learning environment and adopting the routines of study, students' attention turns to their first assessments. The main impact factors which arise concern forming relationships with staff, doing the assignments, meeting deadlines, and receiving feedback.

Part-time students more readily identify with the teaching staff with whom they come into contact rather than with staff from their discipline-based departments (Kember *et al.* 2001). Teaching staff have a crucial influence on the first year experience and it is important that a good working relationship develops between staff and students (Krause, 2001; Krause 2003). Whereas staff said little about developing relationships with their students, the students themselves were quite open about how they perceived their relationships with staff and how staff attitudes affected them:

We know the staff who care and those who don't care. Staff attitudes towards us as part-time students are important. Some staff are not interested in us, they don't perceive us as real students because we're not doing a full-time programme in their academic discipline. (Student).

One lecturer is really very good, positive and encouraging. She is quite strict, but she shows she cares. (Student).

Part-time students are also affected by staff turnover. A change of tutor requires them to adapt to new teaching styles and assessment requirements. In an extreme case, one cohort of students had six different tutors during a 12-week course and were required to submit six written assignments:

We covered nothing in any depth. The tutors were not with us long enough to get to know us or for us to know them. We were constantly writing essays, not learning anything about [subject]. (Student).

Tutors were also influential in motivating students and building their confidence and students were aware of the benefits of developing effective relationships:

In doing assessments we have to move out of our comfort zone. We have to trust the staff who are teaching us, especially in the early days when nothing makes sense. (Student).

Another facet of relationship building between tutors and students manifested in the opportunities presented for students to use their prior experiences within their current courses. Across the sector, there is a perception among many staff that diversity makes students difficult to teach and hence they fail to acknowledge the strengths a diverse student population can bring to the classroom situation (Biggs, 1994). Gourlay (2005) asserts that it is time to move away from the student deficit model to an acknowledgement of the strengths students bring from their former educational and life experiences and to cater for more diverse student cohorts by building on that diversity. In the present study, some tutors ignored the life experiences of mature students:

There are no opportunities to contribute what we bring with us from our life experiences. Our tutor fails to acknowledge our diverse backgrounds and what these could contribute to classroom discussions and tutorial sessions. (Student).

Whereas other tutors capitalise on what the students can bring to the academic setting:

They bring a life with them. We can use that as a resource within the classroom. (Staff).

That tutors are extremely important was echoed across all student focus groups:

It's all down to the tutor. (Student).

Students reported facing difficulties in actually keeping the whole process of assignment preparation and submission within manageable boundaries:

It's hard to keep things manageable. I want to do it all, read everything, write it all down, put it all in, but can't do that, I need to be selective, but I don't know how. (Student).

This is characteristic of adult learners, who often are very highly motivated, adopt a deep approach to studying and demonstrate a fear of failure (Richardson, 1994). For some, the first assessment was challenging because they did not know what was expected of them. This particularly impacted on those who had been out of formal education for some time and for whom the basic skills of academic writing, constructing an essay, referencing, avoiding plagiarism and so on still had to be acquired. There was a dearth of opportunities for formative assessment.

With regard to the submission of assignments, staff and students identified the need for some flexibility in meeting deadlines. Both universities accept work or family pressures as appropriate mitigating circumstances when an extension to a coursework deadline is required or an examination is missed. However, students point out that not only do they need clarity about rules and regulations on assignment and examination submission, they also need information on the consequences of missing classes, failing to submit an assignment, missing an examination, having a resit or being suspected of plagiarism.

Although not discussed at all by students, staff raised the issue of the need to introduce more innovative methods of assessment as a response to diversity within student cohorts. Some had already begun to use open book examinations, portfolios or project work, rather than the conventional essay. For students, their priority issue relating to assignments was feedback. In all focus groups the need for timely, personalised and comprehensive feedback on work submitted was discussed:

My first assignment wasn't returned before I had to start the second. I was nervous about going ahead with the second not knowing how I had done. I felt I was left hanging. (Student).

The worst thing was not knowing how I was coping. (Student).

When I got my work back, I felt so much better about continuing. Until then I was feeling a bit iffy about my course. (Student).

The mark alone is not enough. My last mark wasn't very good. I could have done with some criticism to let me know how to improve. I was marked down but I didn't know why. (Student).

Staff agreed:

It's absolutely vital to give feedback asap. Some staff are immensely lax, others very thorough. Students need personalised detail on how to improve for the next time and they need some praise to build their confidence. I use a standard feedback sheet. It provides a structure, requires detail and is fair to all students. (Staff).

Although part-time students can study at any time, the majority choose to study in the evenings or by distance learning, hence reducing the need to give up daytime family, work and other commitments. For many the reality is the necessity to constantly juggle their responsibilities (Arksey *et al*, 1994). To achieve their educational goals, it is vital to:

Adopt a down-to-earth approach to your studies and retain your sense of humour! (Student).

SECTOR-WIDE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS IMPACT FACTORS

Discussions to identify the strategies in place across the Scottish sector to address the impact factors identified in Phase One and to enhance the first year experience of lifelong learning students highlighted a range of approaches and activities. They also identified a number of cross-cutting themes, illustrating a shared understanding

of the issues that face lifelong learning students. It was clear that colleagues have common ground and that within the Scottish context the sharing of best practice is frequent.

Pre-entry

All institutions identified strategies that recognise the need for provision of accurate up-to-date information and dedicated guidance provision within a supportive and encouraging environment. The majority of institutions provide the opportunity for prospective students to discuss their application face-to-face at a time that is convenient for them even, if that means staff staying late in the evening or at the weekend.

All colleagues report increasing use of the web, not only for the provision of text-based information and a named point of contact but also a range of interactive tools including Virtual Advisers, case studies and frequently asked questions.

All institutions provide hard copy information whether in prospectuses, brochures or on CD ROMS. The majority being as accessible for the target market as possible.

Induction

A cross-cutting theme is the increasing use of electronic media. Within the lifelong learning community, technology is viewed as an enabler to enhance the student experience not a business process saving driver. This is reflected by the increasing use of electronic registration and Virtual Learning Environments to the extent that not being able to provide this service is viewed as a disadvantage within the sector. All institutions using web-based resources also stressed the importance of the provision of adequate and appropriate support and, in particular, access to a friendly helpful member of staff at the end of the phone.

Induction provision was fairly consistent, with the majority of institutions having dedicated activities for part-time students including library, computing, study and academic skills support. Some institutions have credit-bearing modules and courses to encourage the development of skill, most are front-loaded or available pre-semester. With the recognition that induction is an ongoing process a number of institutions reinforce and build on skills within the curriculum.

To encourage a sense of belonging some institutions provide a welcome meeting and opportunities for socialisation with existing students and members of staff.

First few weeks

All institutions identified the importance of peer, academic and pastoral support as critical, particularly in relation to optimising retention.

Within the three themes practice includes engagement with Students Associations, buddy schemes, access to learning and academic advisers and the availability of academic, technical and support staff and services. With few exceptions, there was a general lack of provision of mainstream services outside Monday-Friday, nine-to-five.

Frustration with estates and lack of informal social spaces was widespread.

First assessments

Most institutions reported a predominance of summative assessment with a number highlighting provision of continuous assessment. A small number of institutions are using formative peer assessment.

Within set parameters, flexibility in deadlines is offered by most institutions in recognition of the juggling that most lifelong learners have to negotiate, although the expectation is that assessed work is submitted on time. Learning strategies support is offered prior to the first assessment in a number of institutions.

Whilst all institutions provide formal feedback, practice varies considerably both across and within institutions, subjects and staff teams.

CONCLUSION

In relation to the impact factors identified it is evident that in some areas effective strategies are in place and aligned with student need but that in others further work remains to be done both at institutional, sectoral and policy making levels.

Pre – entry strategies discussed are relevant and effective focusing on the provision of information advice and guidance and identified contacts.

Induction strategies are supporting engagement and a sense of belonging, facilitating students to complete formal processes and providing the tools necessary to start their learning journey, building confidence and skills. Although generally more support could be provided for those who miss induction events/programmes.

Discussions relating to the first few weeks highlighted some of the biggest gaps and greatest frustrations. This is the point at which the wider institutional culture impacts most dramatically on the part-time student experience. Lack in quality of estates and provision of services geared to full-time on campus students figure predominantly

Positively peer support mechanisms are becoming embedded within part-time practice and engagement with the wider student body is improving rapidly.

The importance of staff student relationships were identified as critical by students highlighting the importance of staff who value the life experiences and diversity of student cohorts emphasising the need for staff development and awareness-raising within the wider institution.

Consistency in the format and standard of feedback could be improved and more opportunities for formative assessment should be introduced.

Effective strategies are in place and there is clearly a high level of innovation within the community of lifelong learning.

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APPENDIX 1: ISSUES FOR SECTOR-WIDE DISCUSSION

Pre-entry

- Information advice and guidance
- Identified point of contact

Induction

- Formal registration
- Induction programme
- Students who miss induction programme
- Avoiding information overload

The first few weeks

- Lack of preparedness
- Adult learners and lack of confidence
- Engagement and belonging
- University learning environment
 - Study skills
 - Use of technology to support learning
- Estates
 - Remote locations
 - Accommodation
- Availability of university services
 - Library
 - Support services
- Socialisation

First Assessments

- Relationships with staff
- Meeting deadlines
 - Keeping work manageable
 - Juggling
 - Flexibility in deadlines
- Feedback on assignments

APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

We are grateful for the feedback on institutional strategies provided by staff from:

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University of Aberdeen

University of Dundee

University of Glasgow

University of Paisley

University of Stirling

University of Strathclyde

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