

***Dysgu Gydol Oes
Lifelong Learning***



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“There’s more to learning than earning - the Wider Benefits of Lifelong Learning”

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1.0 Introduction

Writing in *“The Benefits of Learning”*, Schuller et al (2004) are concerned with how learning makes a difference to people’s lives as individuals and as members of their community. Their research covers key questions concerned with the interaction between learning and people’s physical and psychological well-being; the way learning impacts on family life and communication between generations and the effect of people’s ability and motivation to take part in civic and community life.

The range of factors which are influenced by learning include, wellbeing, health, attitudes and behaviour. Schuller et al (2004) argue that UK results looking at well-being show that attainment of at least “O” level or equivalent, reduces the risk of adult depression. In health matters, there is a substantial body of evidence suggesting that positive correlations exist between education and physical and mental health. Evidence has also shown that participation in adult learning has beneficial effects on race tolerance, authoritarian attitudes, political cynicism and political interest. There is further evidence to show that educational interventions have been shown to reduce crime. (Feinstein and Sabates, 2005).

2.0 Social capital and lifelong learning

Robert Putnam, one of the best known authors on the topic of Social capital explains social capital as:

“most generally taken to refer to the networks and norms which enable people to contribute effectively to common goals” (Putnam cited in Schuller et al, 2004, p.17).

Field (2005) argues that social capital and lifelong learning are central to current policy concerns both in the UK and internationally. According to Field (2005) the relationship between social capital and lifelong learning is complex but there is sufficient evidence to point generally to a mutually beneficial association between these two domains. The premise is that because social networks and

learning are both desirable resources - they both help us to enjoy other benefits and as well as this, they may help us to think in new ways about economic development and social cohesion. However, this relationship between lifelong learning and social capital suggests that lifelong learning should be holistic in its approach – one which takes on a wider perspective not only to include work and skills related training, but importantly one which enables individuals to participate in the social, civic and cultural life of society . In spite of this, there is genuine consternation in emerging discourse that the current Government notion of lifelong learning with its emphasis on skills and work is too narrowly defined and arguably one which does not give equal importance to non-economic benefits of lifelong learning and their valuable contribution to social capital.

3.0 The Research Project

The aims of this enquiry into wider benefits of lifelong learning are therefore multifaceted - not only are there questions to be asked about lifelong learning and its wider benefits but also attitudes towards lifelong learning itself. This paper seeks to address some of these issues.

The research data was drawn from a study conducted in Wales, although the implications of the research has relevancy across the UK.

The research firstly considered a range of causal factors that may either encourage or dissuade people to take up lifelong learning. These involved such matters as access, availability, affordability, relevancy etc. and may be vocational or non-vocationally orientated. Questions then needed to be posed to discover whether or not students have experienced personal benefits from their learning and how if at all, those benefits have extended into the community at large.

4.0 The Lifelong Learning Institution and the students involved in the research

The School of Lifelong Learning at Bangor University provides flexible, bilingual educational opportunities across North Wales - from individual undergraduate modules to Masters level study. There are centres at Bangor, Wrexham and Mold spanning the north east and north west of Wales and serving a population in north Wales of approx. 675,600 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006). 1000 students were involved in the sample group consisting of both men and women of a wide age range and living across north Wales.

5.0 Methodology

A mixed method approach was employed with a questionnaire and focus groups. The questionnaire included 21 questions. Section 1 asked about educational interest and issues, section 2 looked at some of the practical and logistical issues involved and section 3 of the questionnaire included more personal questions to allow the previous replies to be placed into greater context.

The questionnaire was accompanied with a letter and form to ask participants if they would be willing to take part in a focus group in order that some of the issues raised in the questionnaire could be discussed in more depth. This enabled the researcher to draw together both qualitative and quantitative evidence in a meaningful way and allowed a number of measurable variables to be quantified and triangulated. Out of the 329 respondents from the questionnaire sample 90 people indicated their willingness to take part in focus group and participate further.

Three focus groups were arranged in three different locations across north Wales – Bangor, St. Asaph and Wrexham. A total of 24 students were invited to the three venues. Quota sampling shown in the table below, was employed in the selection of the participants taken from the 90 respondents, 35 of which were male and 55 female.

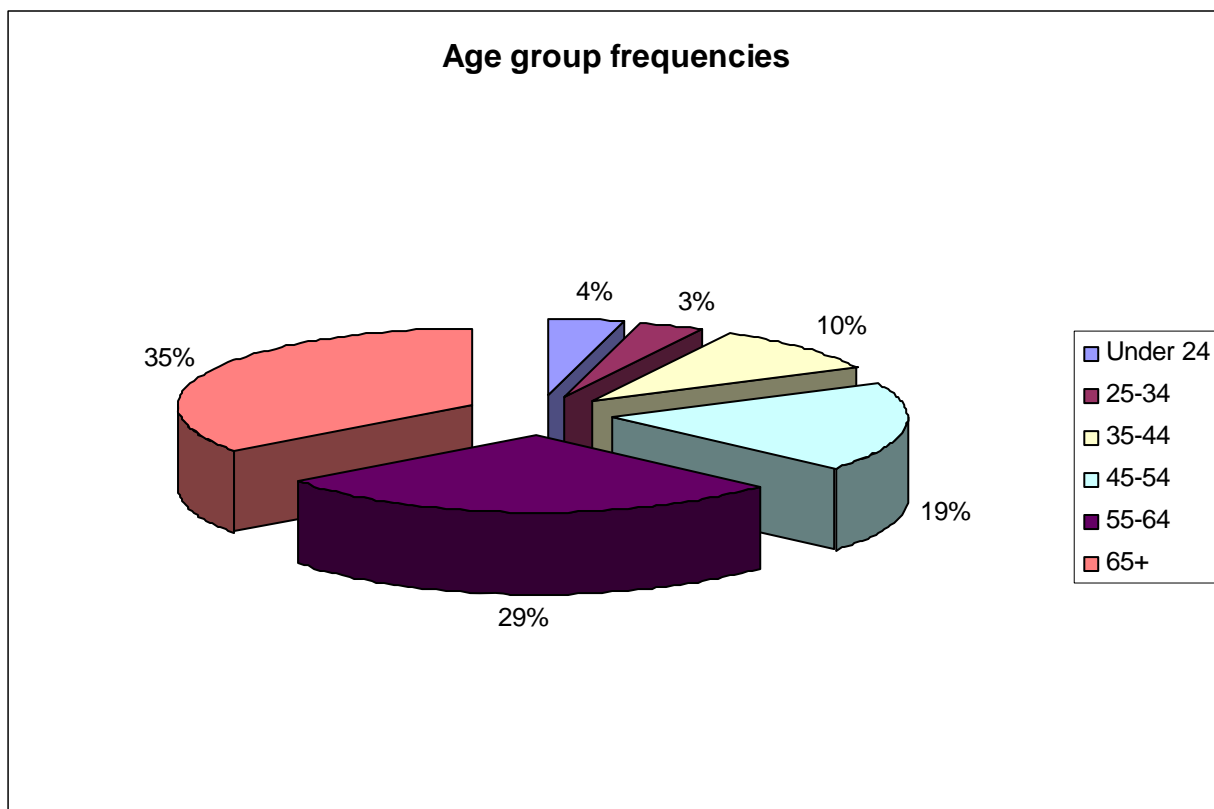
Focus groups

Location	Numbers attending out of 8	Male	Female	Age range
Bangor University - Senior Common Reading room	5	1	4	35-65
St. Asaph – Oriel House Hotel	7	5	2	45-70
Wrexham – School of Lifelong Learning	8	2	6	48-72

Limitations of the questionnaire and focus groups

Data collection focussed primarily on adults already involved in lifelong learning and therefore it did not include adults who may have yet to take up lifelong learning opportunities. The response rate of the questionnaires was 329 out of 1,000 surveyed (33%), therefore the numbers of respondents involved in both the questionnaire and focus groups represent a small section of the student population and care must be exercised in the analysis and interpretation.

It was envisaged that age, personal circumstances and life experiences will have a direct bearing on the results. Therefore it is useful to look firstly at the age groups of respondents.



Results of the age group frequencies indicate a distribution which is skewed towards the higher age groups. The largest participant age group is the 65+ group with 114 individuals accounting for 35% of the total distribution. The second largest group is the 55-64 years with 29% of the total distribution and 94 individuals. The 45-54 group is the third largest (19%), followed by the 35-44 group (10%) and the under 24s group (4%). The lowest group frequency was in the age range 25-34.

The frequency distribution indicates that in our sample most people taking up lifelong learning were aged 45 and over, with the highest percentage being in the 65+ bracket.

The results appear to suggest that as individuals get older they have few family commitments and more free time which means they can attend education classes, particularly those who have retired. It may also be plausible to suggest that as people get older they develop a renewed intellectual curiosity and a desire to improve their knowledge and skills either for continued professional development or personal interest or due to a life-change such as retirement. These issues are expounded in many of the questions below. Alongside this it is interesting to note that according to

McNair (2008), there are a growing number of “young old” people, [in the UK] mainly aged between 50-75 most of whom will be in good health and many of them still economically active.

Bearing in mind that the students in the three focus groups ranged in age between 35 and 72, it was apparent from the question asking about their views and experiences of lifelong learning that all were open to the principles of learning for life in its broadest sense. Some students felt strongly that learning should be regarded as a rite of passage throughout the life-span, illustrated in the following quotations:

‘you never stop learning, learning is not just for the young ones’

‘lifelong learning is appealing because it seems to suggest that there are no age barriers’

‘age becomes irrelevant, you benefit from meeting younger people. A lot of older people don’t realise how much learning has changed. It’s a second chance’.

‘I think it means its all encompassing, knowledge and work skills yes.. but also social skills...’

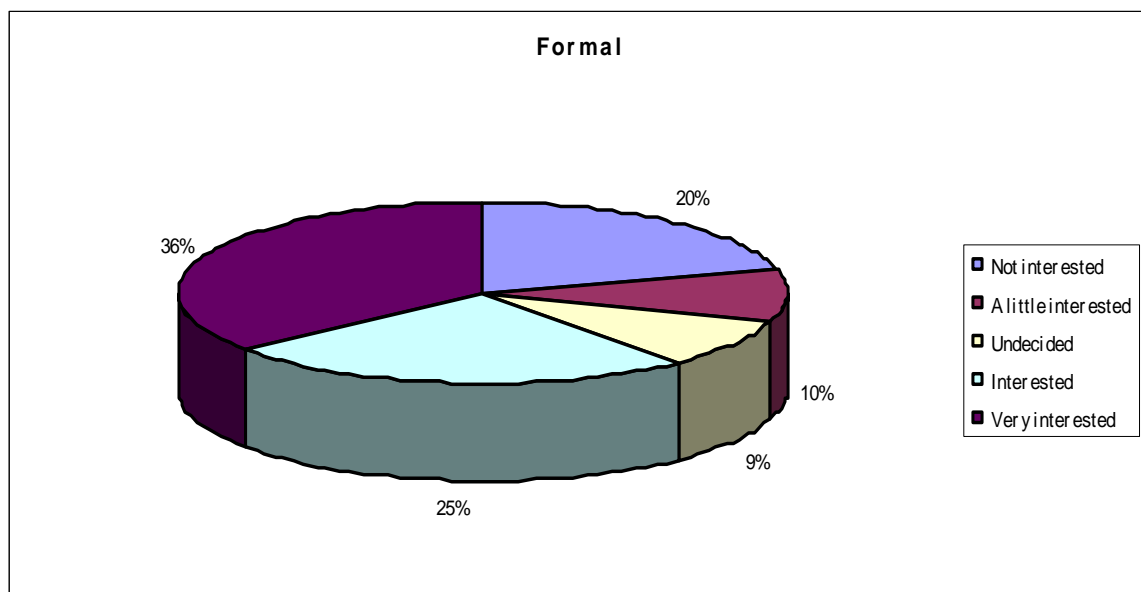
6.0 Questions and responses

The following represents a selection of questions directly relevant to wider benefits.

How interested are you in each of the following types of study?

This question asked students to rank their attitudes to three possible types of study which ranged from formal , non-formal through societies, clubs and voluntary organizations and certificated courses relating to a profession, such as a ‘Microsoft.

1) Formal (at college or university)



This result shows that 61% of respondents were either very interested or interested in taking up formal study within college or university, 10% were a little interested, 20% were not interested in formal learning and 9% were undecided. This indicates a distribution which is skewed towards very interested or interested in formal learning as the most popular response to this question.

This suggests that students regard colleges and universities as important domains for lifelong learning provision. During discussions in the focus groups the idea of 'college values' was raised. Students from all three groups associated lifelong learning with a university or further education college.

There was general agreement that students engaging in formal learning were usually very self motivated and were willing to make a commitment to their studies. There was some consensus within the groups that mature students saw formal learning as a challenge and a way of developing and realising their ambitions. Over half of the participants said that taking up lifelong learning at the University had raised their self-esteem and confidence and for some, the experience had been life-changing:

'accreditation is important and having a degree ... makes you wonder why you haven't done it before. I take what I've learned back to work – tea room conversation has changed, I test out theories on my colleagues'

'..yes, learning gives you the ability to argue, it's empowering'

'I always wanted a cap and gown but no way could I have done this in my teens'

These responses appear to provide strong evidence that lifelong learning offers individuals opportunities to fulfil ambitions or desires and suggest that its appeal and success lies in the fact that everyone learns at different times in their lives and that for some people it is empowering and life fulfilling.

Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that the survey population all had some experience of formal learning and it is interesting that these results show that 20% were not interested in formal learning and 10% a little interested. This provides an interesting dichotomy in that it suggests that some respondents may have negative attitudes towards formal learning.

The question of negative attitudes towards formal learning was taken up in the focus groups. Some students felt that having assessment deadlines could be stressful especially when there are family problems such as illness or caring responsibilities. One student said that missing deadlines *'really put me off'* and nearly made her drop out.

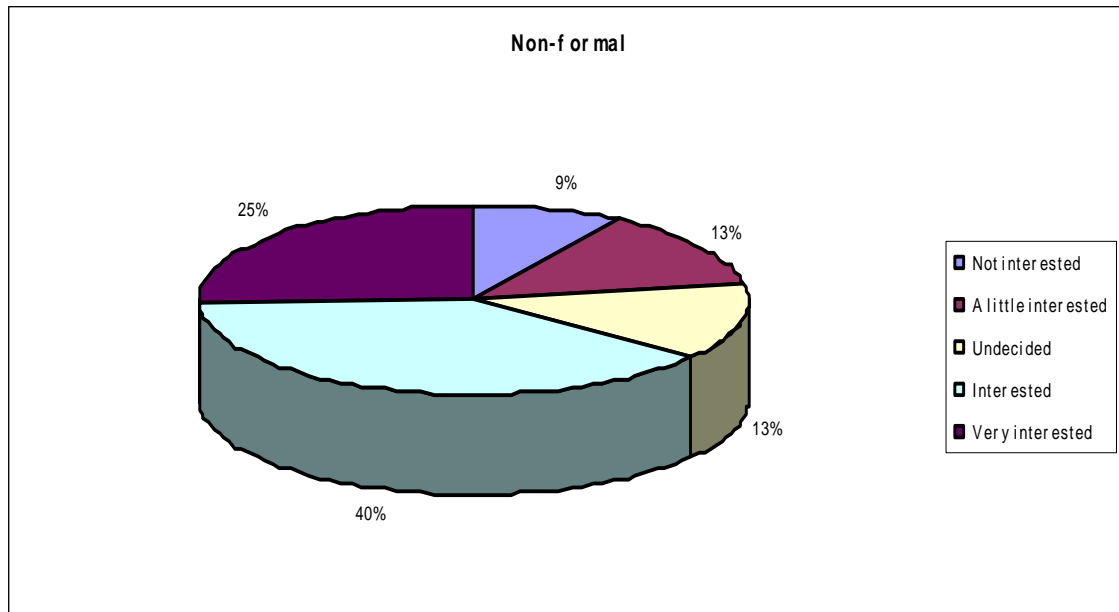
'I felt as though I had failed, I got through it ... but I think that this could be a problem for some people'

The negative experiences discussed centred around workload and assessment. These comments do indicate that some elements of formal learning can be stressful to some people and it must be borne in mind that this would have a negative impact on wider benefits.

Overall, the majority of respondents placed a high value in formal education. Some wider benefits can also be linked here to formal learning, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy and self-fulfilment. There are also wider benefits which impacts both the individual and the community. For example, one student recalled how much she had enjoyed the local history classes, not only did she learn new information but she had also got to know other people in the community.

'The classes brought up lots of interesting things about the area. There was a good turn out.... I had seen some of the people around but never talked to them before..... two of the women were Polish... the class brought us together.... it was a good experience... we have all gained so much'

2) Non-formal (e.g. societies, clubs)



The results indicate that for 65% of the population there is an appeal to learn without the trappings of accreditation and formal structures. This further suggests that these respondents are slightly more concerned with the concept of learning for itself and prefer an informal approach to learning.

Non-formal learning was discussed in the focus groups when discussing student's view about their experiences of lifelong learning. Students felt that there were positive attributes to non-formal learning if the quality of the activity is good. Some students liked the idea of learning for learning's sake and not to gain certificates or accreditation.

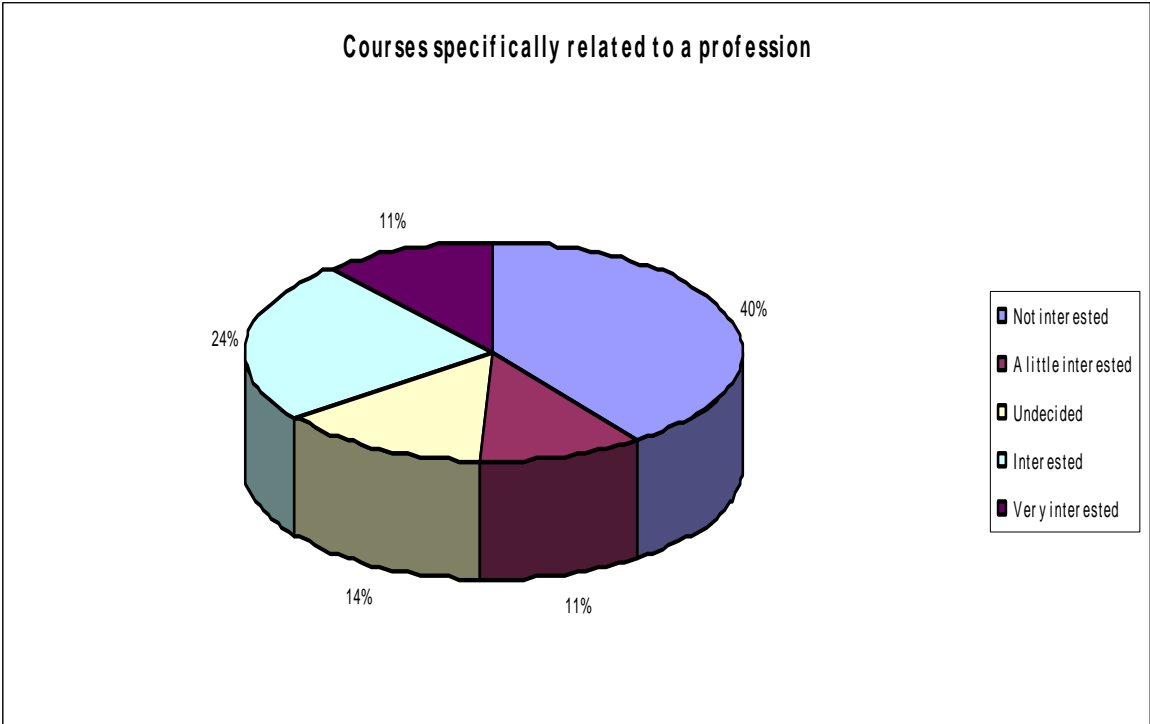
'I already have a degree, so don't feel the need for accreditation, but I enjoy the learning and keeping my brain active'

'I learned to swim when I was 55, it did wonders for my self esteem'

'I went to a "Meet the mouse" course a couple of years ago. We learned the basics of using a computer and the internet... there was no exam or test, I really enjoyed it'

Results from the non-formal learning suggest that this type of learning can also bring about wider benefits in promoting health and wellbeing, self-esteem and social inclusion.

3) Courses specifically related to a profession e.g. Microsoft accredited



The results show that 35% of the respondents were either very interested or interested in professionally related courses, 14% were undecided and 40% were not interested.

This suggests that some individuals may feel that gaining professional certification is important as it is directly linked to employment benefits. It is also worth bearing in mind the age majority of respondents when considering that 40% indicated no interest.

A number of the students in the focus groups believed that gaining professional certification was a way of making oneself more competitive in the work place. One student in her mid forties had taken an European Computer Driving Licence course (ECDL) and found this had helped her to get a new job after being out of the workforce for some time.

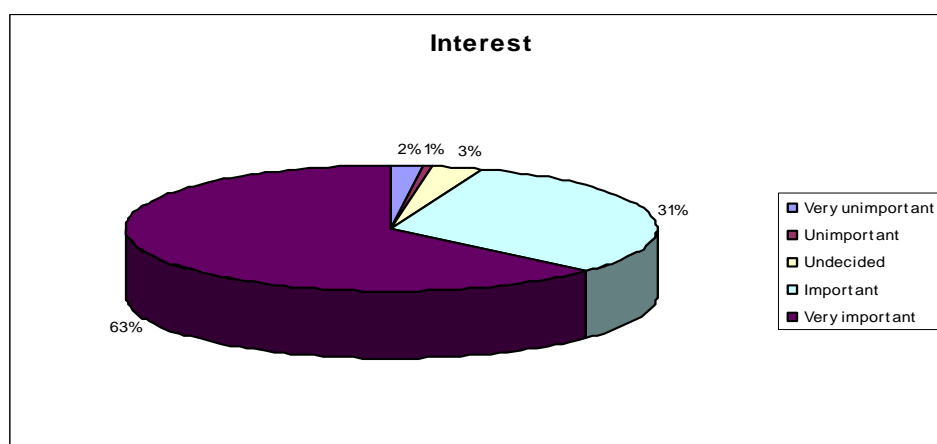
‘Some jobs ask specifically for ECDL qualifications, I was so glad that I had got my certificate’

All three types of learning have their significant values and appeal which suits the needs of the learners. The results would appear to suggest that it is a blending of formal, non-formal and work related learning that is significant here, as it appears that many people are interested in all three types of learning and not necessarily one specific type of learning.

What are you reasons for study?

The next question asked students their reasons for study. Six possible choices were proposed, ranging from self improvement, interest, professional development, to gain further knowledge of the subject, to meet new people, to keep intellectually active. Students were asked to rate each one in order of importance.

1) Interest



Results for this question show that an overwhelming 94% of respondents felt that *Interest in studying* was either v. important or important. This suggest that adults are strongly motivated to take up lifelong learning seeing it as an important way to keep intellectually active, fulfill their potential and foster a spirit of enquiry. During the focus groups, students were asked whether they felt lifelong learning promotes independent thinking and problem solving skills. Some of the respondents shared their views:

'Philosophy has always held a fascination for me... I wanted to find some answers... but there are no easy answers you have to really think about it.....'

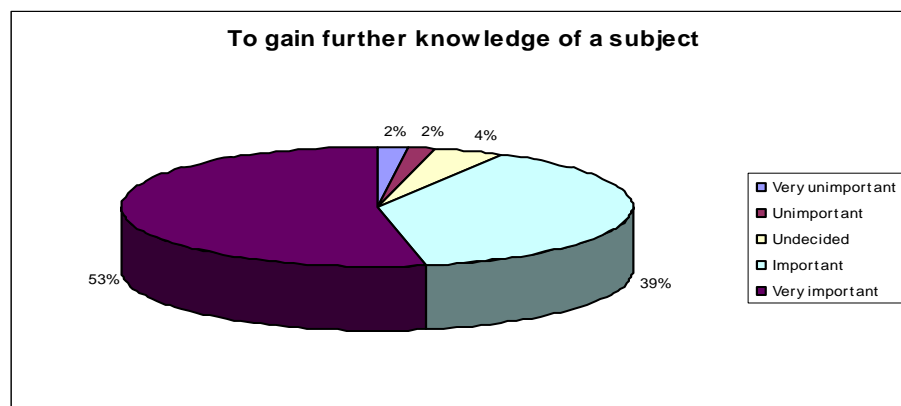
'I joined the class to learn Welsh ... it takes effort and you have to practice its not an easy option!'

'Gives you the ability to argue, it's empowering'

'I took up creative writing... aiming to be a professional writer.. I've had a poem published! ...'

It is clear that improved cognitive skills build self esteem and confidence.

2) To gain further knowledge of subject



For 92% of respondents, gaining knowledge of the subject was either very important or important.

This high score suggests that adults are keen to better their knowledge or perhaps learn new subjects.

As students develop their skills and understanding they become more self-confident and positive in their attitudes to learning. This theme emerged from within the focus groups when discussing how lifelong learning can encourage positive attitudes and values. There was a discussion about school experiences:

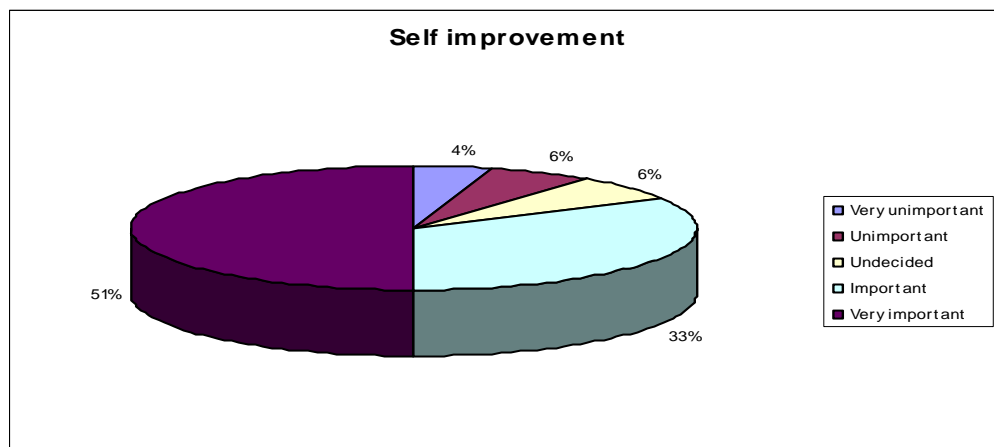
'I never understood literature in school and my teacher wasn't very helpful and made me feel stupid..... Damaging school experiences can stay with you, people don't understand why it's been difficult for some people to access education.

Negative experiences of school education can have a lasting effect on self confidence and attitudes to learning. Many adult students may reach a point in the lives when they want to redress or overcome possible gaps in their knowledge in order to feel better about themselves:

'I wasn't very good in school at maths, so I went to class as I wanted to help my grandson with his homework'

Apart from knowledge and learning, there is evidence here of self-efficacy and self-confidence. However, there are strong indications of barriers to learning also which can have negative impact on wider benefits.

3.0 Self improvement



Self-improvement was also a popular reason for people to take up lifelong learning. For many adults lifelong learning opportunities are and chance to gain new knowledge they may have missed out on in early years.

Discussing how lifelong learning has made a difference to their lives, two female participants, one in her late thirties and the other in her forties commented:

'More tolerant now... we had a lot of sudden changes at work which were quite shocking but education helps you understand and be able to express yourself rationally .. makes you more reflective'

'I love learning.... all positive..... social time away from the children, has a knock-on effect on the children too'

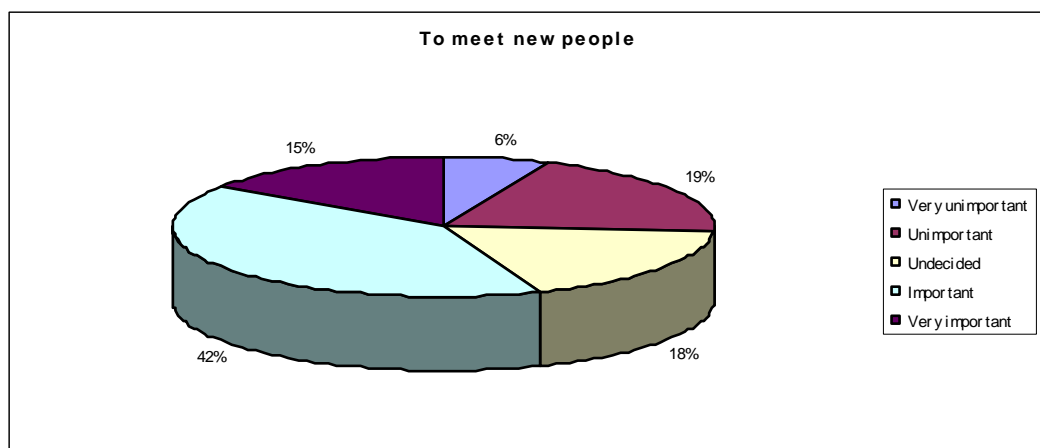
The male respondents, both of whom were over 50 reported:

'I got a new job because of it'

'Made me much more knowledgeable'

The wider benefits here are clearly expounded.

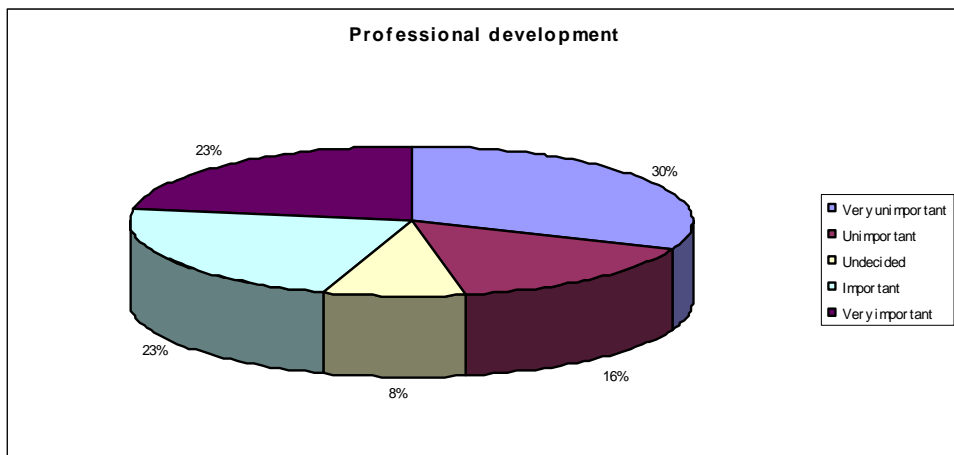
4.0 To meet new people



A total of 57% of respondents said they had taken up lifelong learning to meet new people. This suggests that for many people lifelong learning offers a forum which encourages social networks and social cohesion and in terms of wider benefits provides a good example of building social capital. As one student in the focus group commented:

'you meet people who are interested in the same things as you... not just learning but connecting socially'

5.0 Professional development



The results above show that 46% of respondents felt that professional development was either very important or important. This suggests that these respondents' main concern with accessing lifelong learning centers around their vocational needs, either for their own satisfaction to facilitate their work or satisfy the requirements of professional bodies.

During the focus group meetings, the facilitator asked participants for their views about whether lifelong learning can contribute to the economy. There was a consensus that taking up lifelong learning can aid continuing professional development as it builds people's self confidence and self-efficacy by updating and improving skills and knowledge. It also has a beneficial impact on their performance in the workplace.

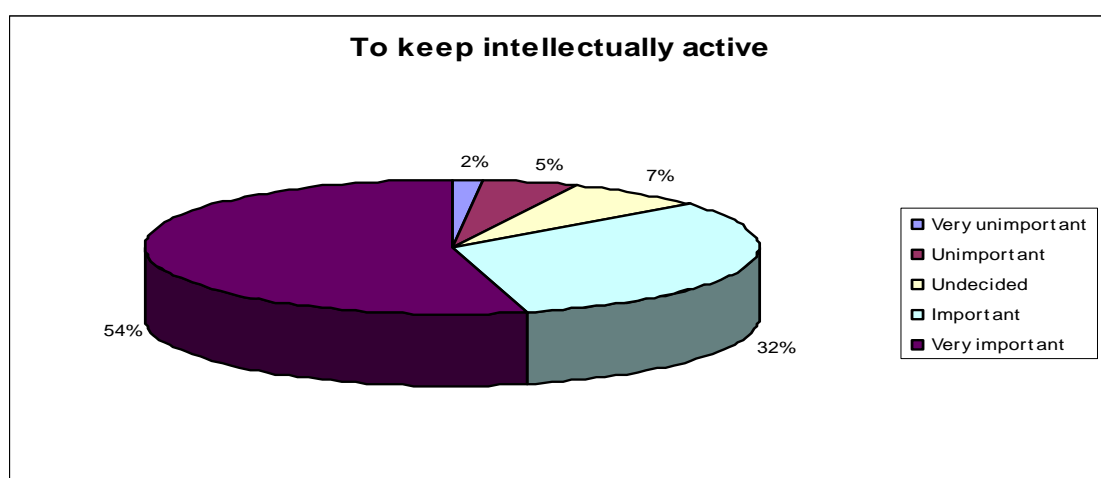
'I'm a self employed graphic designer, so need to keep up with a range of art techniques so that I can offer a better service and get good commissions'

'Gives people confidence to engage in meetings, to be able to have their say and more confidence about being able to back up your point of view'

'I'm an occupational therapist so know about CDP ... it's mandatory in many jobs in healthcare. Lifelong learning fitted in well for me'..

Results from this question that provision for CDP clearly matters to many adults as it enables individuals to sustain their productiveness. Also there are wider benefits here such as wellbeing and self esteem.

6.0 To keep intellectually active



A large percentage of respondents (86%), felt that keeping intellectually active was a prime motivator for study. There is a growing awareness that it is sensible for adults of all ages to keep the mind as well as the body active. The results suggest that for many people, taking up lifelong learning is a way of enabling people to become mentally stimulated and challenged by learning something new - vital for promoting cognitive ability.

This was an area of particular interest for students in the focus group, who discussed the importance of lifelong learning activities and the need to keep abreast of new developments happening in the world around them. This seemed particularly important to the older students who felt it was necessary shake off stereotypical images often relating to older or retired people.

‘Much better communication with grandchildren, keeps you mentally stimulated’ Gave me a new sense of purpose and self confidence’

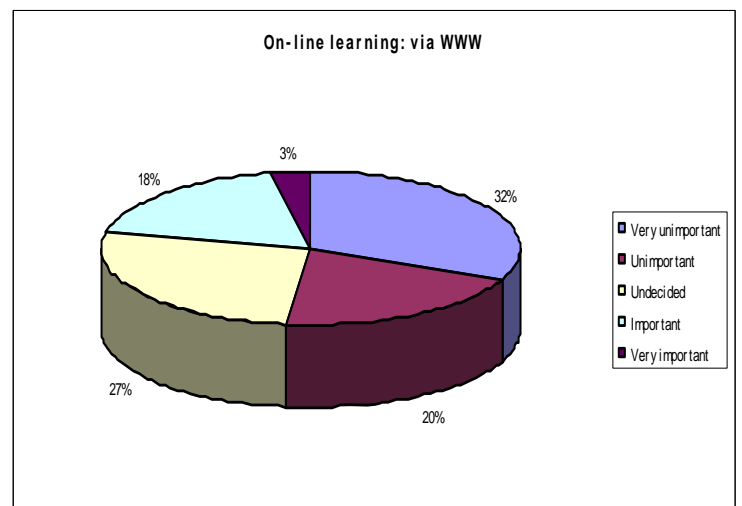
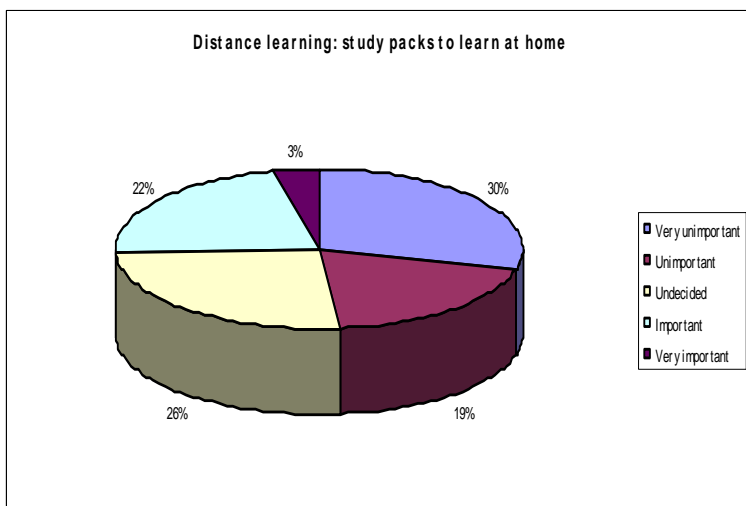
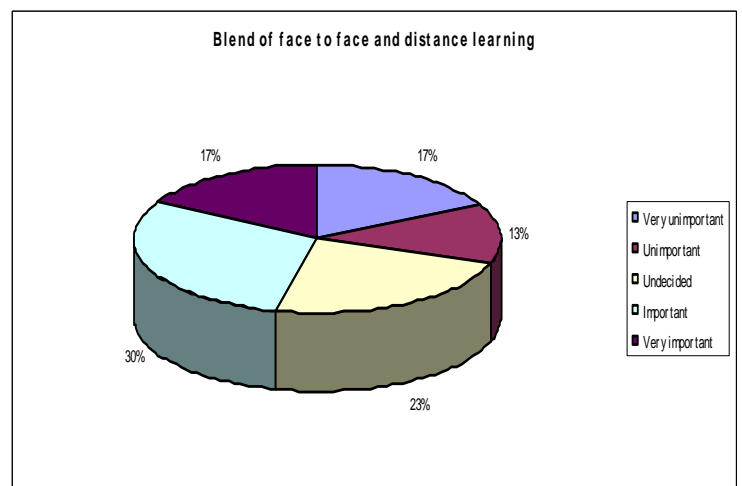
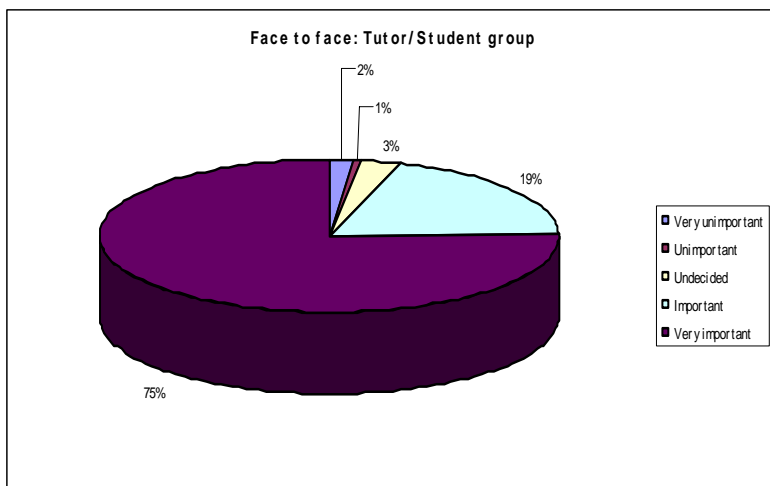
‘My boss was amazed that I use a VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) on my course’

This clearly indicates wider benefits. Hammond (2002) strongly argues that Lifelong learning contributes to psychological, mental and physical health and generates immediate psychosocial outcomes (such as well-being, efficacy, communication skills, a sense of social responsibility) that have lasting effects upon mental health, and cumulative effects upon physical health.

The results from the question show that people have many reasons for taking up study and are motivated by a number of complex factors. The categories discussed show that reasons cited relate directly to non-economic wider benefits such as self confidence, self-efficacy, improved health and wellbeing and greater job satisfaction but also provide a better understanding and some evidence of how these processes interact and in some cases can link to economic benefits.

What is your preference for style of course delivery.

This question asked students “What is your preference for style of course delivery? There were four choices to rate in order of importance. These were face to face learning with tutor/student group; distance learning: study packs at home; on-line learning: via world wide web and a blend of face to face and distance learning.



The results from this question show a high score of 92% majority of the population preferring face to face delivery, 47% rated blended learning as being important or v.important, 41% felt that distance learning was very important or important; 38% rated on line learning as being very important or important.

This suggests that it is essential for students to have human interaction and contact to help them acquire learning and subject expertise. The social contact is also very important to students.

This was clearly articulated in the focus groups where the sense of attending a class was linked with belonging to a community and having access to tutors with subject expertise and knowledge they could trust. The peer support from students themselves also makes the learning experience pleasurable and enjoyable and has wider benefits,

'The stuff you get up on Google is amazing but I get sidetracked and don't really know if its right or wrong'

'Social aspect of classes are good too... laughing is very good for you'

'More self confidence now, I'm learning so muchand new friends – has to be a health benefit from this....'

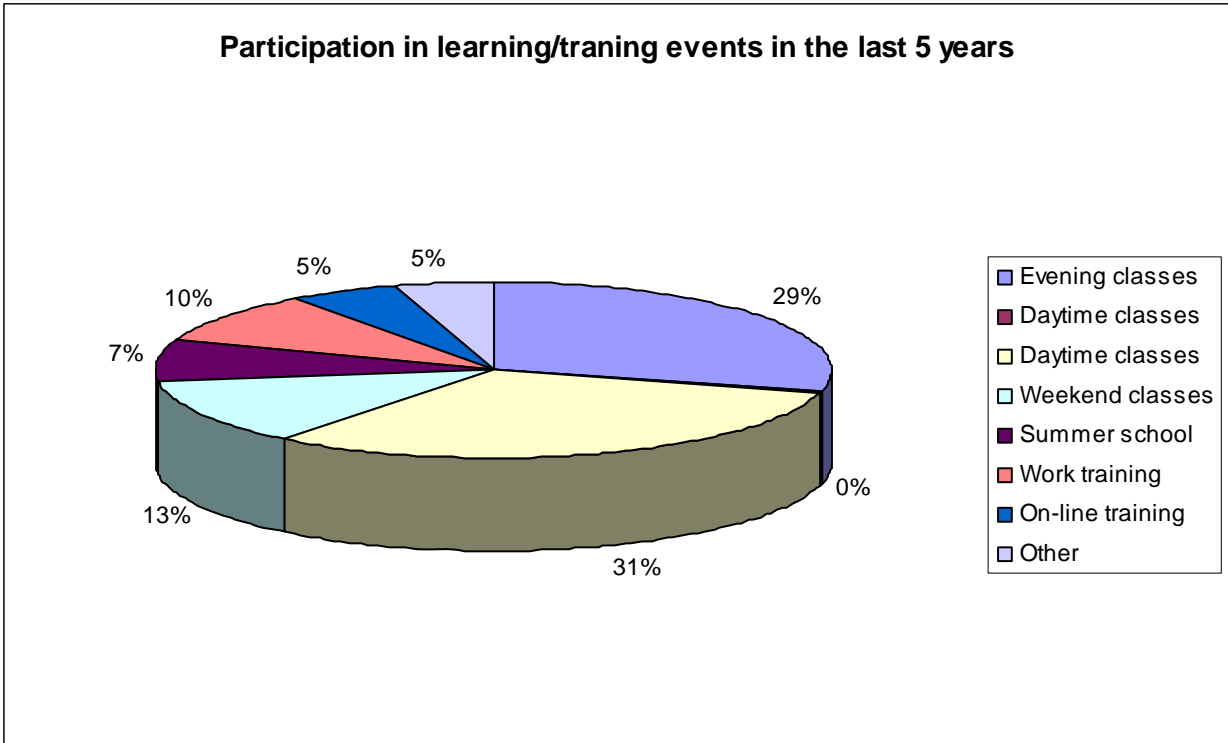
Nevertheless, there were some frustrations mooted in that provision didn't always meet personal requirements. For example, a course was being delivered in a venue which students were not able to get to, or if the timing of the class was wrong.

It follows from this evidence that is not so surprising that distance learning was not as popular a choice as this normally entails working in isolation and independently. Students would need to be particularly motivated to work in this way. Although, one must bear in mind that there are very successful distance learning programs that do hold appeal to some students such as those offered by Open University. The on-line learning option was rated fairly low. This is worthy of note here, particularly as one of the other questions concerning level of skills with computers and information technology showed that the majority of respondents (73%) indicated they were either very confident or reasonably confident using information technology and computers. This again infers the need for people to engage in face to face delivery.

It was however, interesting to note that 47% of students were interested in blended learning and this is a model that perhaps holds appeal and could prove to be successful for certain students and may also help learning providers to reach a wider audience.

Overall the results suggests that successful learning takes place in environments where there is a human element and the dynamics of dialogue, debate and peer support exists. Also one must bear in mind that for many students who are returning to learning after a long period, or who may have suffered some form of trauma or life change, interacting with tutors and peers is likely to be preferred to studying in isolation. These are attributes which aid social cohesion and build self confidence and self-esteem.

Previous Study

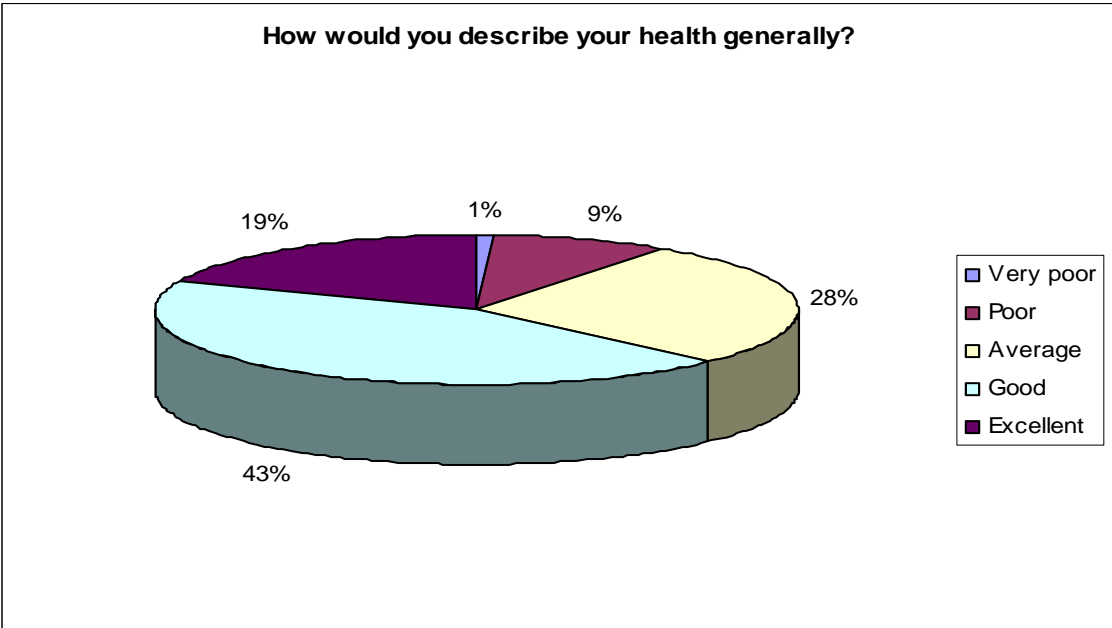


The results from this question show that 29% of respondents had taken part in evening classes, 38% in daytime (am/pm) learning, 13% weekend learning, 7% summer schools, 10% work training and 5% online.

These results are interesting in that they provide longitudinal evidence showing individuals have been involved with learning over a **five year period**. Whilst daytime and evening provision is the most popular, it is interesting that work training and weekend learning are being taken up.

These results confirms that lifelong learning is meeting its aims in that it is life long and ongoing. People may want to step in and out over a period of time as this realistically matches up to life events. For many learners this may mean taking courses which are at the same level of accreditation and not necessarily to achieve higher awards. This “level” provision however, is an area which is currently being affected by financial policies of the funding councils. In England the funding councils have decided that funding will cease for students who take university and college courses for qualifications at the same or lower levels than those they possess already. This is currently not the case in Wales.

How would you describe your health generally?



This suggests that 90% of respondents, the majority of whom are 55 and over, enjoy average to good health and are intellectually active. This may suggest that being involved in learning activities can stimulate cognitive processes which can have beneficial effects on health and wellbeing. Of course there is also the possibility that because students are in good health, they are able to take up lifelong learning opportunities.

These results were considered alongside the comments from the focus groups where the theme of health and wider benefits of lifelong learning was emotively debated in all three of the focus groups. Four students attending three different venues Bangor, Wrexham and St. Asaph, two female, two male, reported benefits to their own or their partner's mental health from attending lifelong learning courses.

'felt very ill and depressed until I did a degree at 40 .. I probably would have been put in a mental asylum.....'

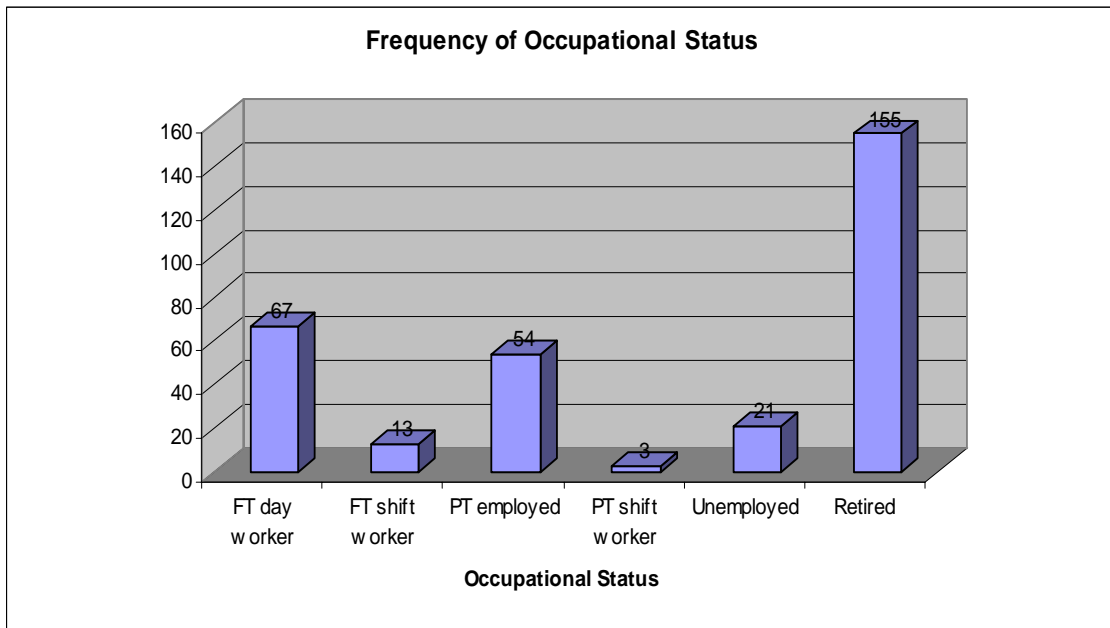
I've suffered off and on for many years with depression, but doing my degree has given me a better focus – its really made a difference to my life and to my family... working at the course has helped me through I feel so much better about myself...

"I retired at 55 .. I found it difficult to cope at first, but worst of all my wife died suddenly soon after. Taking up lifelong learning has enabled me to find some stability and direction - I have a sense of purpose again..learning new things.... I feel part of a community"

These comments strongly suggest that it is because of their learning that students' health and well being has improved.

How would you describe your current occupational status?

The following question asked people about their current occupation status to ascertain how many people were in full or part time employment , those who were unemployed and those who were retired.



Results from the data in this question show that out of 328 respondents, 155 are retired, and a total of 134 of these are in either full or part time employment and 21 unemployed.

These figures are particularly interesting when compared to the age of the population where the largest percent of respondents were in the 55-65+ age brackets.

Issues about learning and occupations arose in the focus groups. One student spoke about how he had experience difficulty in getting work after 55.

“I sent out over 40 applications, I got a couple of interviews but never got a job .. I think it was because of my age although no one actually said so”

Some in the focus groups felt that employers do not value experience, preferring to take younger people who have may have new qualifications. Only two of the students in all three focus groups were aware of APEL. There was a sense that work/life experience of older people value is undervalued . Issues such as these can create social exclusion. Finding a new social purpose is important for health and wellbeing and lifelong learning can help to address this.

7.0 Main findings and analysis

Peoples' attitudes towards Lifelong Learning

The results have shown that there are excellent benefits to be gained from all types of learning whether this be formal, non-formal or informal which can add to social capital and some of these findings will be further explored in this analysis.

The investigation has found that people have very diverse and multi-faceted reasons for taking up lifelong learning. It is clear that once adults engage with lifelong learning they are highly motivated to learn. The research showed that students also have certain expectations, hopes and aspirations about the different kinds of learning that they choose to do and many willingly conveyed that they have experienced profound and lasting benefits from their learning. The results have also revealed some interesting barrier issues surrounding lifelong learning which may for some people, result in non-participation and isolation.

Health and well being benefits

Students that took part in the focus groups were highly articulate about their experiences of lifelong learning and how it had affected their lives. The majority of the students reported personal wider benefits relating to their health, improved self-esteem, their happiness and well being. In some cases students illustrated how these benefits made a direct positive impact on their family and work-related relationships.

Whilst it is tempting to argue unequivocally that lifelong learning is a panacea for good health, it would be remiss to paint too bright a picture of health benefits as there were issues raised in the research which also point to negative impacts which can for some people, effect their health and wellbeing. For example, some of the students in the focus groups talked about how they had faltered at the amount of reading they needed to do and another spoke of the pressure of assessments and

their deadlines. In both cases the students had lost confidence and this had affected their self-esteem. In these particular cases, students were following part time degree qualifications where support structures were in place to help. However, it does suggest that for some a less intensive qualification may be more appropriate. Hammond (2006) discussed how education can also generate challenges and expectations that are potentially stress-inducing indicating cognitive dissonance explaining that this happens when students aspirations, expectations and reality do not match up and the stress generated from this which may place burdens on students and their families and friends.

Barriers to lifelong learning

Negative experiences can affect many other individuals who may be less motivated to learn because of the perceived expectations it may place upon them. Motivation can be affected if these individuals are at a point or place in the lives where they are vulnerable, or if their confidence and self-esteem is low. This is counterproductive to the aims of lifelong learning in seeking to widen participation and reach the groups of people who may be socially excluded and for whom the right sort of learning opportunity could bring a range of benefits. Jones (1997) identifies these groups of people to include the unemployed, unskilled, immobilised and carers. However, there are many other disadvantaged people who could be added to this list.

This points to the need for strong advice, guidance and support structures for adult learners who may be isolated and non-participant in learning and perhaps this where taster courses, study skills provision and broad foundation type courses can be of great help, especially if they are of a short duration initially to introduce and encourage new ideas. It also points to opportunities that can exist between non-accredited and accredited provision as both have strengths and appeal in engaging and fostering educational pursuits and have complementary value for lifelong learners. In practice such “signposting” would require the skills of a good advisor to ensure that students are aware of the various programmes available to them and are advised about the sort of learning experience they

may expect - but more than this, the advisor would need to be sensitive to the circumstances of the individual and in this sense the role should be both advisory and mediatory.

8.0 What Lies Ahead for Lifelong Learning

A response to the UK government's focus on skills and employment has been central to this research, which has shown that lifelong learning *in its broadest sense*, can make a significant contribution in this area. From the point of view of wider benefits, both formal and informal types of learning can improve the skills of individuals and thereby aid sustainable employment levels. However, one could argue that it is through the formal learning domain that people will increase their cognitive and reflective thinking skills, and where people can gain accreditation for their endeavours. Formal accreditation has value to the individual, as it shows achievement and competency which can make them competitive in the marketplace and can have benefits to employment trajectories as adults develop new skills and keep lifelong employment.

The evidence further suggests that lifelong learning is a vital agent in encouraging social inclusion allowing opportunities for all as it is a gateway to education, social networks, employment and for many groups who may be termed as socially excluded such as the under-qualified, unskilled, unemployed, immobilised, carers, (Jones, 1997).

Note: Additional results from the questionnaire and focus groups are electronically available contact s.m.hughes@bangor.ac.uk.

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