

# Understanding effective part-time provision for undergraduates from under-represented and disadvantaged backgrounds

*A report for the Office for Students by CFE Research and HESA*

HESA  
SERVICES



**The authors of this report are:**

**CFE Research:**

Dr Sarah Tazzyman  
Lindsey Bowes  
Arifa Choudhoury  
Rachel Moreton  
Alex Stutz

and

**HESA:**

Tej Nathwani  
Matt Clarke

**For more information about this  
report please contact:**

Lindsey Bowes, Research Director

CFE Research  
Phoenix Yard  
Upper Brown Street  
Leicester  
LE1 5TE  
T: 0116 229 3300  
E: [lindsey.bowes@cfe.org.uk](mailto:lindsey.bowes@cfe.org.uk)

[www.cfe.org.uk](http://www.cfe.org.uk)

Established in 1997, CFE Research is an independent not-for-profit company specialising in research and evaluation services in the fields of education, wellbeing and the economy.

© OfS 2019

# CONTENTS

01.	Executive Summary	1
02.	Introduction	10
03.	Method	16
04.	Secondary data analysis	23
05.	Qualitative findings	39
06.	Student Survey	55
07.	Case studies of higher education providers	65
	Appendix 1: Secondary Analysis – Data Tables	71

---



# 01. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last decade, the number of UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time education at English higher education providers (HEPs) has been in decline. This decline is of concern because of the role part-time higher education (HE) plays in widening access for disadvantaged groups, and in supporting social mobility and economic growth. The factors that are likely to be contributing to the decline are well-documented.<sup>1</sup> However, less is known about the characteristics of students who study part-time and whether the decline in participation is greater amongst certain groups.

In January 2018, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA)<sup>2</sup> commissioned CFE Research in partnership with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to undertake research and analysis to address the gaps in current understanding and explore practice within some of the providers that appeared to be bucking the downward trend in part-time HE. ‘Disadvantaged students’ provided a particular focus for the research. This report explores trends in access to part-time HE through analysis of HESA records on UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time study in publicly funded English providers between 2006-07 and 2016-17. A survey of 281 students in seven HEPs explored the factors that influence whether disadvantaged groups choose to study part-time. The factors that motivate HEPs to offer part-time provision were explored in interviews with 13 institutional staff from four HEPs. Three institutional case studies highlight how some providers are successfully engaging and supporting part-time undergraduates. Although relatively small scale, this research makes an important contribution to advancing our understanding of the current part-time study landscape.

## Key findings

### Trends in part-time study

- The number of part-time HE students **fell by 171,630** between 2006-07 and 2016-17; the number of full-time students rose by 61,410 during the same period.
- The proportion of the overall HE student population studying part-time in 2016-17 **was less than 20 per cent**, down from 46 per cent in 2006-07.

---

<sup>1</sup> Callender, C. and Thompson, J. (2018) *The Lost Part-Timers: The decline of part-time undergraduate higher education in England*. London: The Sutton Trust. Published online at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/The-Lost-Part-Timers-Final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The research was commissioned by OFFA and completed between January and March 2018. OFFA and HEFCE ceased to exist from 1 April 2018 and were replaced by the Office for Students (OfS), a non-departmental public body of the Department for Education that acts as the regulator and competition authority for the higher education sector in England. OFFA’s responsibility for promoting fair access to HE had a slightly different function to the OfS and the HE landscape has changed since the research was carried out. The findings of this report were therefore guided by the role that OFFA served, but seek to provide recommendations to reflect the responsibilities of the OfS.

- The **Open University (OU) is the major supplier of part-time first degrees** (64 per cent of the current market). Other, predominantly **low-tariff providers, are the major providers of ‘other undergraduate’ qualifications** (93 per cent of the market).
- **High-tariff providers experienced a sharp decline** in their part-time student numbers between 2006-07 and 2016-17, which accounts for 6 per cent of their UK domiciled undergraduate intake.
- **Subjects allied to medicine** have become the **dominant subject** area studied in part-time HE.
- **Part-time students now display a younger age profile** as a result of a substantial decline in the proportion of entrants aged 40 or over.
- The **decline in part-time study amongst disadvantaged groups** is primarily accounted for by a **reduction in the number of students** studying nursing, business and administrative studies, and education in low-to-medium-tariff providers.

### **Provider perspectives on part-time HE**

- The **key drivers** of part-time provision are both **economic and social**.
- The **sustainability** of some programmes and providers is dependent on maintaining part-time student numbers.
- In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution<sup>3</sup> and wider changes to the social and political landscape, **demand for flexible routes is anticipated to grow**. Part-time HE forms one element of a diverse offer that could help to protect HEPs from the potential impact of these changes.
- Although employer support for part-time HE has declined, there is a **still a market for provision that is responsive to employers’ needs**. This includes degree apprenticeships.
- Some HEPs recognise the important role that part-time study plays in **widening access for specific groups**, e.g. disabled and mature students.
- There is **very little incentive to develop part-time provision for some HEPs**; they can be deterred by the additional costs involved in reaching out to part-time learners and developing the infrastructure needed to deliver bespoke courses and support.
- The **reforms to student finance and a decline in employer support** are perceived to be the main reasons for the decline in part-time student numbers. The requirement for students to be studying towards a recognised qualification in order to be eligible for a loan presents a barrier to students wishing to undertake a standalone module.
- Time constraints, lack of confidence and academic study skills, lack of integration with the student community, and a lack of facilities tailored to part-time students’ needs are also perceived barriers for part-time students.
- Some providers are **addressing barriers** through **more strategic, holistic approaches** and by enhancing distance-learning provision through the use of new and innovative technology.

---

<sup>3</sup> See Schwab, K. (2016) The Fourth Industrial Revolution: what it means, how to respond. Published online at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/> and World Economic Forum (2017) Accelerating workforce reskilling for the Fourth Industrial Revolution: an agenda for leaders to shape the future of education, gender and work. Geneva: WEF. Published online at: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_EGW\\_White\\_Paper\\_Reskilling.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_EGW_White_Paper_Reskilling.pdf)

## Student perspectives on part-time HE

- The **main reason** survey respondents choose to study part-time is to enable them to **continue to work and support themselves and their family**. Employer contribution is not a key driver – only 8 per cent opted for part-time study because their employer was prepared to contribute to the cost of their tuition fees.
- Respondents are motivated to study in HE because they need the qualification to get the job they really want. **Disadvantaged students** commonly report that they were not in a position to study HE before and **were motivated by a long-held ambition to get a HE qualification**.
- **Delivery method** and **perceived lack of choice** are key reasons why students choose their provider.
- **Disadvantaged students** with care responsibilities are most likely to be relying on a **loan to pay for their tuition costs**.
- Of those who have not made use of the loan system, **over a third are not aware that part-time students could be eligible for a tuition-fee loan**.
- **Financial considerations** are generally a **bigger concern** for respondents than non-financial matters, such as the timing of lectures.
- **Disadvantaged students** in particular report **experiencing difficulties meeting the cost of education**, with course-related expenditure and living expenses of greatest concern.
- Although most elements of part-time courses meet students' needs, disadvantaged students are most likely to be dissatisfied with **the provision of social, emotional and pastoral support**.

## Conclusions

Our analysis demonstrates that, despite the dramatic fall in part-time student numbers overall, the proportion of students from disadvantaged groups has remained relatively stable at around 10 per cent. Hardest hit by the decline are mature students, and in particular those over 40. The cost of part-time HE appears to be the main barrier to access, particularly for disadvantaged and older age groups, and the measures introduced so far to mitigate the impact of funding reforms have done little to address this. The reasons for this appear to be, in part, a lack of awareness of the availability of financial support for some part-time students. However, mature students also appear to be reluctant to take advantage of the funding available. This may be because they are more debt-averse and/or fears they will not achieve a return on their investment. In the context of the introduction of loans for maintenance as well as tuition fees, these reasons could be usefully explored further to ensure future developments in funding policy are informed by the voice of this group.

The findings highlight the significant role that the OU plays in the part-time HE market and, in particular, in the delivery of first-degree programmes to students from disadvantaged groups. The analysis identified a number of 'cold spots' in provision in several regions of England, and the survey findings highlight a perceived lack of choice for part-time students. Part-time students are typically less mobile. A lack of provision restricts student choice and can limit part-time students to certain courses at certain types of provider. There is a risk

that these types of restriction perpetuate disadvantage, and that HE does not deliver the desired level of social mobility for these students.

Providers that are growing their online and distance-learning provision, such as the OU and the University of Derby, will play an increasingly important role as national providers, enabling those living in areas with limited provision to access HE. However, addressing cold spots through an expansion of campus-based and blended learning is also important for a number of reasons. First, online delivery models are not suitable for all types of learner and those not wishing or able to study by distance learning require access to HE provision in their local area. Second, one of the Office for Students' (OfS) four strategic objectives is to ensure students receive a high-quality academic experience and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure. Student protection plans are one of the mechanisms to be put in place to support OfS to achieve this objective. But it will be challenging to implement these plans for part-time students in the absence of alternative local part-time provision. Finally, HEPs, as anchor providers and responsible bodies, fulfil a vital role in upskilling and reskilling the workforce, and assuring a pipeline of talent with higher level skills within Industrial Strategy<sup>4</sup> priority areas. Skills issues are often region-specific; focusing on practical ways in which HEPs and employers can work collaboratively may help to optimise skills utilisation at the local level.<sup>5</sup>

In the absence of local provision that is accessible to adults in work, employers are likely to struggle to address presenting skills gaps and shortages. Current Government policy is designed to support and encourage employers to engage with providers to ensure provision meets their needs. The Industrial Strategy<sup>6</sup> and identified regional skills shortages emphasise the importance of higher education, employers and regional associations working together to close the gap and assure the talent pipeline. This is crucial for enhancing productivity and supporting economic growth as the UK continues to emerge from the 2008 recession and given the uncertainties over Brexit.

Although employer support for part-time HE has decreased, there is evidence that there is still demand for employer-responsive provision to address specific skills gaps<sup>7</sup>. The opportunity presented by degree apprenticeships for students to 'earn and learn' could be attractive to those who are deterred by the cost of HE and/or need to continue to work to

---

<sup>4</sup> HM Government (2017) Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain fit for the future. Published online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-strategy-building-a-britain-fit-for-the-future>

<sup>5</sup> OECD/ILO (2017) Better Use of Skills in the Workplace: Why It Matters for Productivity and Local Jobs. Paris: OECD Publishing. Published online at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281394-en>.

<sup>7</sup> The Institute of Coding (<https://instituteofcoding.org/>), a consortium of around 60 universities, businesses and industry experts, has received funding to tackle the UK's digital skills gap. The funding is enabling HEPs to design and deliver innovative teaching provision that aims to transform graduate employability, opening up opportunities for widening participation students with a background and/or interest in computing.

support themselves and their family. However, disadvantaged and mature students often possess low or no formal qualifications and may not, in some cases, meet the requirements for higher apprenticeship programmes, including degree apprenticeships. As this policy area evolves, further consideration could be given to the development of more inclusive routes into higher apprenticeships for these groups, drawing on existing good practice within the HE sector, such as contextual admissions.

HE, employer and regional collaboration is also important for social justice. The research strongly suggests that there are some groups, such as disabled students, that are simply unable to access HE without the flexibility accorded by part-time provision. If the decline in part-time provision is allowed to continue at the current rate, there is a possibility that many of these students will be excluded from HE altogether in the future. As a result, people may not reach their full potential and rather than contribute to the economic prosperity of the UK, be confined to low-skill, low-wage occupations, or a reliance on the state.

Aside from the cost, this research identifies a range of barriers for part-time students including time constraints, lack of confidence and study skills to study at the HE level, lack of opportunities to integrate into the wider student community, and a lack of facilities tailored to part-time students' needs. In addition, some survey respondents express particular dissatisfaction with the social, emotional, and pastoral support available for part-time students. Although further research is required to establish whether this is reflective of the view of part-time students in the sector as a whole, it raises an important question about how engaged part-time students are in the National Student Survey and the extent to which their voices influence providers' decision-making.

The case studies highlight ways in which some providers are addressing barriers to access, retention and progression for part-time students. Key to the success of these approaches is buy-in at a strategic level. This ensures an appropriate level of resource is invested in the development of infrastructure for both teaching and learning, and pastoral support for part-time students. It also ensures that the offer for part-time students is tailored to their needs and fully integrated, as opposed to being 'bolted on' to full-time provision.

## Recommendations

CFE identifies several recommendations for the OfS and policy makers to address the decline in student part-time numbers, contributing to effective part-time provision:

### OfS and policy-makers

- The majority of national policy, programmes and initiatives are focused on full-time provision. **Ensuring part-time provision is prioritised in national policy** is important to ensure part-time provision becomes a strategic priority for providers.

- **Incentivise all providers to increase their part-time provision as part of a whole-sector approach to addressing the decline in student numbers.** This could be achieved through mechanisms such as providers’ access and participation plans (APPs) and widening participation (WP) strategies. Ensuring the part-time student voice is accurately captured via the National Student Survey and other feedback mechanisms would help to ensure that changes to provision meet the needs of this group. This is relevant for higher=tariff providers in particular, where part-time student numbers have declined sharply and disadvantaged groups remain under-represented.
- It will be important to consider **strategies to address ‘cold spots’** (i.e. areas of no or low levels of HE provision) **and regional disparities in part-time provision through the development of a combination of distance, campus-based and blended learning.** Given the varying levels of infrastructure in place across the sector, this may best be achieved through **collaboration between different types of provider, employers and regional bodies to create pathways** which enable learners to move between providers and progress from other undergraduate to first-degree programmes. There is some evidence of HEPs collaborating with further education colleges (FECs) to validate part-time HE programmes. These partnerships could be strengthened and expanded to increase provision and ensure regional coverage. This is important for ensuring fair access for those who are not able to study via distance learning. It would also ensure, in the event of programme or provider failure, that suitable alternative provision is available and student protection plans can be implemented for part-time as well as full-time students.
- It will be important to continue to **monitor trends in the part-time participation rate amongst disadvantaged groups** to understand the impact of any policy (or provider) interventions to boost participation. To facilitate this, it will be important to **develop a more appropriate measure of disadvantage**, given students are typically older and in work. Our analysis suggests that this should take account of previous educational level/attainment and caring responsibilities.
- **There is a lack of effective information, advice and guidance (IAG)** at a national level, including information about the funding available to part-time students. Improving IAG for both young people and adults in the workplace could help to address one of the fundamental barriers faced by part-time students and mature learners in particular. Although schools and colleges have a role to play in this context, given the age profile of part-time students, the focus must be on the delivery of provision through other mechanisms, such as job centres, trades unions, charities and third-sector organisations, building on initiatives such as the deepened co-location trials.
- **Evaluating the impact of loans for maintenance** will ensure future developments in national (and provider funding policy) are informed by the voice of part-time students. It will be important to ensure that this evaluation also takes account of the impact of other recent changes to the funding of some courses, such as the withdrawal of the NHS-funded bursary for nursing students.
- Consider **re-introducing funding for low-intensity study** in order to facilitate access to HE for those wishing to retrain or up-skill by undertaking standalone modules, or simply ‘dip a toe’ into HE without committing to a full qualification.
- Continue to prioritise the development of programmes to improve partnership working between providers, employers and regional bodies to support disadvantaged students throughout the student lifecycle and beyond (e.g. the Challenge Competition by the OfS<sup>8</sup>) in order to encourage future economic growth and social mobility.

---

<sup>8</sup> For information see: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/ofs-challenge-competition-industrial-strategy-and-skills-support-for-local-students-and-graduates/>

## Providers

- **Providers should consider the strategic importance of part-time provision in the context of their role as ‘anchor institutions’ and ‘responsible bodies’** supporting economic growth and social mobility in their local region as well as nationally.
- **Raising awareness of the strategic benefits** of part-time provision is key to securing overall buy-in at the provider level and to support the development of the infrastructure necessary for effective delivery of part-time provision, such as investment in IT and/or staff training.
- HEPs and employers should work collaboratively to complete initial-skills-level assessments for new apprentices in order to ensure they receive the most appropriate and beneficial offer.
- Sharing learning and best practice from within the HE sector could help employers to implement more progressive and inclusive recruitment practices which ensure disadvantaged students, including those with low or no formal qualifications, can access higher apprenticeships.
- Cost and access to funding are key barriers for part-time students from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular. Improvements in the **IAG about part-time study and the financial support available** would help to address this barrier by ensuring prospective and existing students have access to up-to-date and accurate information to inform their decision making. Working in partnership with employers and other organisations such as Jobcentre Plus could help to ensure potential part-time students, particularly mature learners, are aware of the opportunities available in HE and have access to the IAG they need to make an informed choice about whether it is the right route for them.
- **Analysing and interrogating existing data** to understand the characteristics of their learner populations and those that are not being served by traditional full-time provision will assist providers to identify groups in need of bespoke support. Providers could undertake a review of the extent to which part-time students’ views are reflected in the National Student Survey and develop mechanisms to accurately capture their voices if required.
- **Encouraging providers to undertake evaluations** of their existing provision for part-time learners to ensure future strategies are informed by the learner voice could help to ensure future provision caters more fully for part-time students’ requirements.
- **Retention and progression** amongst part-time students is a presenting issue and a potential barrier to the expansion of provision. Identifying the reasons for drop-out and developing **tailored initiatives and support** could help address this. However, it is important that these initiatives are bespoke to part-time students and not a ‘bolt-on’ to interventions for full-time students.
- **Specific marketing and outreach strategies** aimed at part-time students to boost confidence and awareness of the options available to prospective part-time students would be beneficial. Providers’ websites are a key source of information for part-time students, so materials pitched at this group need to be accessible and clear.
- Developing a **range of flexible study models** would enable more groups, including adults in work seeking to retrain, to engage in HE. This is important for the achievement of social mobility goals as well as productivity and economic growth.
- Raising employers’ awareness of the advantages of more diverse entrants to programmes and their understanding of the role of more **flexible and inclusive admissions** could be advantageous for part-time students, helping to broaden access to HE via routes such as degree apprenticeships.

## Future research

This study was small scale and while it adds to our understanding, it also raises some important questions which warrant further research. For example, discerning whether the decline in part-time numbers is due to supply-side reasons (e.g. course closures) or demand-driven issues (e.g. fee rises). Previous literature has acknowledged the potential impact that income and price changes could have on demand. Whilst higher prices often encourage supply, changes in the cost of provision (relative to full-time courses) and the ability to alter production to other programmes can cause supply to shift. Until recently, the extent to which economic theory has been used to consider the supply-side has been limited and exactly how supply-side and demand-side factors have influenced provider thinking on what mix of full-time and part-time courses to offer was not well known. However, evidence is emerging to address some of these questions. A recent report for the Sutton Trust begins to explore the interaction between supply-side and demand-side issues to understand the decline in part-time student numbers.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Department for Education (DfE) is currently commissioning research that will feed into the review of post-18 education that will explore the relative cost of different modes and levels of HE provision.

Nevertheless, the opportunity remains for further analysis and primary research. HESA and CFE have identified the following areas for further research to understand in more detail how part-time study can be encouraged and enhanced:

### Research with providers:

- Further research is needed to understand the reasons for the decline in part-time provision and the lack of a strategic focus on part-time students in high-tariff providers and in providers located in ‘cold spots’. This would enhance our understanding of the specific challenges faced by providers and the drivers that are most likely to foster an increased focus on part-time study in the future.

### Research with prospective and current students:

- Further quantitative and qualitative research is needed to understand the characteristics of the ‘lost learners’ and the reasons why some groups of students, who have engaged in part-time HE in the past, are increasingly unlikely to study at this level. Multivariate analysis could help us to deepen our understanding of the factors that influence part-time provision. Primary research could usefully explore the decision-making processes for those considering part-time study and the factors that shape and influence whether they apply. In particular, it will be important to understand why, given access to funding and cost have been shown to be key barriers, some eligible students choose not to take advantage of the tuition-fee loan; it will also be important to explore the impact of the forthcoming maintenance loans on take-up of part-time HE. A focus on the attitudes of mature students towards part-time HE would be particularly insightful as this group, as a proportion of the number of part-time students overall, has declined significantly.

---

<sup>9</sup> Callender, C. and Thompson, J. (2018) ‘The Lost Part-Timers: The decline of part-time undergraduate higher education in England’. London: The Sutton Trust. Published online at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/The-Lost-Part-Timers-Final.pdf>

- Multivariate analysis could focus attention on trends in the retention rates of part-time students and the proportion of individuals that successfully complete their course to identify whether drop-out is higher amongst specific groups. Primary research could explore why current pastoral, emotional and social support is failing to meet the needs of some part-time students and the impact this is having on retention and achievement. It is also important to explore the extent to which national mechanisms such as the National Student Survey, as well as provider monitoring and evaluation, are adequately capturing the part-time student voice and ensuring their insights inform the development of bespoke IAG, academic and pastoral support for this group.
- There is currently no centralised body to apply to for part-time courses. Instead, prospective applicants submit an application directly to the provider. It would be interesting to understand whether the application process presents a barrier or meets part-time student requirements and the implications for IAG and student support at a national and provider level.

**With employers and wider stakeholders:**

- Despite a marked increase in the number of regional sector skills deals to address skills shortages, evidence suggests that employers in many sectors continue to experience skills gaps and shortages<sup>10</sup> and provision of higher-level skills is variable. With unemployment at a 40-year low, the pool of potential talent is small and there is an increasing need for employers to ‘grow their own’. It is important to understand the demand chains at a local and national level and the factors that influence demand for certain types and levels of provision. Skills gaps and shortages, and priorities for the development of programmes to address them, could be explored through both quantitative and qualitative research with employers, businesses and regional bodies such as Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), in the context of wider initiatives to support economic growth and social mobility, such as Opportunity Areas.

---

<sup>10</sup> See: <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/employer-skill-survey-2018/>

## 02. INTRODUCTION

Higher education (HE) is valued for the contribution it makes to social mobility and economic growth in the UK. Part-time provision offers a vital route into HE for under-represented and disadvantaged groups, yet provision has been in decline for over a decade. This report identifies the groups that have been most affected by this decline and the actions that providers are taking to address this.

### Background

Since the start of this decade, the number of UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants into part-time education at English higher education providers (HEPs) has been in decline.<sup>11</sup> The biggest drop occurred following the changes to fees and funding for full-time and part-time students in 2012, but the downward trajectory was evident even before this policy was implemented. The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) argues that reversing this pattern is one of the biggest challenges facing the sector.<sup>12</sup>

The UK is facing a range of economic and social challenges which have implications for the achievement of the related policy goals of social mobility, prosperity and growth. Indeed, much has been made of the role of economic conditions, along with changes in HE policy, when attempting to explain patterns in full-time and part-time study. This is because demand for full-time study tends to be *counter-cyclical*; people are encouraged to invest in their skills during times of poor economic growth. Conversely, demand for part-time education is typically *pro-cyclical*, stimulated by a buoyant economy, higher wage levels and employer confidence.<sup>13</sup>

Following the recession of 2008, many UK and overseas students sought to enter HE on a *full-time* basis in order to upskill or re-skill during a period of diminishing job prospects. Furthermore, employers were focused on the sustainability of their business rather than on

---

<sup>11</sup> OFFA (2017) Outcomes of access agreement monitoring for 2015-16. Bristol: OFFA. Published online at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/29489/>

<sup>12</sup> HEPI (2015) It's the finance, stupid! The decline of part-time higher education and what to do about it. Published online at: <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2015/10/29/finance-stupid-decline-part-time-higher-education/>

<sup>13</sup> Conlan, G. and Hedges, S. (2017). How is the demand for part-time higher education affected by changing economic conditions? London: London Economics. Published online at: <https://londoneconomics.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/London-Economics-How-is-the-demand-for-part-time-education-affected-by-changing-economic-conditions-12-09-2017.pdf>

investment in staff training and development. Since the recession, there has been little change in UK productivity levels which is a key driver of long-term economic growth.<sup>14</sup> Despite a marked increase in the number of regional sector skills deals to address skills shortages, evidence suggests that employers in a number of sectors, including those identified as priority areas in the Industrial Strategy which rely heavily on employees with science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) qualifications<sup>15</sup> continue to experience skills shortages.<sup>16</sup> With unemployment at a 40-year low, the pool of potential talent to plug these skills shortages is small and there is an increasing need for employers to ‘grow their own’. A recent report by Universities UK highlighted the extent of the recruitment gap, with 123,310 professional jobs unfilled in 2016. This is more than double the gap in 2015.<sup>17</sup> This is likely to be further aggravated in the coming months in the context of Brexit and the impact this could have on access to skilled labour from the European Union.<sup>18</sup> In order to address current skills shortages, and mitigate the impact of changes in immigration policy, demand for people qualified at Level 4 and above is likely to increase. Universities are purported to deliver an estimated 41 per cent of provision in professional and technical qualifications.<sup>19</sup> It will be important that HEPs continue to work in partnership with employers and other local and regional stakeholders to develop programmes that address regional as well as national higher-skills needs.

Ensuring people from all backgrounds have equal opportunity to develop their talents, move into jobs that match their skillsets, and fulfil their potential while in work remains high on the Government’s agenda, as set out in *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential*<sup>20</sup> and *Building a Britain fit for the future*.<sup>21</sup> A fundamental aim of part-time provision is to widen access to HE to those for whom more traditional methods of study may not be appropriate, including some disadvantaged groups. It also facilitates access to HE for those

---

<sup>14</sup> Harari, D. (2017). Productivity in the UK. Commons Briefing Papers SN06492. London: House of Commons Library. Published online at: <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06492>

<sup>15</sup> See for example: UKCES (2015) Reviewing the requirement for high level STEM skills: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/444052/stem\\_review\\_evidence\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/444052/stem_review_evidence_report_final.pdf) and NAO (2018) Delivery STEM skills for the economy: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Delivering-STEM-Science-technology-engineering-and-mathematics-skills-for-the-economy.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/employer-skill-survey-2018/>

<sup>17</sup> UUK (2018) Solving future skills challenges. Published online at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/solving-future-skills-challenges.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.cityandguilds.com/news/june-2018/employers-predict-skills-gaps-and-brexit-will-stifle-uk-businesses>

<sup>19</sup> UUK (2018) Solving future skills challenges. London: UUK

<sup>20</sup> DfE (2017) *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential*. A plan for improving social mobility through education. Published online at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/667690/Social\\_Mobility\\_Action\\_Plan\\_-\\_for\\_printing.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/667690/Social_Mobility_Action_Plan_-_for_printing.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> HM Government (2017) *Industrial Strategy: Building a Britain fit for the future*.

seeking to develop and progress in their careers or retrain in response to emerging job roles in a fast-changing global economy.<sup>22</sup> The reduction in part-time provision has significant implications for the achievement of the skills and social mobility agendas because of the role that it fulfils in upskilling and reskilling those in employment and increasing the supply of people with the high-level skills required by many employers.<sup>23</sup>

Between 2011 and 2016, figures published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) indicate that the population in England grew across all age groups.<sup>24</sup> Although growth was fastest amongst those aged 65 and over, demographic change certainly does not seem to explain the fall in part-time participation. Much of the decline has been attributed to the economic climate in addition to changes to the way HE is funded.<sup>25</sup> In 2012, the cap on part-time fees was raised to £6,750 and means-tested tuition and course grants were abolished. Although financial support in the form of tuition-fee loans was introduced for some part-time students, these measures have not mitigated the impact of the rise in the same way that the corresponding measures alleviated the effects of the increase for full-time students. There are a number of reasons for this, including the strict eligibility criteria,<sup>26</sup> which mean a significant proportion of people are not entitled to take up the loan, and also that part-time and mature students are less willing or able to take on debt.

Whilst these changes may form part of the explanation for the decline in part-time HE participation rates, it is likely that the reasons are more complicated. The lifting of the cap on student numbers, the focus on opening up the HE market and increasing competition, and growth in demand for full-time study has led many providers to concentrate on this segment of the market. This has resulted in a decrease in the supply of part-time courses, which are often more resource intensive and more costly to provide than full-time

---

<sup>22</sup> CFE Research (2014). Forging futures: building higher level skills through university and employer collaboration. A report for UKU and UKCES. Published online at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2014/forging-futures.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Callender, C. and Wilkinson, D. (2012). Futuretrack: Part-time higher education - the benefits of part-time higher education after three years of study A Report to the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU). Published online at: [https://hecsu.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/futuretrack\\_part\\_time\\_students\\_report\\_oct2012.pdf](https://hecsu.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/futuretrack_part_time_students_report_oct2012.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/latest#growth-in-population-aged-under-65-is-highest-in-london>

<sup>25</sup> Callender, C. and Thompson, J. (2018) The Lost Part-Timers: The decline of part-time undergraduate higher education in England. London: The Sutton Trust.

<sup>26</sup> Students studying programmes of less than 25 per cent of the intensity of a full-time programme and those studying for a second degree-level qualification (unless they are studying a STEM subject) are not eligible for support.

courses.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, there is some evidence that those considering part-time study are not able to access the information they need to make informed choices, including information about the loan system, pastoral support, and teaching and assessment methods. In addition, courses which are not designed around the needs of part-time learners can act as a barrier to progression, particularly for those seeking to balance HE with other commitments.<sup>28</sup> Finally, previous research conducted shortly after the fee changes of 2012 indicates a decline in employer support for part-time study.<sup>29</sup> We revisited this issue to analyse whether the falling levels of employer funding have been evident in more recent years. For our population, the number of students funded by their employer fell from 39,035 to 21,435 between 2011-12 and 2012-13. Numbers have continued to drop since then, with 14,760 individuals funded by their organisation in 2016-17.

The sector is starting to respond to these issues and there is emerging evidence of interventions being developed by providers to promote and support part-time study. For example, the University of Cambridge's Institute of Continuing Education has provided bursaries for part-time students and used funding from donations or sponsors to maintain part-time provision.<sup>30</sup> The University of Wolverhampton has collaborated with a local college and the local authority to provide new part-time courses in an easily accessible area.<sup>31</sup> However, further research is required to understand the effectiveness of these interventions in terms of increasing demand for part-time study, including from disadvantaged groups, in the context of continued economic and political uncertainty.

## Research aims and objectives

Although many part-time students are already well-educated and established in the labour market, part-time HE fulfils an important role in supporting widening participation (WP) by creating a more responsive HE sector which affords students greater choice and provides alternative routes into HE for students who otherwise would not be able to access

---

<sup>27</sup> Callender, C. (2015). Putting part-time students at the heart of the system? Chapter 1 in *It's the finance, stupid! The decline of part-time higher education and what to do about it*. London: Higher Education Policy Institute. Published online at: [https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/part-time\\_web.pdf](https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/part-time_web.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Butcher, J. (2015). Listen to part-time learners and smart policy will follow. Chapter 5 in *It's the finance, stupid! The decline of part-time higher education and what to do about it*. London: Higher Education Policy Institute.

<sup>29</sup> HEFCE (2014). Pressure from all sides: economic and policy influences on part-time higher education. Published online at: [https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20060/1/HEFE2014\\_o8d.pdf](https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/20060/1/HEFE2014_o8d.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Lingwood, R. (2015). Recovering from ELQ: A Cambridge view. Chapter 9 in *It's the finance, stupid! The decline of part-time higher education and what to do about it*. London: Higher Education Policy Institute.

<sup>31</sup> Layer, G. (2015). Local solutions for local issues. Chapter 8 in *It's the finance, stupid! The decline of part-time higher education and what to do about it*. London: Higher Education Policy Institute.

it.<sup>32</sup> It is, therefore, important to understand the characteristics of students that study part-time, whether the decline in the part-time participation rate is greater amongst specific groups (including those already under-represented in HE) and how this decline can be addressed in order to mitigate the impact on skill levels and social mobility. Although relatively small scale, this report makes an important contribution to the development of this understanding. Drawing on a combination of secondary analysis of historical Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data and primary research with current part-time students and provider staff in strategic and operational roles, the research explores:

- trends in access to part-time HE
- the factors that influence whether different groups of disadvantaged and under-represented students choose to study part-time
- the factors that motivate HEPs to offer and/or focus on part-time provision, and
- the characteristics of effective provision of part-time HE for disadvantaged and under-represented students.

The methodology is described in detail in Chapter 2.

## **This report**

Whilst outlines of the main trends in part-time study have been published, there has yet to be a detailed examination of exactly what lies behind these patterns using existing administrative data, particularly when it comes to disadvantaged students. This is explored in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 provides a provider perspective on the key drivers of supply and demand for part-time HE and the reasons for the decline in student numbers, including views on the barriers and enablers for students. It also highlights some of the ways in which providers are seeking to halt the decline and improve retention and progression amongst part-time students through the development of more tailored routes, programmes and student support. Further details of these approaches are provided in case studies of providers which have significant proportions of part-time students (see Chapter 6).

Chapter 5 explores the perceptions and experiences of current part-time students. We draw on the findings of an online survey which was administered on our behalf by seven providers selected based on the proportion of part-time students and students from

---

<sup>32</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, (2011) *Students at the Heart of the System* London: BIS. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/31384/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31384/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf)

disadvantaged groups. By linking the primary survey data to HESA data (where consent was provided), we are able to examine differences in experience by student characteristics.

The report concludes with a summary of key findings. Key issues for consideration by providers and policy makers are identified, along with areas for further research.

### 03. METHOD

Here we describe our approach to the secondary data analysis and primary research with current part-time students and provider staff. As students from disadvantaged backgrounds provide a particular focus, we begin by exploring our definition of ‘disadvantage’ in this context.

#### Defining disadvantage

A key challenge in this research was how we identify disadvantage. The difficulties of developing such a measure are not confined to part-time students, illustrated by the fact that there is no universally agreed indicator used for young entrants to HE or school pupils. Rather, we have access to a range of instruments and must determine an appropriate proxy from these.

HESA data has several variables that could be used in creating a measure for disadvantage, each with benefits and drawbacks. Whilst data on parental education is collected, this has historically received a low level of response, and for many individuals, this data is recorded as missing. More recently, work has indicated that, for full-time first-degree entrants at least, the quality of the data has been improving in the last few academic years.<sup>33</sup> However, given the age profile of part-time students, it is likely that many would not have parents with a HE qualification given that university participation only expanded rapidly after 1990. Individuals who enter university are also asked about the occupation of the highest earning parent. However, this data has also been identified to be of low quality and has subsequently been removed from use as a WP performance indicator. Further, our analysis shows that the majority of part-time students are mature (aged 21 and over), in work and likely to be living independently. As such, it is questionable whether parental occupation would be an effective indicator of disadvantage for many part-time students.

Having ruled out using these variables, we considered other options, including the participation of local areas (POLAR) measure developed by HEFCE. POLAR places areas into quintiles depending on the proportion of 18-year olds who enter HE at the age of either 18 or 19. Those places with the lowest proportions of participation will fall into Quintile 1 and are defined as low-participation neighbourhoods. The most recent version is POLAR4, which is formed based on entry rates between 2009-10 and 2014-15. The advantages of this variable are its comprehensiveness and use of recent data. However,

---

<sup>33</sup> Hawkins, R. (2017). Increase in first generation university students. Bristol: HEFCE

with such a large proportion of part-time students being mature, it is less relevant to the group of interest in this study.

An alternative to POLAR is the HE-qualified adult classification. This was formulated by ranking Census Area Statistics wards by the percentage of adults aged between 16 and 74 with a HE qualification at the time of the 2001 Census. Quintiles were created, with Quintile 1 consisting of those areas with the lowest proportions of adults who had completed HE. Whilst this is certainly more appropriate for part-time students, the potential drawbacks are that it uses older data and considers a very wide age range.

HESA collects detailed information on the qualifications achieved by an individual prior to their entry into HE. Whilst full-time young entrants are likely to predominantly enter with Level 3 qualifications, this will not necessarily be the case with part-time students. As discussed earlier, those who study part-time are likely to be doing so for a diverse range of reasons. For some, this will be their first chance to experience university, whilst others will already hold a degree and be looking to further their career or change pathways. Based on participation trends, we assume that those without any previous HE qualification are more likely to be from a less affluent background.

Taking the strengths and limitations of the available information into account, we define an individual as being disadvantaged if they are from Quintile 1 of the adult HE classification *and* hold no previous HE qualification. As both the POLAR measure and adult classification using Census data have their benefits and drawbacks, we checked the robustness of our disadvantage indicator by using those who fall into Quintile 1 of POLAR4 and have no HE qualification as an alternative definition. Furthermore, the overarching trends and patterns we observed in our analysis were the same, regardless of the definition used. Therefore, the analysis of disadvantaged students based on HESA data reported here uses the measure developed using the adult HE classification.

## Secondary data analysis

HESA undertook a detailed examination of administrative HESA records to examine trends in the part-time sector, with the patterns seen amongst disadvantaged students being of particular importance. Alongside this, key movements by age, region and provider type were also explored, so that a much fuller picture of this aspect of HE could be developed. In order to compare trends by provider type in part-time provision we adopted the same method applied by the DfE in their analysis of the destinations of Key Stage 4 and 5 students.<sup>34</sup> This approach ranks providers according to their mean UCAS tariff score

---

<sup>34</sup> DfE (2017) Technical note: Destination Measures, 2014 to 2015  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/584161/SFR01\\_2017\\_Technical\\_note.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/584161/SFR01_2017_Technical_note.pdf)

from the top three 'A-level' grades of entrants. Providers are then split into two categories: 'lower average entrant tariff score' and 'higher average entrant tariff score', depending on whether or not they lie in the top third of this table. The terms 'low-to-medium-tariff' and 'high-tariff' providers are used throughout this report to refer to these groups.

The cohort of interest in this research is UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time study in publicly funded English HEPs between the academic years 2006-07 and 2016-17. As the Open University (OU) is a UK-wide provider, only those registered at the OU in England were considered. Given the size of the OU and the proportion of part-time students overall that study with this provider, analysis has been carried out separately for the OU and the rest of the sector and data is presented for the populations including and excluding the OU. Part-time students in further education colleges (FECs) and alternative providers are not covered in this study. Data from the HESA student record for the relevant population was extracted and transferred into the statistical package Stata for analysis. In order to ensure that no person can be identified through our work, all numbers have been rounded to the nearest multiple of five. The initial analysis of HESA data considered the trajectories in part-time education at the individual-provider level in order to identify providers that could be included in the survey and qualitative fieldwork.

## Primary research

The primary research was designed to complement the secondary analysis by exploring the reasons for the decline in part-time student numbers, the barriers and enablers to part-time study and the characteristics of effective part-time provision. Although wider economic and political factors impacting on the HE sector and part-time provision are touched upon, they do not provide the main focus. The impact of the decline in part-time student numbers on employers and the ways in which they are responding are also out of scope, although these issues are being explored elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

This is a small-scale study with a very specific focus and, as such, the study parameters placed restrictions on the number and characteristics of the providers selected to take part. A list of 10 providers with differing trends in part-time provision were identified through analysis of HESA data. Although the primary aim of the research was to identify good practice within these providers that could be shared to help enhance provision for part-time students more broadly, it was agreed that two providers that had previously had a high proportion of part-time students but had since experienced a decline would also be invited to participate for comparative purposes. Given the focus on disadvantaged

---

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/blog/Pages/Disappearing-part-time-and-mature-students-time-for-change.aspx>

students, the proportion of such students within the providers was also taken into account in the selection of the sample, along with geographical location and mission group.

A total of seven providers agreed to take part in the research. All seven agreed to distribute the online survey to a sample of part-time students; a sub-sample of four took part in the staff interviews and three provided the basis for more detailed case studies. The provider sample includes two specialist providers of part-time HE and two high-tariff providers. The providers are situated in a range of geographical locations across England.

## **Survey of part-time students**

An online survey designed by CFE and HESA was administered by providers on behalf of the research team. The survey was subject to ethical clearance by one of the providers. Where large proportions of part-time students were enrolled, the survey was administered to a sample of learners, and stratified to ensure a focus on disadvantaged groups; others with smaller overall populations administered a census. Given the small-scale nature of the research, the survey is not representative of the part-time population as a whole. However, the purpose of the survey was to enable greater exploration into the student view on part-time study, as opposed to drawing statistical inference from the data.

The questionnaire explored students' reasons for electing to study part-time and for studying their chosen course at their chosen provider. It also identified the factors that influenced their decision to progress into HE: satisfaction with course design and delivery, and satisfaction with the pastoral, financial and other support available to part-time students. The survey also included a question asking respondents' permission to link their responses to HESA data on student characteristics and their willingness to take part in future research. Students who declined to have their data linked were asked a series of additional questions designed to capture equivalent information for the purposes of the analysis.

## **Respondent profile**

English students studying an undergraduate degree or other undergraduate qualification on a part-time basis were eligible to take part in the survey. A series of screening questions were asked to ensure only those who met these criteria went on to complete the survey. A total of 641 students clicked the survey link: 87 students were screened out because they were not from England, 112 were screened out because they were not studying part-time and a further 112 were screened out because they were not studying a degree or other undergraduate qualification. The final sample achieved was 330 eligible responses, of which 309 were happy for their data to be linked to HESA records (94 per cent consent rate).

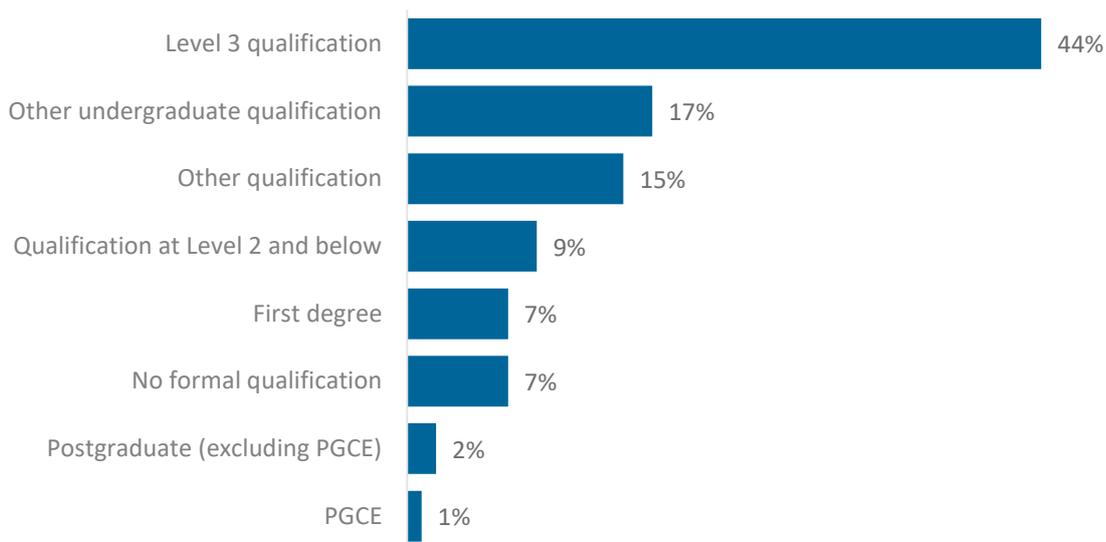
It should be noted that 95 individuals who agreed to data matching began their course in 2017-18. As HESA data for this cohort is still being collected, it was not possible to link their survey data and instead these respondents were asked to provide the required information on their characteristics in the survey. The process of linking relies upon ‘fuzzy matching’, whereby students provide details such as their full name and date of birth. Where incomplete or inaccurate information was supplied by the student, we were unable to successfully carry out the linking. In some cases, having matched a person’s records, we found that they were not part of the population of interest (e.g. they were studying a postgraduate qualification or were registered as a full-time student). These were removed from the sample. The total number of observations in our cleaned dataset is 281.

Around four-fifths of our sample said they were studying for a first degree, with 84 per cent based at a specialist part-time provider (i.e. Birkbeck College or the OU). The majority of respondents in the sample (96 per cent) started their course after the introduction of higher tuition fees in 2012-13 and a third of respondents (34 per cent) started their course in 2017-18. Despite the range of start dates, a similar proportion of respondents are due to finish their course across each of the next four academic years (2017-18 to 2020-21). Over three-fifths (62 per cent) of the sample study on campus, around one quarter (28 per cent) study off campus/online and one in 10 (10 per cent) respondents report studying via a blended learning route.

The majority of respondents are mature students over the age of 25: two-fifths (42 per cent) are in the 26 to 39 age bracket; the same proportion are 40 or over. Reflecting the composition of the part-time student population as a whole, there is a slightly higher proportion of females (56 per cent) in the sample compared with males (44 per cent). Over half of students in the sample are working full-time (54 per cent), compared with one fifth who are in part-time employment (19 per cent). Just 4 per cent reported that they are unemployed. Part-time students commonly balance study with caring responsibilities.<sup>36</sup> Almost two-fifths (39 per cent) of our sample have such commitments. The sample is also diverse in terms of current qualifications held (Figure 1). Just over two-fifths of our cohort (44 per cent) held Level 3 qualifications on entry to their course, whilst 21 per cent had no formal qualifications or held awards at Level 2 or below. Approximately one quarter had previously completed a first degree or other undergraduate course.

---

<sup>36</sup> See for example Butcher (2015). ‘Shoe-horned and side-lined’? Challenges for part-time learners in the new HE landscape. A report for the Higher Education Academy, York. Published online at: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/shoe-horned-and-side-lined-challenges-part-time-learners-new-he-landscape>



**Figure 1: Highest educational qualification in survey population (base= 275)**

The views of disadvantaged students are central to this work. As noted above (pages 17–19), defining disadvantage in this context is problematic because traditional measures, such as parental education or occupation, are not appropriate for many part-time students who are typically mature, in work and may also have family responsibilities. The measure utilised in our secondary data analysis has both advantages and drawbacks. Given the greater challenges faced in the lives of part-time students, we use the data collected in our survey on caring responsibilities to formulate an alternative measure of disadvantage that is not possible with administrative data, whilst also drawing upon the measure we used in examining trends in HESA data. A total of 13 per cent of our sample is classed as disadvantaged when defined as those in Quintiles 1 and 2 of the adult HE classification and without a prior HE qualification. Those in Quintile 2 have been included in the definition for analysis of the survey due to the sample size. The proportion of disadvantaged respondents rises to 27 per cent when we define a disadvantaged student as someone with care duties and no previous HE qualification. Both measures have been used for the purposes of survey analysis to enable us to explore how the results change, if at all, depending on how one defines disadvantage.

After the primary survey data was linked with HE records, the dataset was transferred into Stata for analysis by HESA. Along with producing relevant one-way tabulations for the sample as a whole, we also created tables where the analysis had been restricted to our two disadvantage groups described above. HESA data security measures were applied, with numbers rounded to the nearest multiple of five. Any percentages based on fewer than 22.5 individuals were suppressed. Averages based on seven or fewer students were also suppressed.

## **Qualitative case studies of HEPs**

A sub-sample of four providers participated in the fieldwork with provider staff. This sample was purposively selected from those that were able to take part within the timescale. Within each provider, a range of staff were consulted at both a strategic and operational level. Senior leaders, operational managers and academics with a remit for part-time provision and student support took part in a series of one-to-one and small group interviews. A total of 13 staff were consulted. The interviews were conducted by telephone for expediency and transcribed verbatim for the purposes of analysis.

The interviews explored the key drivers for the provider focus (or reduced focus) on part-time provision, the enablers and barriers for disadvantaged students studying part-time, as well as effective practice in the design and delivery of part-time study. A coding frame based on the key concepts within the overarching research questions was developed and interview transcripts were analysed thematically. The insights from the interviews, illustrated with direct quotations, are presented in Chapter 4. It is important to emphasise that the interviews were conducted with a small sample. As such, the findings represent the views of individuals and are not representative of the provider or the sector as a whole. Examples of interesting practice in operation in three of the providers are presented in more detailed case studies presented in Chapter 6.

## 04. SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter provides the secondary data analysis for English HEPs between the academic years of 2006-07 and 2016-17. Overall trends in the data for part-time study is provided followed by a focus on disadvantaged students.

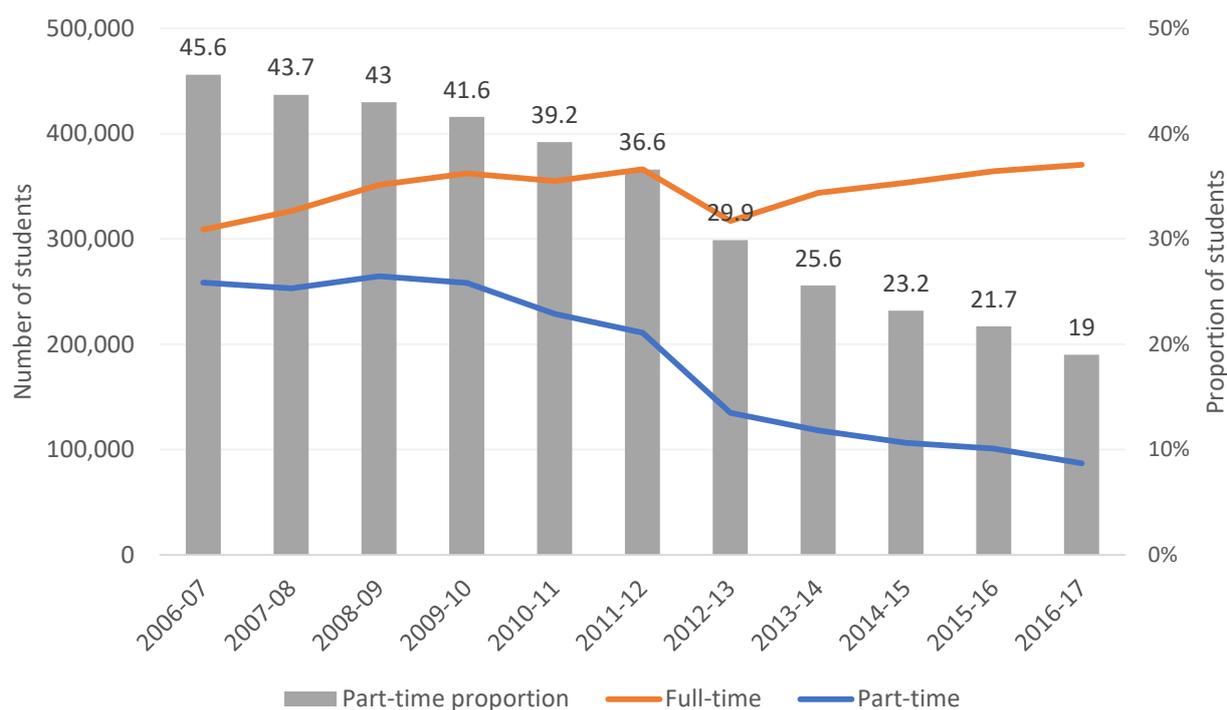
### Key findings

- The number of part-time HE students fell by 171,630 between 2006-07 and 2016-17. In contrast, the number of full-time students rose by 61,410 during the same period.
- The proportion of the overall HE student population studying part-time in 2016-17 was less than 20 per cent, down from 46 per cent in 2006-07.
- The OU is the major supplier of part-time first degrees, accounting for 64 per cent of the current market. Other, predominantly low-tariff providers, are the major providers of ‘other undergraduate’ qualifications such as HNDs and Foundation Degrees, accounting for 93 per cent of the market.
- High-tariff providers experienced a sharp decline in their part-time student numbers between 2006-07 and 2016-17, which now account for 6 per cent of their UK-domiciled undergraduate intake.
- Subjects allied to medicine (and more specifically nursing) have become the dominant subject area studied in part-time HE.
- Part-time students now display a younger age profile, with the sector having experienced a decline in the proportion of entrants aged 40 or over.
- Some regions of England, notably the South West and East of England, have limited provision of part-time courses.
- Although the proportion of disadvantaged students has remained relatively constant over the last 10 years, when the OU is excluded from the analysis a decline in the proportion of disadvantaged students entering part-time study is observed. This underscores the vital role that the OU plays in facilitating access to HE for disadvantaged students.
- The decline in part-time study amongst disadvantaged groups is primarily accounted for by a reduction in the number of students studying nursing, business and administrative studies, and education in low-to-medium tariff providers.

The findings reported in this chapter are based on analysis of HESA data undertaken by HESA Services Ltd. The data has been presented in charts to illustrate the key findings. In some instances, we have restricted the number of years presented in the graphs to the first and last year in the decade, as well as the three years around the time of the fee change. However, corresponding data tables containing figures for all years are provided in Appendix 1.

## Trends in HE participation

The upward trend in the number of full-time undergraduate entrants to HE over the past decade, along with the corresponding increase in the proportion of full-time students from disadvantaged groups, is well-documented.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, part-time student numbers fluctuated between 2006-07 and 2011-12 and fell dramatically following the introduction of the new fee and funding regime in 2012-2013. This downward trend has continued. The proportion of the overall HE student population entering part-time study has also decreased year-on-year, falling from 46 per cent in 2006-07 to under 20 per cent in 2016-17 (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Number and proportion of UK domiciled undergraduate entrants studying in English HEIs**

Analysis by level of study shows that it is changes in the number of students studying ‘other undergraduate’<sup>38</sup> courses that are driving the overall pattern. Between 2006-07 and 2016-17, the number of part-time first degree students reduced by 36 per cent, compared with a 74 per cent decline in the number of ‘other undergraduates’ studying part-time. There are a number of possible reasons for this decline, including the abolition of Foundation Degree Forward, a lack of awareness of Foundation Degrees and action by a number of universities to move students onto first-degree courses in response to student

<sup>37</sup> See UUK (2017) Patterns and trends in UK Higher Education at: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/facts-and-stats/data-and-analysis/Documents/patterns-and-trends-2017.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> ‘Other undergraduate’ provision includes foundation degrees, higher national certificates and diplomas, undergraduate certificates, and studying for provider credits.

number controls.<sup>39</sup> The OU is the country’s largest provider of part-time HE. The analysis demonstrates that the role of the OU in the market for part-time first degrees has increased. In 2006-07, the OU delivered 53 per cent of part-time first degrees. By 2016-17, the OU’s share of this market had increased to 63 per cent. In contrast, just 7 per cent of learners studying ‘other undergraduate’ courses studied with the OU in 2016-17, compared with 22 percent in 2006-07.

Further analysis by age and provider characteristics was carried out to examine the patterns in more detail and the findings are discussed in the section that follows. Trends in participation specifically amongst disadvantaged groups are then considered.

### Age group

The majority of individuals who enter part-time education are mature learners (aged 21 or over). However, the age profile of part-time students has shifted since 2006/07, resulting in a fall in the proportion of entrants aged 40 or over and an increase in the proportion aged 25 and under across the sector (Figure 3 and 4).



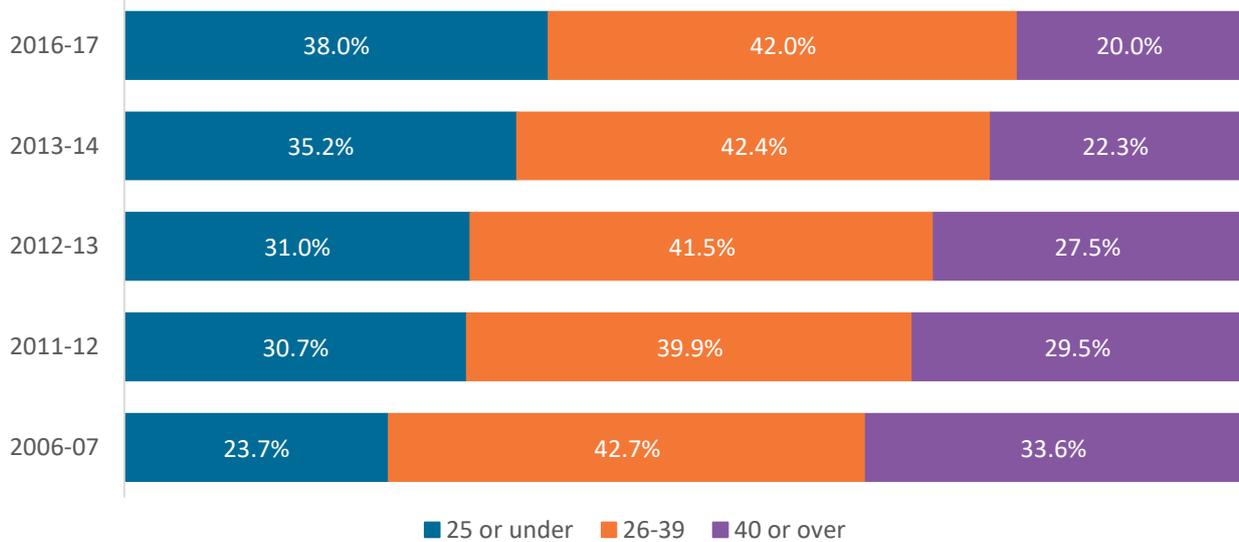
**Figure 3: Proportion of UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses by age group in English HEPs (excluding the OU)<sup>40</sup>**

The latest figures for the sector as a whole from 2016-17 indicate that the number of entrants in the 25-or-under age category is now greater than that in the 40-or-over category for the first time. This shift has been heavily driven by the trends that have taken place at the OU. The proportion of students aged 40 or over studying at the OU decreased by 14 percentage points between 2006-07 and 2016-17 compared with just 7 percentage points in other providers. There was a corresponding increase in the proportion of

<sup>39</sup> <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/the-downfall-of-foundation-degrees/>

<sup>40</sup> Please note that the sum of percentages may not necessarily add to 100, due to rounding.

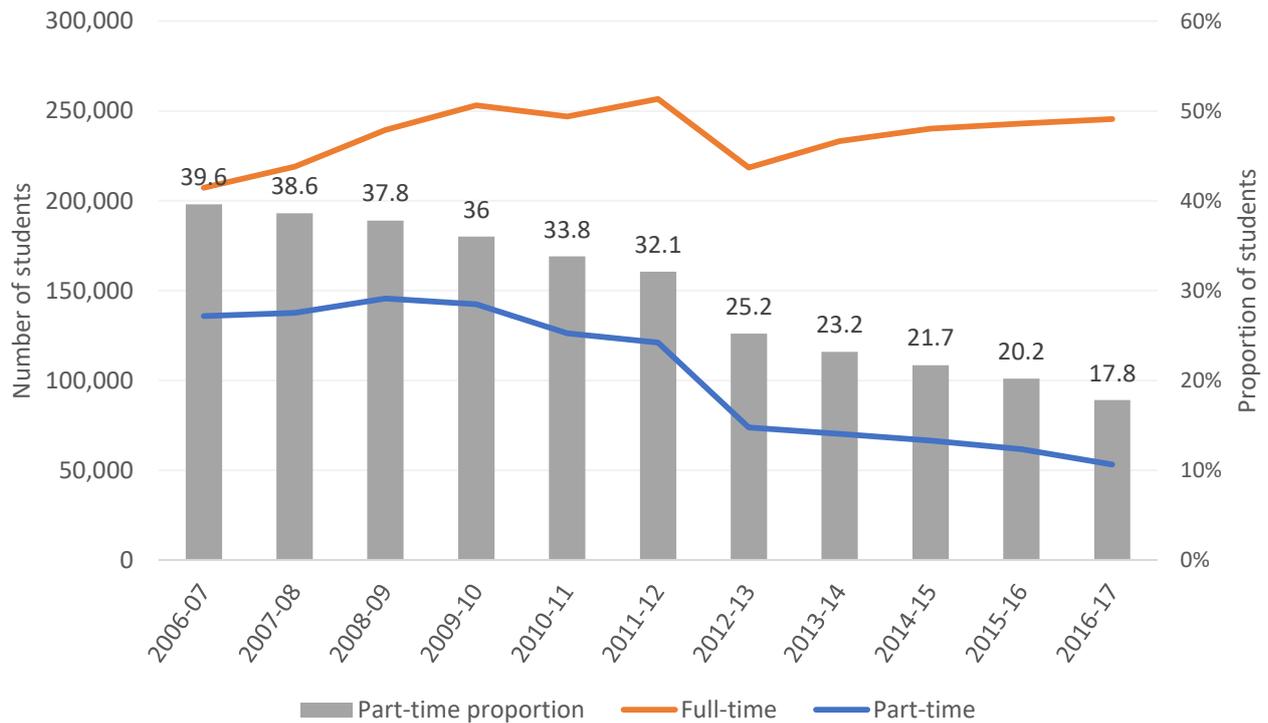
students aged 25 or under at the OU (14 percentage points) compared with a 3 percentage point increase in other providers.



**Figure 4: Proportion of UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses by age group at the OU**

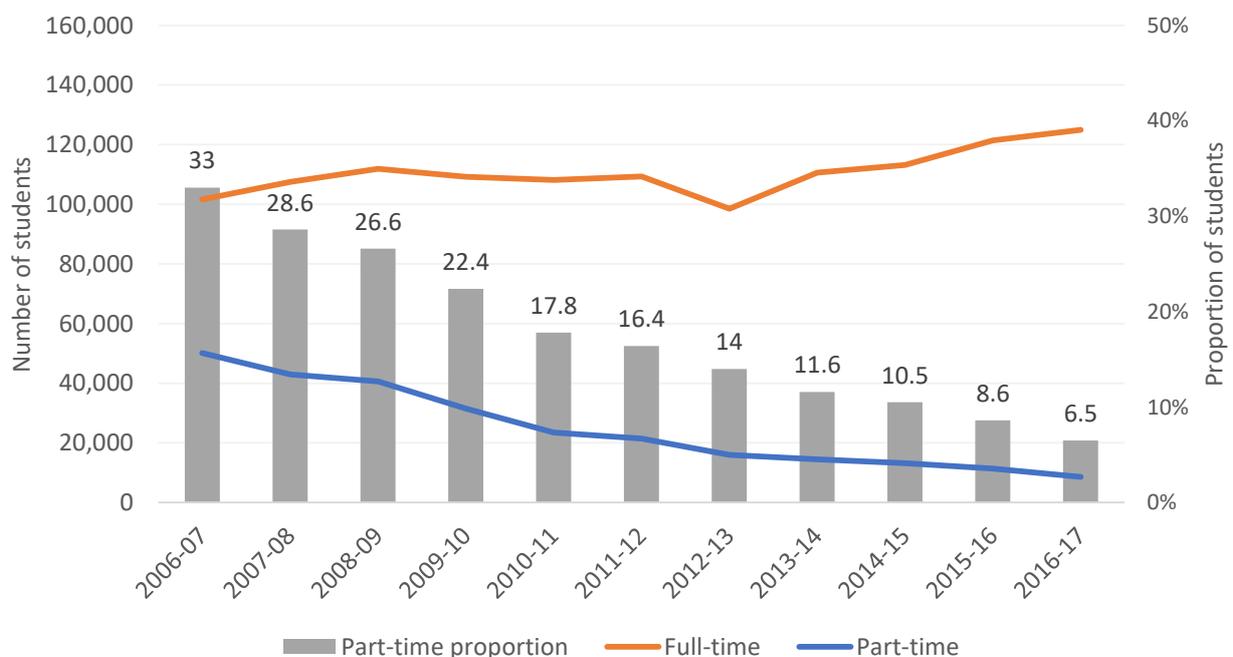
### Provider tariff

The general pattern in both low-to-medium-tariff and high-tariff providers reflects the pattern for the sector as a whole: a rise in the number of full-time students and a fall in the number of students studying part-time. An exception to this is the period 2009-10 to 2010-11 during which there was a fall in both full-time and part-time student numbers. There was a substantial drop in both the number and proportion of part-time students in low-tariff providers in the academic year 2012-13, when there were changes to the fees and funding arrangements changed (Figure 5).



**Figure 5: Number and proportion of UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants into low-to-medium-tariff providers by mode of study (excluding the OU)**

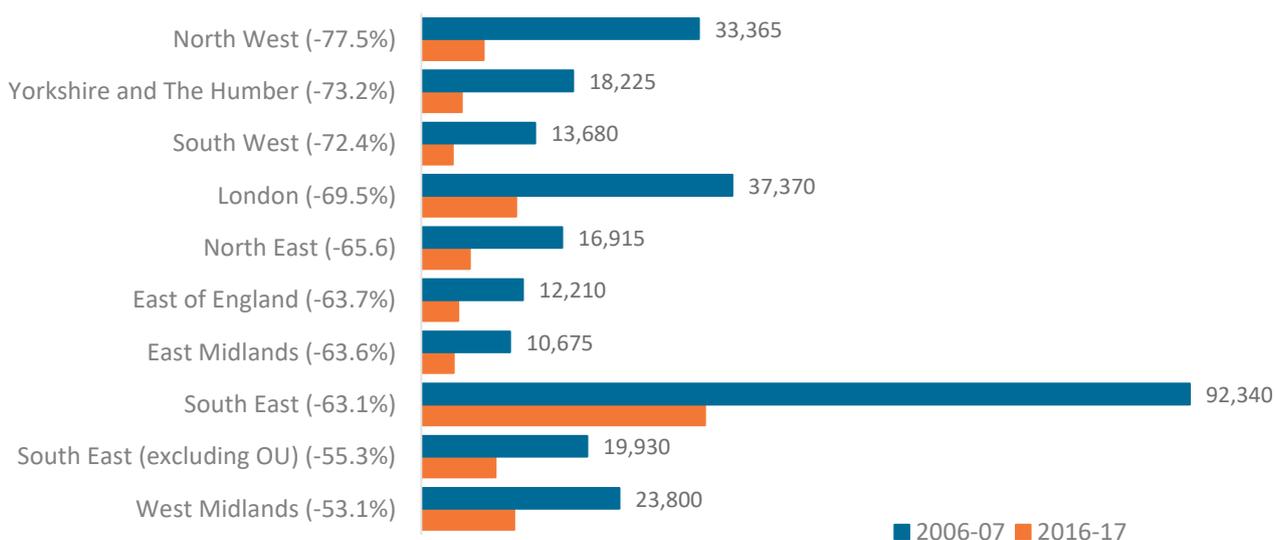
In contrast, the changes in the fee policy do not appear to have had any special impact on the proportion of part-time students in high tariff providers with the proportion of students studying part-time in these providers steadily declining over the 10-year period under analysis (Figure 6).



**Figure 6: UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants into high-tariff providers by mode of study (excluding OU)**

## Provider region

Regional analysis demonstrates the shift in part-time student numbers as well as the decline in the level of provision within each region of England and within London. Figure 7 compares the number of students studying in each of these regions in 2006-07 with 2016-17. The figures in parentheses represent the percentage change. The analysis reveals, excluding the OU, that the largest concentration of part-time students was in London in 2006-07, and this trend continued in 2016-17. Although the number of students has decreased in all regions, the steepest decline is observed in the North of England and the South West, where the number of part-time students has been reduced by approximately three-quarters.

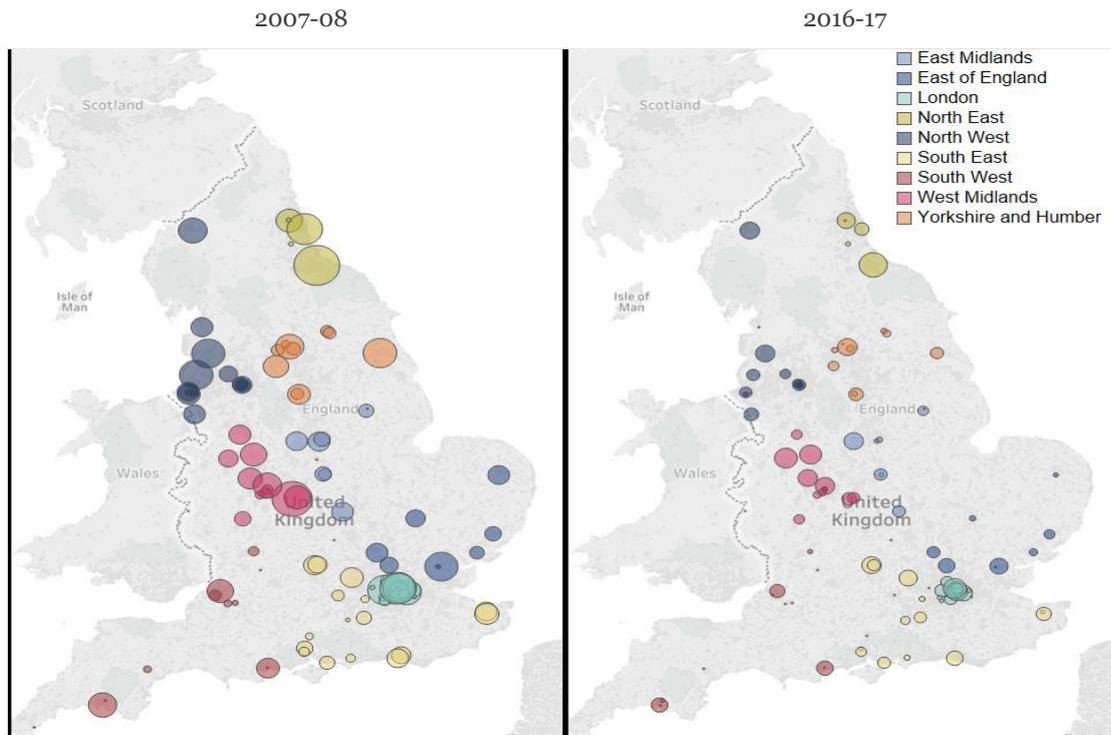


**Figure 7: Change in part-time provision amongst UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants by region between 2006-07 and 2016-17**

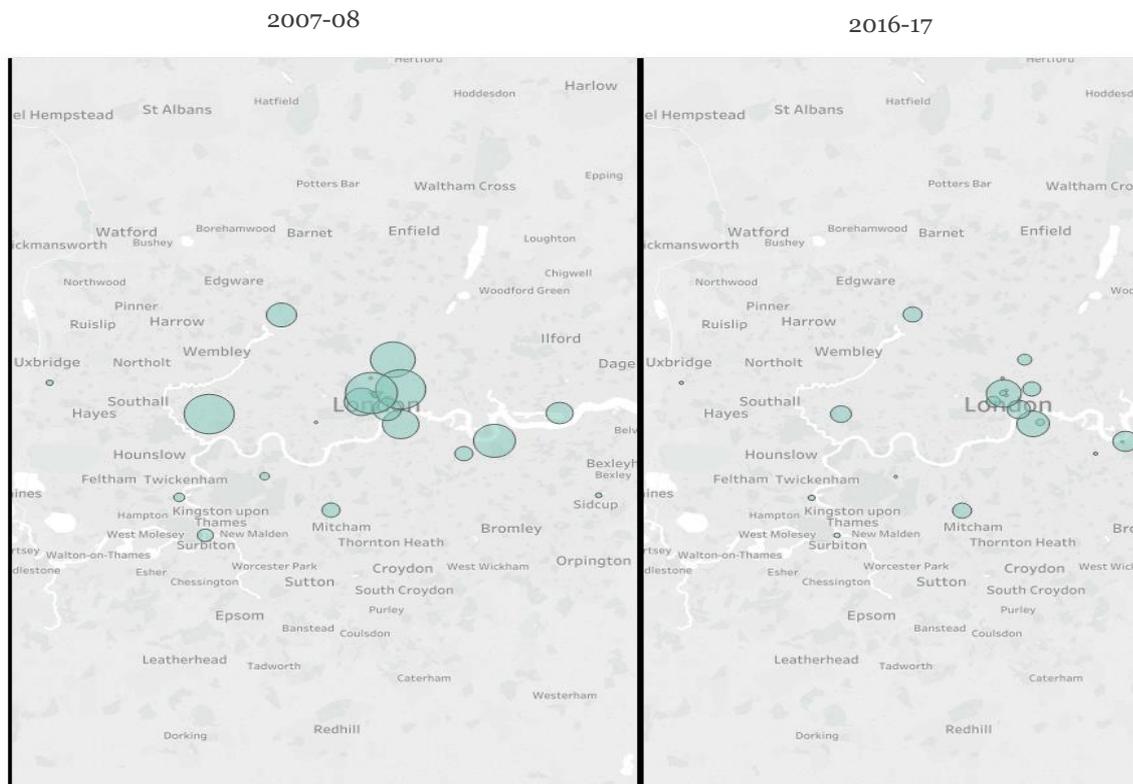
Figure 8 and 9 below demonstrate the variety and extent of supply in each region of England and London, where each dot indicates a university and the size of the circle indicates how many part-time students entered the provider in 2007-08 and 2016-17.<sup>41</sup> The analysis further highlights the large falls in the level of part-time provision in the North West and Yorkshire and Humber regions in particular. This is predominantly the result of a decline in provider populations of part-time students, although some providers do appear to have left the market altogether. There also seems to be a lack of supply in more rural parts of the country, such as the South West and East of England.

---

<sup>41</sup> Tableau and HEIDI software were used to produce visualisations that help identify regional trends. Please note that the HESA data in this software begins in 2007-08 and the population may differ slightly to that used for the rest of the analysis we present. For example, the records in this source will include OU students in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.



**Figure 8: The change in part-time provision amongst UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants in England between 2007-08 and 2016-17**



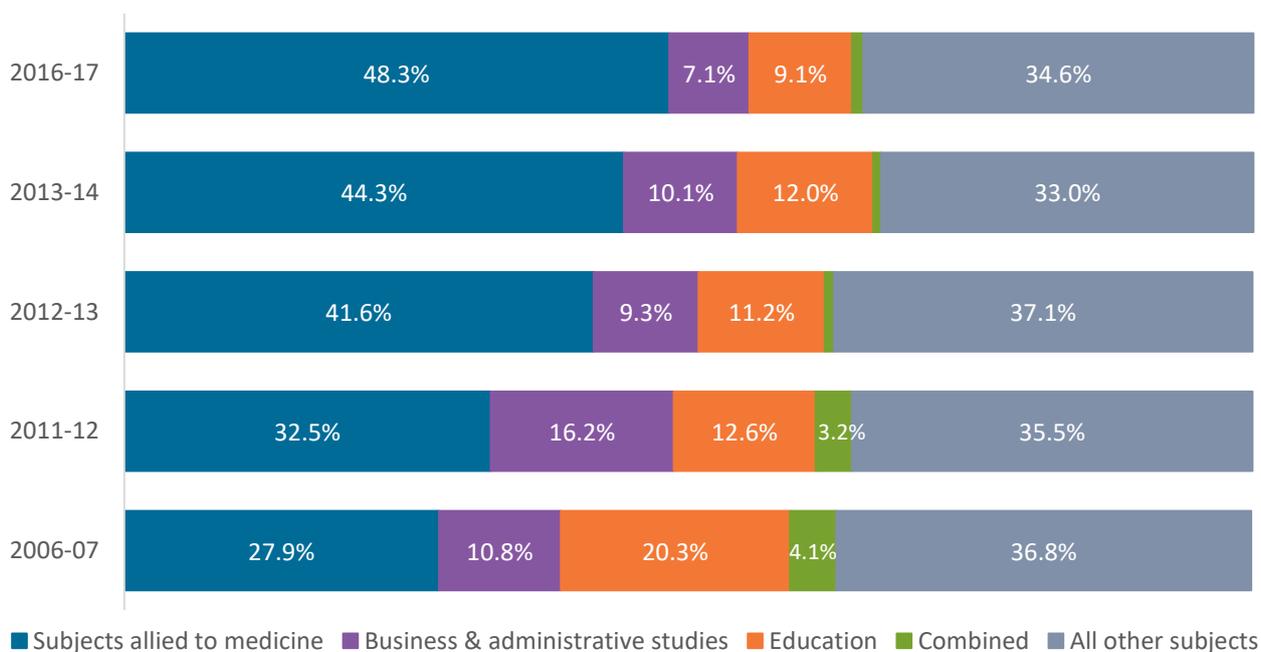
**Figure 9: The change in part-time provision amongst UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants within London between 2007-08 and 2016-17.**

## Subject group

Finally, we analysed the data by subject group to identify whether the decline in part-time HE participation is having a disproportionate impact on any subjects in particular and to highlight the implications for employers in these sectors and the wider economy. However, when considering patterns by subject group, it is important to note that, in recent years, providers across the sector have been encouraged to report the individual subject components being taken by students to HESA, as opposed to placing them into ‘combined’. This can make it more difficult to understand the exact trends by subject area.

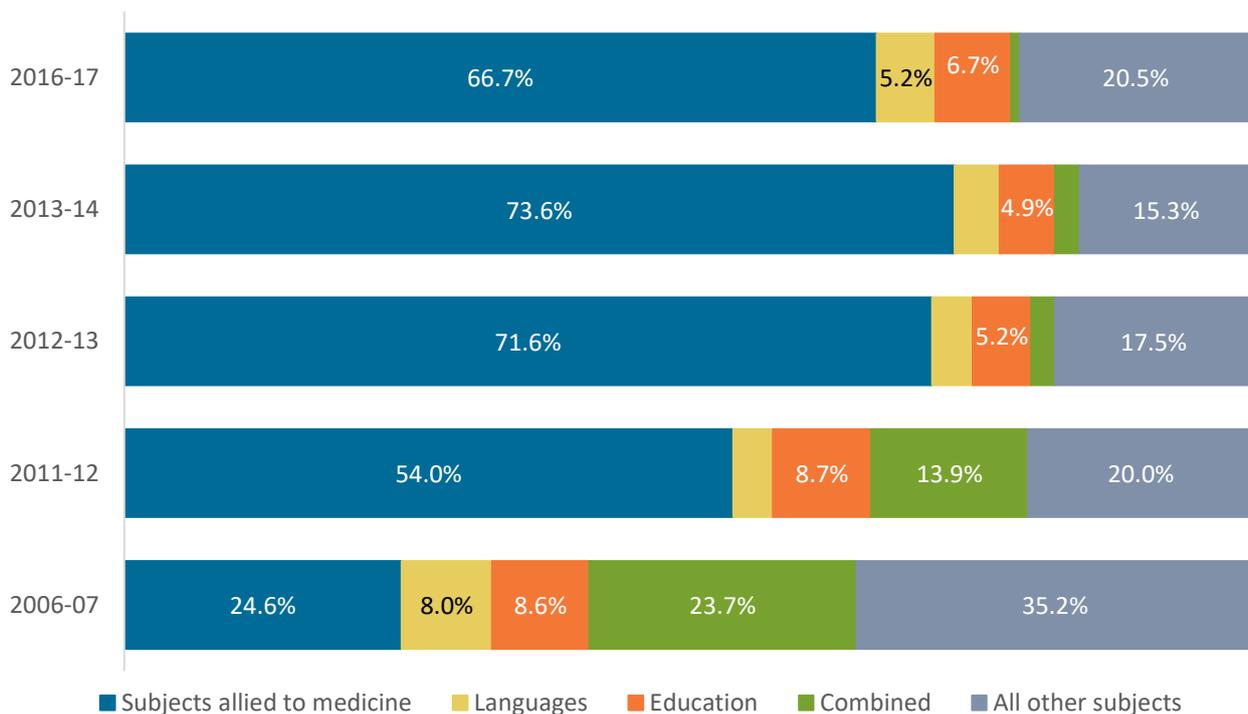
Historically, three dominant areas of study in low-to-medium-tariff providers (excluding the OU) have been subjects allied to medicine, business and administrative studies, and education. Only a very small proportion of students have entered the combined subject field in the last decade within this group of providers, which provides greater certainty that the patterns observed are not likely to be highly skewed by a change in the data collection process. Across the decade, there has been a significant and consistent growth in the proportion of students studying subjects allied to medicine, with nursing being the predominant course within this subject area provided by these universities. The proportion of part-time students studying subjects allied to medicine has increased from 28 percent in 2006-07 to 48 per cent in 2016-17.

Although the proportion of students studying business and administrative subjects (predominantly business and management studies) has fluctuated and declined by almost 4 percentage points between 2006-07 and 2016-17, participation has remained relatively stable when compared with education, where the proportion of part-time students has reduced by more than half over the same period (Figure 10).



**Figure 10: Proportion in each subject area of study among UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate entrants at low-to-medium-tariff English HEPs (excluding OU)**

In the analysis of high-tariff providers, two providers that accounted for a substantial amount of the provision in two subject areas at specific points in the time period have been excluded to ensure they do not distort the more general pattern emerging amongst these universities.<sup>42</sup> Mirroring the findings for low-to-medium-tariff providers, there has been a big increase in the proportion of part-time students studying subjects allied to medicine (and more specifically nursing) within high-tariff providers. There was a particularly large jump in the proportion entering this subject area after the fee change in 2012 (Figure 11). However, the proportion of students undertaking these courses has declined over the last three years in high-tariff as well as low-to-medium-tariff providers, where, in the most recent academic year, the percentage fell to under 50 per cent. Students commencing new nursing and midwifery degrees, along with those commencing most other allied health programmes, from the 2017-18 academic year will not receive NHS bursaries, although the government has committed to continuing to provide a maintenance bursary for part-time courses for the duration of the course for a capped number of new students starting in 2017-18. Full-time and part-time students will have access to maintenance and tuition-fee loans through the same student loans system as students studying other degree programmes.<sup>43</sup> It will therefore be interesting to monitor if the number of students studying subjects allied to medicine declines in the future in response to these reforms.



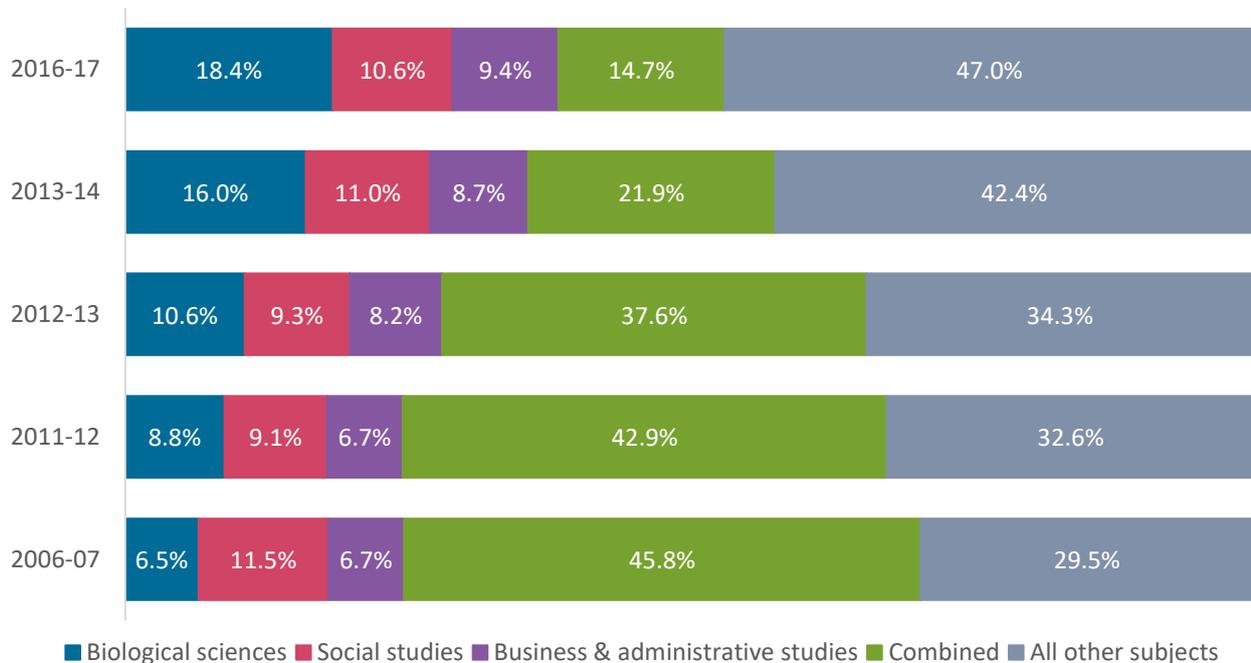
**Figure 11: Proportion in each subject area of study amongst UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate entrants at English high tariff providers (excluding Oxford and Warwick)**

Figure 12 illustrates that the OU has offered students the opportunity to study combined courses, whereby individuals achieve a qualification by selecting modules from different

<sup>42</sup> These two providers were the University of Oxford and University of Warwick.

<sup>43</sup> See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-bursary-reform/nhs-bursary-reform>

subject areas. Over the decade, the proportion of students studying biological sciences has increased substantially; conversely, the proportion studying combined studies has reduced, with the percentage studying social studies (primarily psychology and social work) remaining relatively steady. However, for the reasons discussed above, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which any changes by subject area are the result of recoding, or an actual movement in participation.

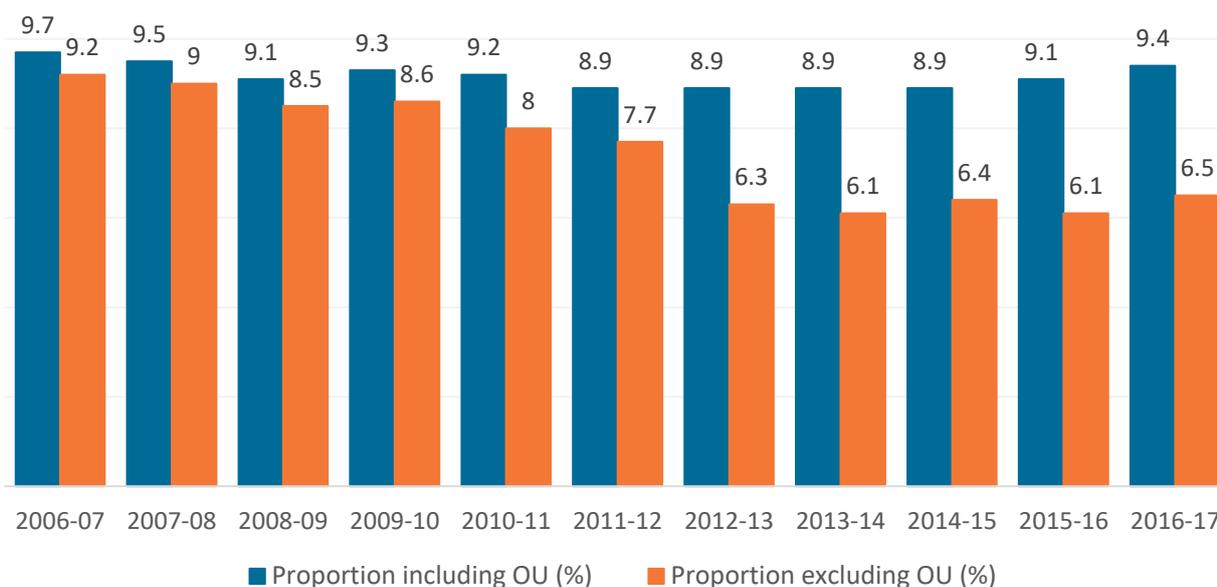


**Figure 12: Proportion in each subject area of study amongst UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate entrants at the OU in England**

## Disadvantaged students in part-time education

Using the developed measure of disadvantage (discussed in the previous chapter), the analysis reveals that, although numbers have dropped, the proportion of disadvantaged<sup>44</sup> students entering part-time study has remained fairly steady over the past decade at just under 10 per cent. However, once the OU is removed, a decline is evident, with the biggest fall occurring around the time of the fee change (Figure 13).

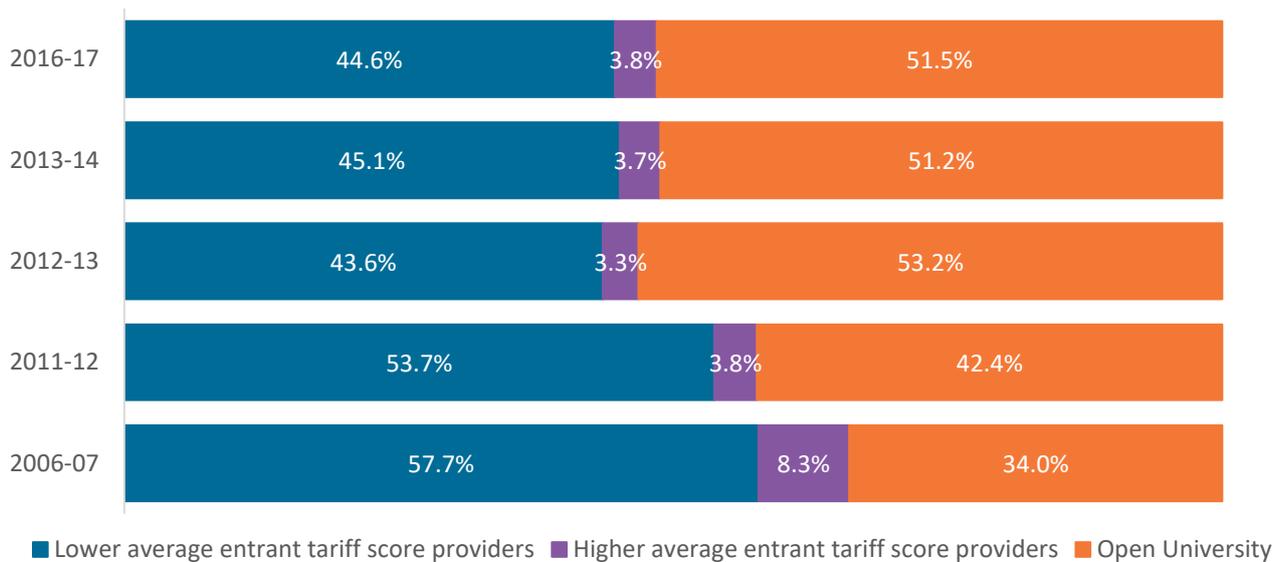
<sup>44</sup> Please note that any individual whose qualification on entry was unknown, or their adult HE classification quintile was unknown, were excluded from the analysis.



**Figure 13: Proportion of UK domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses classified as disadvantaged in English HEPs**

### Provider tariff

Over the last 10 years, only a very small number of disadvantaged students have entered high-tariff providers to study part-time, and this trend is still evident today. Low-tariff providers served just under 12,000 students in 2006-07, but this number fell to below 4,000 for the first time in 2016-17. There were particularly steep drops in student numbers between 2009-10 and 2010-11, as well as after the fee change in 2012-13. Although the OU also experienced a decline in student numbers between 2010-11 and 2014-15, the drop was not as substantial as in the rest of the sector. As a consequence of declining numbers in the rest of the sector, and low-tariff providers in particular, over half of all disadvantaged students (51 per cent) were studying with the OU in 2016-17, up from 34 per cent in 2006-07 (Figure 14).

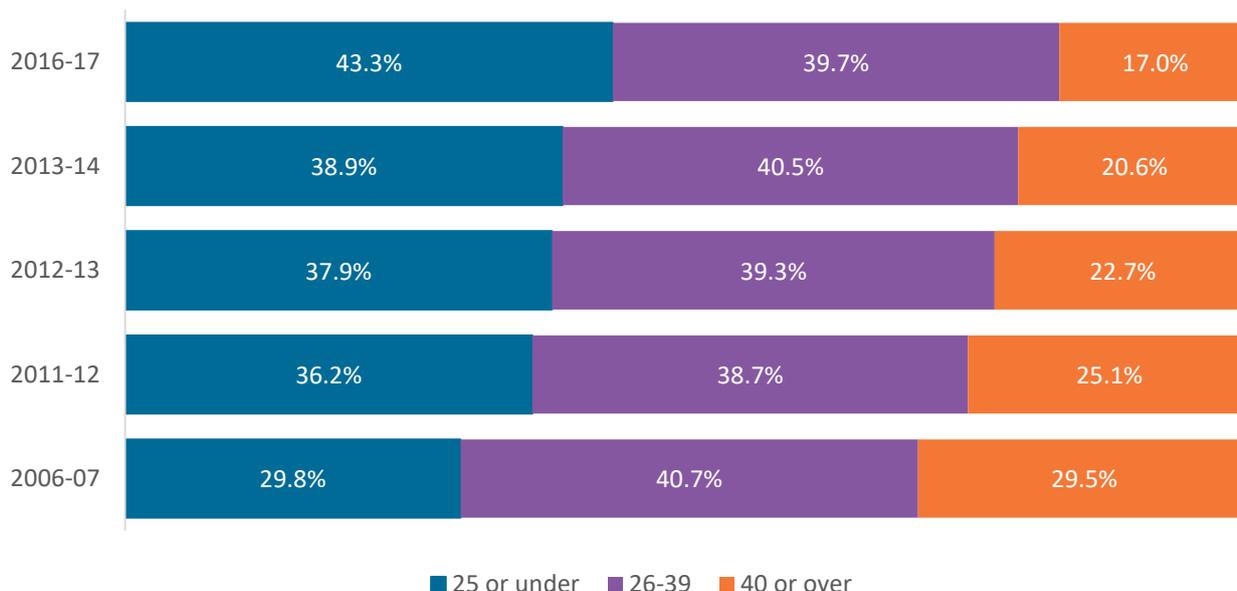


**Figure 14: Proportion of disadvantaged UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses by provider group in English HEPs**

A comparison between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students reveals a different pattern. The proportion of advantaged students studying part-time at a low-to-medium-tariff provider actually increased over the decade in question from 54 per cent in 2006-07 to 62 per cent in 2016-17. In contrast, the proportion of advantaged students studying at the OU decreased from 30 per cent in 2006-07 to 27 per cent in 2016-17.

### Age group

At a sector level, whilst the number of disadvantaged students in all age categories has declined, the largest fall in proportion terms is amongst the older age group, mirroring the trend in the wider student population. The 40-or-over age group made up 30 per cent of the disadvantaged part-time student population in 2006-07; this proportion dropped to just 17 per cent by 2016-17. The majority of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds studying part-time are now aged 25 and under (Figure 15). Comparing this trend to advantaged students, whilst a similar overall pattern is seen, the changes are not quite as marked as those experienced within the disadvantaged group. In 2006-07, 38 per cent of advantaged individuals were 40 and over, with this having fallen to 30 per cent by 2016-17. During the same time period, the proportion of advantaged students in the 25-and-under bracket rose by 6 percentage points from 22 per cent to 28 per cent.



**Figure 15: UK-domiciled disadvantaged undergraduate entrants to part-time courses in English HEPs by age group**

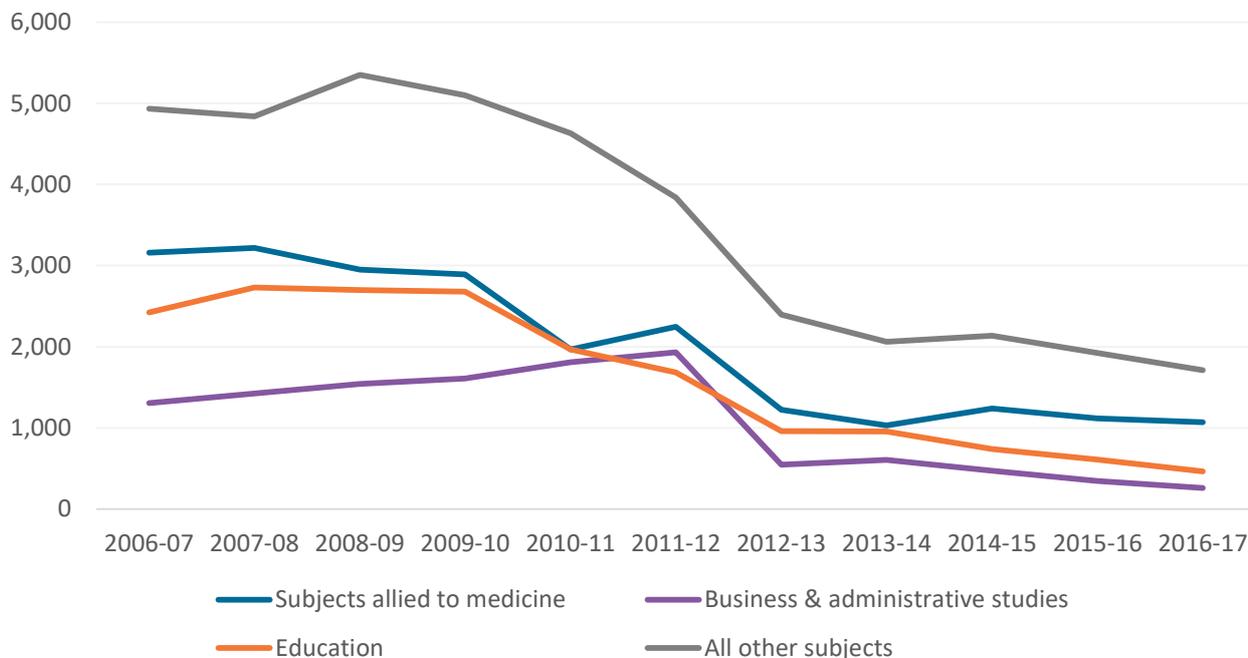
### Subject area

With the overall pattern in disadvantaged student numbers being driven by the trends occurring in low-to-medium-tariff providers, the subjects that disadvantaged students were studying at low-to-medium-tariff providers in the time period of interest were explored. Figure 16 suggests that the decrease in participation between 2009-10 and 2010-11 is primarily down to a reduction in the number of entrants to programmes in education and subjects allied to medicine. These two subject areas, along with business and administrative studies explain almost 70 per cent of the drop in part-time student numbers at these providers after the new tuition fee policy was implemented. Our data suggests that a key reason for the observed fall in business and administrative studies in particular is a reduction in the level of employer funding available for these courses. In 2011-12, 880 students studying this subject area were funded by their employer, with this having fallen to 185 in 2012-13. Comparatively, other subject areas have not experienced such a drastic decline. When looking at all employer-funded courses, the proportion in the business and administrative field fell from 30 per cent before the fee change to 12 per cent immediately after the policy shift, highlighting the large impact it had in this subject area.

It will be interesting to monitor the impact of degree apprenticeships on disadvantaged part-time student numbers over the next few years and the subjects they study.<sup>45</sup> Although degree apprenticeships still comprise a relatively small proportion of all apprenticeships, there is evidence that some programmes are achieving large numbers of registrations. For

<sup>45</sup> The apprenticeships levy was introduced on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2017. The findings in the current report relate to historical HESA data between 2006-07 and 2016-17 that prevents us from commenting on the impact of the levy on the part-time market.

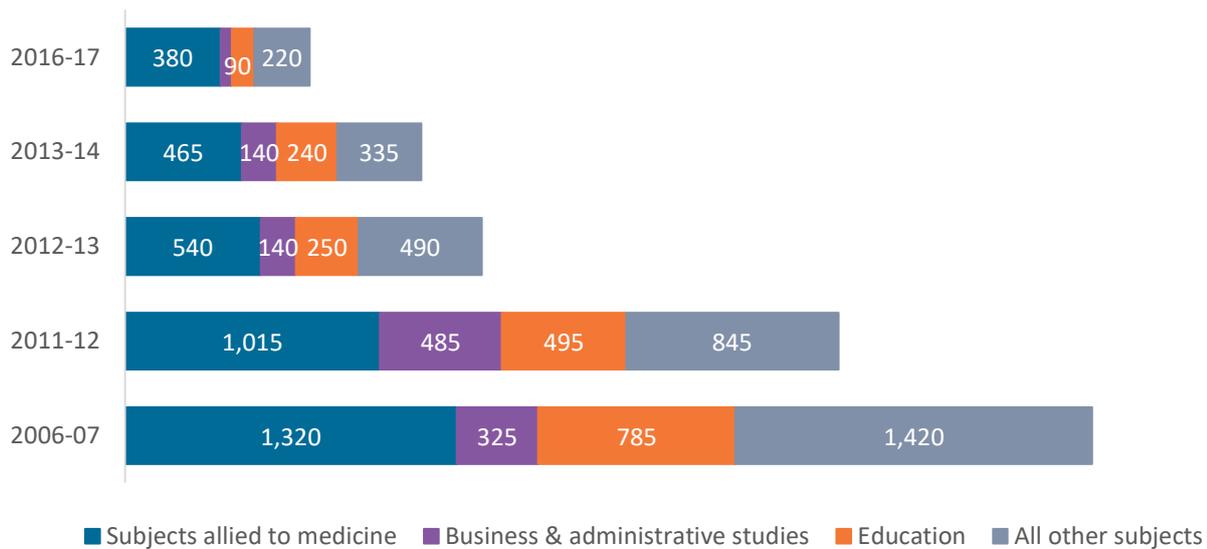
example, the Chartered Management Degree Apprenticeship has seen the highest number of registrations of any degree apprenticeship and is the second most popular standard at Level 6 or 7. Growth is also being driven by an increasing number of registrations on digital and technology and engineering-related degree apprenticeships. There are some early indications that these programmes could attract students who would not have entered traditional degree programmes.<sup>46</sup>



**Figure 16: Number of disadvantaged UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses at English low-to-medium-tariff providers by subject area (excluding OU)**

Earlier, we noted the large decrease in the number and proportion of disadvantaged students aged 40 or above. We investigated this trend further by exploring the courses being studied by disadvantaged students in this age group at low-to-medium-tariff providers. Figure 17 demonstrates that subjects allied to medicine, business and administrative studies, and education accounted for a large proportion of the courses being taken by students aged 40 or above across the years under investigation. In the past decade, however, participation in business and administrative studies, as well as education, has tended towards zero. The fall in the level of participation amongst older disadvantaged students at low-to-medium-tariff providers is, therefore, predominantly down to the declining number of entrants into three subject areas.

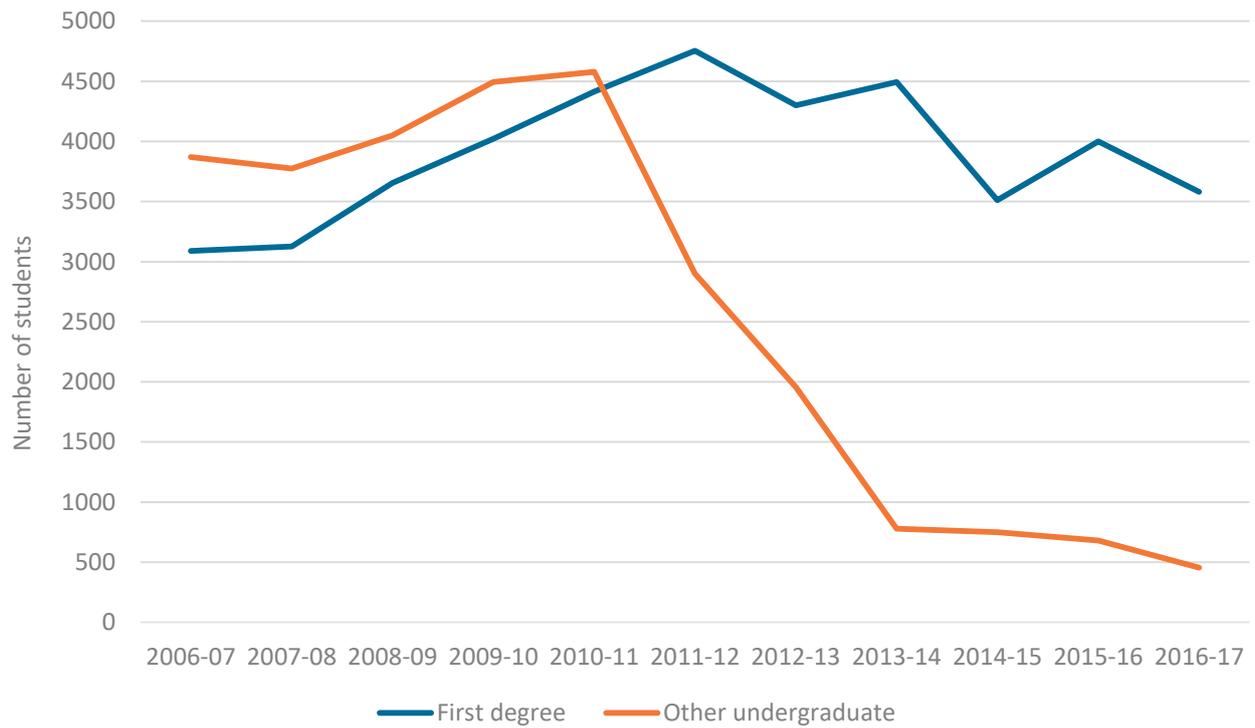
<sup>46</sup> UUK and HEFCE (2017) Degree Apprenticeships: Realising Opportunities. Published online at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2017/degree-apprenticeships-realising-opportunities.pdf>



**Figure 17: Number of disadvantaged UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants aged 40 and above to part-time courses at English low-to-medium-tariff providers by subject area (excluding OU)**

The OU analysis separates out those on first degrees from individuals on other undergraduate courses. Prior to 2012-13, there was a stable rise in first-degree entrants to the OU, with around a quarter of students studying a combined degree. After this point, there is a substantial reduction in participation in combined courses, and fluctuation in the number of students undertaking other subjects. However, as noted above, some of this variation is due to recoding.

Interestingly, there has not been a great deal of change in the number of entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds to part-time first-degree courses overall. Over the 10-year period, the total number of disadvantaged students entering first degrees has increased by just under 500. This is almost entirely a consequence of more students aged 25 or under starting a degree course at the OU. The proportion of first-degree students in this age group has risen from 34 per cent in 2006-07 to 46 per cent by 2016-17. Only a small proportion of those aged 40 or over have historically enrolled on to this type of qualification, with the share falling from 19 per cent to 13 per cent across the decade. This is in contrast to the pattern observed for other undergraduate courses. In 2010-11, there were a similar number of disadvantaged students on first-degree and other undergraduate courses. However, after this point, the number of individuals entering other undergraduate qualifications collapsed (Figure 18).



**Figure 18: Number of disadvantaged UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses at the OU in England by level of study**

## 05. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

This chapter provides some provider perspectives on the key drivers of supply and demand for part-time HE and the reasons for the decline in student numbers. It also highlights some of the ways in which providers are seeking to halt the decline and more effectively enable part-time study through the development of tailored routes, programmes and student support.

### Key findings

- The key drivers of part-time provision for the providers consulted are both economic and social.
- The sustainability of some programmes and providers is dependent on maintaining part-time student numbers.
- In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution<sup>47</sup> and wider changes to the social and political landscape, demand for flexible routes is anticipated to grow. Part-time HE forms one element of a diverse offer which could help to protect HEPs from the potential impact of these changes.
- Although employer support for part-time HE has declined, there is still a market for provision that is responsive to employers' needs. This includes degree apprenticeships which are regarded as an opportunity as well as a potential threat to part-time provision by some providers.
- A commitment to equality and social mobility motivates some HEPs to deliver part-time provision. Although there are no strategic imperatives for 'inclusive' (typically low-to-medium-tariff) providers to attract greater numbers of under-represented students through part-time courses to meet WP targets, HEPs recognise the important role that part-time study plays in widening access for specific groups, e.g. disabled and mature students.
- For many HEPs, full-time undergraduates are the main strategic focus. HEPs can be deterred by the additional costs involved in reaching out to part-time learners and developing the infrastructure needed to deliver bespoke courses and support to ensure those who study part-time are retained and progress into successful outcomes.
- The reforms to student finance and a decline in employer support are perceived to be the main reasons for the decline in part-time student numbers. In particular, the requirement for students to be studying towards a recognised qualification (degree or other undergraduate qualification) in order to be eligible for a loan presents a barrier to students wishing to undertake a standalone module or 'dip a toe' into HE without committing to a full qualification. The key barriers for part-time students are also perceived to be financial.

---

<sup>47</sup> See Schwab, K. (2016) *The Fourth Industrial Revolution: what it means, how to respond*. World Economic Forum (2017) *Accelerating workforce reskilling for the Fourth Industrial Revolution: an agenda for leaders to shape the future of education, gender and work*. Geneva: WEF

- Other perceived barriers for part-time students include time constraints, lack of confidence and academic study skills, lack of integration into the wider student community, and a lack of facilities tailored to their needs.
- Some providers are addressing barriers through the development of more strategic, holistic approaches and by enhancing distance-learning provision through the use of new ground-breaking, innovative technology.

## **Key drivers of part-time provision**

### **Economic drivers**

In HEPs such as the OU, where a substantial proportion of the student body studies part-time, maintaining part-time student numbers is a strategic priority because a significant reduction would have serious implications for the viability and sustainability of the providers. The sustainability of specialist providers is important because of the vital role they fulfil within the HE system, facilitating access for groups who otherwise would not be able to access HE, such as some disabled students and those who lack the formal qualifications required by other types of providers.

In February 2018, the Prime Minister launched a review of post-18 education which is concerned with questions such as choice, value for money and access. In addressing these questions the review will consider, amongst other issues, how students and graduates contribute to the cost of their studies and the case for differentiated fee levels.<sup>48</sup> This has raised concerns in some providers about the potential impact of further rises in tuition fees and the implications for part-time provision. HEPs are also concerned about the potential impact of Brexit on student recruitment and the implications this could have for the viability of some programmes, and even providers.

Identifying and addressing demand from employers for high-level skills and qualifications brings commercial benefits for providers and this was frequently reported as a key driver of part-time provision. A strategic focus on employer-sponsored part-time courses is reported to have helped to mitigate the impact of the changes to student finance by one provider, where the development of industry-led and employer-sponsored part-time provision (including apprenticeships) in the fields of engineering, the built environment and health have proved to be particularly successful, with over 8,000 students enrolled. Growth in these subject areas has helped to offset the dramatic decrease in the number of part-time students studying nursing, which coincided with the removal of the NHS bursary. As a result, student recruitment overall has remained relatively stable in recent years within this provider.

---

<sup>48</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-launches-major-review-of-post-18-education>

We know there are markets in the employer-sponsored courses, apprenticeships and CPD. We're looking at where there might be a market and offering courses for that. (Strategic lead interview)

Addressing the needs of their local as well as the national economy is a core part of some providers' missions. This is particularly important as England's population ages and the working lives of most people who are already in or who are about to enter the labour market are extended. Working-age people will need to be increasingly agile and responsive to changes in the economy driven by, for example, advances in technology and globalisation. It will be essential for workers to develop their skills so that they are able to adapt to new and evolving roles and, in some instances, to change career completely. Interviewees all advocated that part-time study will play a critical role in up-skilling and reskilling the workforce in this context.

Without a part-time offer, we are not continuing to develop our workforce, our ageing workforce that needs to learn new skills. We've got past the automation stage, and are now at the augmented reality, virtual reality, robotics, artificial intelligence stage. As a country we have an awful lot to keep developing our workforce on. So it's not just about getting the graduate skills going through that university experience it's about then continuing to support workforces across the country and that will be through part-time study I think. (Strategic and operational interview)

## Social drivers

All the case study HEPs can be described as 'inclusive' providers in that their student populations are typically diverse and comprise large proportions of under-represented and disadvantaged groups. As such, these providers do not struggle to achieve their WP targets and, consequently, there are no strategic imperatives to attract greater numbers of under-represented students through the provision of part-time courses.

We're already taking on a diverse population, and offering access to those students who wouldn't get in at other providers, which is achieving the goal of widening access without having to increase part-time provision. (Academic interview)

Despite this, HEPs recognise that part-time provision can fulfil an important role in widening access to specific under-represented groups. One interviewee reported that the process of developing their provider access agreement had prompted them to interrogate their data on part-time students to identify particular groups that were being enabled to access HE through part-time provision. These included students with disabilities. In response, this provider is developing part-time provision, along with student support, to ensure these groups are able to access HE.

## Disincentives for providers

Despite the compelling economic and social case for part-time HE, there is apparently still little incentive for some providers to develop and prioritise part-time provision. Even amongst some of the providers consulted that had previously delivered large volumes of part-time students, the strategic focus was now on full-time undergraduates. There are a number of reasons for this.

**1. Under-recruitment on some programmes:** One provider indicated that they had struggled to fill some of their full-time courses due to competition from other providers, in particular higher-tariff providers. Addressing this shortfall became a strategic priority and resulted in an absolute focus on the recruitment of full-time undergraduates to the detriment of part-time courses. At this provider, part-time provision is now regarded as a way to fill spaces on courses, rather than as a priority in its own right.

**2. Retention and success rates:** Rates of retention, progression and success are often lower amongst part-time students. As providers are increasingly judged on the outcomes of their graduates, this, along with the additional resources required to support the progression and attainment of part-time students, can impact on provider propensity to view part-time provision as a key area for growth. Despite this, most case study HEPs regarded it as important to gain insights into the perspectives and experiences of part-time students in order to better understand the factors influencing progression, attainment and outcomes.

**3. Development of bespoke provision for part-time students:** Providers recognise that simply providing a 'bolt-on' provision for part-time students is ineffective and leads to dissatisfaction for both the student and academic staff delivering the course. However, bespoke study routes and student support for part-time students can be resource intensive to develop, often requiring significant investment in IT infrastructure as well as staff training and development. Interviews with academics highlight that there is an interest amongst some individual members of staff in developing bespoke part-time provision. However, the level of resource involved presents a challenge for some HEPs (or individual departments), meaning in some cases that part-time provision is not economically viable. As a result, staff are not able to secure the support at a strategic level. Without the buy-in of the senior leadership, it is challenging to develop a coherent and sustainable offer.

**4. Marketing and outreach:** Providers perceived that in order to tap into the potential market for part-time students they would need to develop a dedicated marketing and outreach strategy to raise awareness of the part-time options available amongst potential students. As the majority of part-time learners are aged 25 and over, providers would need to reach out to adults in their communities and/or workplaces which is resource intensive and, as highlighted in the Year 1 report of the evaluation of the National Collaborative

Outreach Programme,<sup>49</sup> requires a different set of skills which many outreach staff, who are used to engaging with young people through schools and colleges, do not possess.

## Reasons for decline in part-time students

Provider perspectives on the reasons for the decline in part-time student numbers were explored with the case study HEPs.

### Reforms to student funding and wider education policy

A consistent perception amongst interviewees is that the change to student finance is the main reason for the decline in the number of students studying part-time. As the secondary analysis of HESA data demonstrates, the majority of part-time students are over the age of 25. Provider staff perceive that mature students are more debt-averse and, as a result, are less inclined to take up the option of a student loan since the changes were introduced. This unwillingness to take out a loan, coupled with a reduction in other sources of funding (such as employer contributions), is perceived to have made a significant contribution to the decline in student numbers. This is particularly illustrated by the substantial drop in the number of part-time and mature nursing students since the withdrawal of the NHS-funded bursary. One of our case study HEPs has been particularly affected by this reform. This provider perceives that the implications of this fall are far-reaching. As well as creating a skills shortage, it is perceived that it will be detrimental to the quality and diversity of the future workforce:

Our applications for health courses have dropped enormously. [Students previously] were on a bursary – all the places were NHS-funded. We had an enormous number of mature women [...]. Nursing was such a fantastic career for them because they'd get a bursary for their degree and then they'd be going into a guaranteed job. [The reduction in mature learners] means we're filling a lot more of those places with 18-year-olds. I'm not sure that's very good for the profession either. (Strategic lead interview)

The OU has faced particular challenges in the wake of the changes to student funding. Prior to the 2012-13 fee increases, a large proportion of OU students chose to study individual modules which did not necessarily lead to a full degree qualification. However, following the reforms, students must be studying towards a recognised qualification (degree or other undergraduate qualification) in order to be eligible for a loan. This presents a barrier to students who wish to retrain or up-skill by studying standalone modules in particular subject areas, or who simply want to try HE without committing to a

---

<sup>49</sup> CFE (2018) National Collaborative Outreach Programme: Year 1 report of the national formative and impact evaluation, including capacity building. Bristol: HEFCE.

full qualification. As a consequence, there has been a steady decline in the number of students undertaking this route.

This policy has exacerbated the decline in student numbers which was originally triggered by the implementation of the ELQ (equivalent or lower qualification) policy in 2008-09. As a result of this policy change, HEFCE withdrew provider funding for most students studying for a qualification at a level equivalent to, or lower than, the level of qualification which they already held. The ELQ measure applied to both full-time and part-time provision, but it affected part-time to a much greater extent because a much higher proportion of part-time entrants already had an HE qualification. Some providers responded by charging ELQ students a tuition fee supplement which deterred some from engaging in HE. Notably, however, the OU has never charged ELQ students a higher fee.<sup>50</sup>

Many part-time students are facing difficult financial circumstances as a result of the economic downturn and are struggling to manage their living costs alongside the costs of their studies. Several HEPs observed that, as a result, the proportion of part-time students working full-time to fund their studies is increasing year-on-year.

I've known students who didn't have money on their Oyster Card to come in to return library books and things like that. We have to be very sensitive to the points at which we could be presenting barriers to students without realising it. (Strategic lead interview)

Although financial support in the form of hardship funds, bursaries, prizes, awards and charitable donations are sometimes available to part-time students in addition to loans, there is a perception that part-time students are often not aware of it. Furthermore, there is a perceived lack of financial advice and support that is specifically tailored to the needs of part-time students. Lack of awareness of financial support and concerns about affordability are perceived to deter some part-time students. In addition, financial hardship is perceived to adversely affect retention and re-enrolment of part-time students.

### **Reduction in employer support for part-time study**

There has been a reduction in the level of employer sponsorship of part-time study in more recent years and this is perceived to have contributed to the fall in student numbers. HEPs are of the view that the economic downturn, austerity measures and uncertainties about the impact of Brexit are responsible for this reduction because, in this context, employers are less likely to make resources available for staff training and development.

---

<sup>50</sup> See Callender, C. and Thompson, J. (2018) *The Lost Part-Timers: The decline of part-time undergraduate higher education in England*. London: The Sutton Trust; p10.

One HEP perceived that the changes to student finance have also been a factor leading to the reduction in employer support. The reforms are perceived to have made sponsorship more bureaucratic and less appealing to employers.

Sponsoring a student is not as viable an option as it used to be due to the changes in the loans. The onus of the funding now is on the student, as opposed to a company sponsoring an individual. (Strategic lead interview)

One of the case study HEPs, London South Bank University (LSBU), has built on their existing links with business to develop an industry-led part-time offer. This approach, coupled with an integrated programme of support for part-time students which connects them with a student engagement intern and full-time students studying similar programmes, has enabled them to buck the wider trend of declining part-time student numbers. At present, 40 per cent of the student population study part-time at LSBU. In addition to attracting and retaining part-time students, this industry-led approach is perceived to have had a positive impact on student employability, enabling part-time students to engage in new employment opportunities outside of the organisation they currently work for. A consistent viewpoint to emerge is that whilst degree apprenticeships may create alternative opportunities for part-time students, it is too early to demonstrate the impact.

## Opportunities and threats

### Apprenticeships

Since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in April 2017, there has been a shift from intermediate to advanced and higher apprenticeships. For the first time in the 2017-18 academic year, there was an equivalent number of enrolments on intermediate Level 2 apprenticeships (43 per cent) and advanced apprenticeships (44 per cent). Furthermore, there was a 24 per cent increase in the number of higher apprenticeship enrolments between the 2016-17 and 2017-18 academic years.<sup>51</sup> In some subjects, such as engineering, health and leisure/tourism, advanced apprenticeships now dominate, and a considerable share of higher level apprenticeships in science (50 per cent), ICT (25 per cent) and business (20%).<sup>52</sup>

Higher apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships, are perceived to be an important emerging market for some HEPs and they have embraced the opportunity to develop an apprenticeship model. One interviewee reported that their provider is aware of

---

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-apprenticeships#apprenticeship-and-traineeships-current-data>

<sup>52</sup> See NIESR Blog: <https://www.niesr.ac.uk/blog/apprenticeships-are-changing-levy-year>

the need to evolve more flexible modes of learning, and to align standard degree routes and degree apprenticeships to ensure that both student and employer requirements are met.

The way we deliver our education is going to be changing a lot as a result of degree apprenticeships. It's really quite interesting to be talking about these things for that group of students. In a good way, apprenticeship students want something different from an undergraduate full-time student. I think it's positive. (Strategic lead interview)

One respondent at a provider that has embraced degree apprenticeships indicated that some of their departments that have a long tradition of providing part-time routes in subjects such as nursing, engineering, and the built environment, are transferring over from an employer-sponsored model to the apprenticeship model. However, there is an expectation that the provider will have to review the way students are supported within the degree apprenticeship model. It is anticipated that this will result in radical changes, which will present a challenge for staff within the providers and potentially have a transformative effect on the sector.

Other interviewees voiced concerns that degree apprenticeships could threaten their provider's ability to deliver a sustainable and financially viable part-time offer. Some interviewees were particularly concerned that the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy had resulted in many employers transferring resources, that were previously ring-fenced for sponsorship of part-time degree programmes, to apprenticeships<sup>53</sup> and that a substantial amount of part-time provision could be lost as a result.

If employer-sponsored degrees become apprenticeships because of the Levy, how much can universities provide higher and degree apprenticeships? They cost more to deliver than standard provision. There are a lot more obligations in terms of attendance monitoring. The employer is a stakeholder, we have to provide them with data and have conversations about quality. This provides certain challenges. There are a lot more processes. There's more bureaucracy. The costs go up. We get the same or possibly less income so at that point we probably can't afford to run them on our model. (Strategic lead interview)

In a worst-case scenario, we'll grow apprenticeships, find out they're not financially sustainable and be on a trajectory to not being able to pay the bills. That's what's likely to happen. I don't know what would happen. It wouldn't be that we failed, it would be that the model was unsustainable. We're back to the country's got the problem. The

---

<sup>53</sup> Degree apprenticeships provide an opportunity for apprentices to gain a full Bachelor's or Master's degree. Programmes are designed in partnership with employers. Apprentices study part-time at a university or college, with the rest of the time being spent with the employer. They take between 3 and 6 years to achieve depending on the course level.

country hasn't solved the issue of technical education; it's taken a beating on higher education. (Strategic lead interview)

In response to concerns about the sustainability of their part-time offer, one of the providers consulted has taken the strategic decision to increase their apprenticeship provision in order to offset the impact of any decline in employer-sponsored degree provision, focussing on areas such as engineering, business, the built environment and health where students might have otherwise been expected to enrol on employer-sponsored part-time degree courses. Another is undertaking a detailed review of their teaching-model framework to ensure that there is alignment between core teaching and degree apprenticeships. However, there is an element of risk involved in this strategy. Different systems and processes to those that are already in place within providers are required to support the delivery of apprenticeships, for example, to monitor attendance and that particular standards are being met. Some providers expressed concerns about the additional costs and bureaucracy that will be incurred as a consequence.

The introduction of degree apprenticeships also presents an opportunity for specialist providers of part-time HE such as the OU, but realising these opportunities is not without its challenges. As a national organisation, the OU lacks contacts with 'local' employers that other HEPs exploit as part of developing an apprenticeship offer. In order to develop their offer, providers such as the OU have to focus on national employers and they have had some success in this regard:

The OU is very interested in higher apprenticeships. There are advantages in us being a national provider but also disadvantages because we tend not to have the links in with local industries. So, we would tend to work with more national organisations; we've done things for example with the police. We've delivered training for them on a national model, working with them to develop a curriculum. (Strategic lead interview)

Although some large graduate recruiters such as PWC have renounced A-levels as a primary method of selection for their graduate programmes, many employers seeking to take on degree apprentices still require applicants to meet specific entry requirements, usually A-levels at specified grades or above. Many applicants to providers such as the OU with an open-access policy do not possess formal qualifications. Working in partnership with employers to raise their awareness of the advantages of increasing the diversity of their entrants through more flexible and inclusive recruitment mechanisms for degree apprenticeships would be beneficial to disadvantaged part-time students in particular.

### **Development of flexible modes of delivery**

Universities seeking to sustain or further develop their part-time provision need to consider which part-time route is most viable for them given their overarching strategic objectives, the level of resource available and target student groups. This presents an opportunity to develop a range of online, blended and campus-based part-time provision

across the sector. One university consulted has focussed on the development of their campus-based provision for part-time students in order to distinguish their offer from specialist providers such as the OU. Other providers have focussed on the development of their distance-learning offer and digital provision.

HEPs recognise that rapid developments in technology and the emergence of a new generation of 'digitally literate' learners who are comfortable operating in virtual environments presents an opportunity to grow and enhance distance learning through online methods.

The fact that people growing up in a digital environment treat the digital world the same as the real world, I think there is scope for part-time distance-learning courses to become very significant. (Academic interview)

HEPs also recognise that online distance learning can be particularly attractive for disadvantaged students and provides opportunities to engage harder-to-reach communities. For example, the OU has invested in cutting-edge, innovative technology to provide a flexible, personalised offer that can be particularly attractive to and beneficial for disadvantaged part-time students. The development of FutureLearn, a subsidiary of the OU, provides a digital education platform in partnership with other providers. The benefits of this platform include providing a flexible mode of learning and a forum to engage with learners worldwide. One provider consulted has invested in the development of distance-learning provision with a focus on students with learning difficulties and disabilities to ensure a positive learning experience. Another has a contract with the Ministry of Defence to deliver modular distance-learning courses to staff based overseas.

However, misperceptions about distance learning can present a challenge for some HEPs, particularly when looking to grow their overseas markets. Distance learning is not a mode of delivery that is recognised in some countries because of concerns about maintaining quality standards.

Some governments do not recognise online learning even though we go through the same quality standards and processes and rigour, if not more. Unless I think there's a government lobby that promotes this, then I think that we will continue to struggle to make an impact in some areas of the globe. The students desperately want this as a solution, but this challenge is coming from the government or the policy makers. (Strategic and operational interview)

Online distance learning has been positively embraced by the University of Derby (see Chapter 6 case study) in order to expand their part-time offer. It has enabled them to develop a virtual campus which provides part-time online learners with a comparable experience to full-time students. Specialist providers such as the OU (see Chapter 6 for

case study) have also heavily invested in enhancing their technology to optimise their online learning platforms to ensure an effective, high-quality part-time offer is sustained.

## **Barriers and enablers for disadvantaged students studying part-time**

HE staff perceptions of the barriers and enablers for disadvantaged students were also explored through the interviews with case study providers.

### **Barriers**

#### **Finance**

HEPs perceive that finance is the main barrier to HE for part-time students from disadvantaged groups. Previous government policy on part-time HE is felt to have disincentivised participation because of a lack of access to financial support, although provision in the form of means-tested tuition fees and course grants was in place to help the most disadvantaged students. The tuition and course grants were abolished and loans for part-time students were introduced in 2012. The aim was to ensure greater parity with full-time students in terms of access to loans, to coincide with the rise in tuition fees. However, greater parity of access to financial support has failed to boost participation in part-time HE and despite the introduction of the loans, numbers have continued to decline. This is in part because not all part-time students are eligible for the loans. However, there are perceived to be a number of other reasons why the loans have not reversed the decline in part-time HE. Provider staff perceive that students are simply not aware that they may be eligible for a loan.

The challenge is the combination of being a student from a disadvantaged background and being an adult learner. It's the combination of those two so people will often have mortgages to pay, kids to support and are also working full-time and a lot of our students will have some sort of caring responsibilities as well so they're time poor as well as financially poor. What the research does tell us is that adult learners are not always clear or well-informed about the tuition loan system. (Strategic lead interview)

This view is reinforced by the results of our survey which found that over a third of respondents were unaware that they may have been able to access a student loan. There is a clear role for providers as well as Government in improving awareness of the financial support available to part-time students through enhanced information and tailored advice and guidance that addresses the needs and concerns of prospective students.

Future growth of degree apprenticeships may provide opportunities to expand part-time provision for some providers. The zero-fee status, and the lack of a resulting debt, is the main financial advantage for apprentices and this may be particularly appealing to disadvantaged students. The HEP gets income directly from the employer – although this is capped according to different funding bands (there are around 30 funding bands for each apprenticeships standard). Employers can use the Levy up to the band ceiling, but

may also contribute additional funding if they want to. The employer and HEP negotiate the funding, which can be beneficial in facilitating new partnerships with employers. However, interviewees also conveyed the view that employer contributions do not fully cover their costs in providing student support and a positive learning experience.

#### Lack of infrastructure

HEPs consistently reported that inadequate infrastructure for part-time learners can deter prospective students from considering HE as well as inhibit the progression and achievement of existing part-time students. Interviewees spoke of the challenges of providing facilities, resources and support for part-time students. This includes access to services such as the library due to conventional opening hours, inadequate childcare provision for campus-based students, timetabling constraints, and a lack of facilities to enable part-time students to submit assignments online.

HEPs are also concerned that part-time students can miss out on the ‘full student experience’ because of a lack of integration with the wider student body and opportunities to study and socialise with their peers (full-time and part-time students). This lack of a sense of belonging can leave students feeling isolated and unsupported which can negatively impact on retention, progression and success.

There are structural barriers that aren’t servicing part-time students, as our students are mostly full-time. My concern is providing more access to education, if a student feels they can’t commit to full-time, but I think they would be at a disadvantage with no peer group supporting them. It’s about making sure they feel integrated, and that our systems are set up to recognise them. (Academic interview)

Provider staff also perceive that a lack of confidence can act as a barrier for some students. This is particularly the case for mature learners, who have not engaged in education for some years, and disadvantaged students who come from families with no direct experience of HE.

We have many other students who are the first in their family to come to university, don’t have a great deal of confidence about their own abilities and might not necessarily be fully aware or conscious of what is expected at university. (Academic interview)

Although this is also true for mature and disadvantaged full-time students, the challenge can be particularly acute for people considering part-time distance learning, especially if they lack confidence with IT and/or do not have the support of family or peers to draw upon. In order to overcome the challenges of isolation and improve retention amongst part-time students, LSBU have introduced student engagement interns who provide support throughout the HE experience, from application to graduation, to ensure students know what to expect in HE and receive the help they need to develop the skills and

confidence to succeed (See Chapter 6 for examples of how student interns and technology are successfully improving the learning experience for part-time students).

Effective support for part-time students is therefore recognised as essential to ensuring this group succeeds in HE. However, HEPs tend to offer universal support services to students, which do not always take account of mode of study and the specific needs of part-time students. Indeed, respondents to the student survey were not satisfied that the pastoral support in their provider was meeting the needs of part-time students, suggesting there is a need for HEPs to dedicate further resources to enhancing the support provided for this group. In order to help overcome this barrier, one case-study HEP has implemented out-of-hours online support which is available to both full-time and part-time students. Another provider has assigned a ‘single point of contact’ for part-time students who can address any issues or concerns. In their view this is working effectively:

I don't think many courses build the necessary pastoral or support elements that need to be done. With my students, a lot of them do need a lot of time, mentoring, coaching/building their confidence. What does appear to work is having a single point of contact so that if they've got any issues they can go to that person. (Academic interview)

#### Lack of local provision

Finally, provider staff recognise that as a result of their existing work and/or family commitments, many part-time students are not able to travel great distances to study and, as a result, prefer to study at their local university. However, as this interviewee notes and our secondary data analysis demonstrates, there are substantial disparities in levels of provision between different regions, resulting in cold spots in some areas.

If you're an adult learner or a part-time learner, then you're almost certainly geographically immobile and we all know there are cold spots in terms of universities and employment opportunities and that's something that people tend to forget. (Strategic lead interview)

Graduate skills horizon scanning currently being undertaken as part of the Foss's business plan, together with its Challenge Competition,<sup>54</sup> seeks to address student mobility issues because of the positive impact that it can have on student outcomes. This is particularly relevant to disadvantaged part-time students who are typically less mobile. The project is seeking to collate evidence on ‘what works’ for students who study and work in their home domicile region, in order to help them maximise the return on their investment in HE.

---

<sup>54</sup> For information: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/ofs-challenge-competition-industrial-strategy-and-skills-support-for-local-students-and-graduates/>

Growth in online provision has helped to overcome geographical barriers. However, this mode of delivery is not accessible to all potential students, including some disadvantaged groups and those living in rural areas in particular. Interviewees expressed concerns that this mode of delivery could actually serve as a barrier and further disadvantage some groups of students, such as those who do not have access to high-speed broadband and/or up-to-date hardware (laptop or desktop PC, for example). There is a view that a move towards purely digital materials and support for part-time students should, therefore, be undertaken with caution.

The challenge is that if you've not had a positive experience at school and you're quite poor and you can't afford decent broadband and maybe you've got a rubbishy old laptop, there's something quite exclusionary about that, even in terms of getting started. Lots of our students tell us that they really like print materials. (Strategic lead interview)

## Enablers

### Flexible modes of delivery

Flexibility in all aspects of HE, from funding to mode of delivery, is perceived to be a key enabler as it ensures there is a range of options available to students depending on their needs and preferences.

The big deal for me would be the opportunity for more flexible study. Almost the removal of the terms 'full-time' and 'part-time'. The assumption that students study as [and when] suits them and the funding system is set up to support that. (Strategic lead interview)

Providers also need to take account of part-time students' personal circumstances in the design and delivery of their programmes because factors such as caring responsibilities, irregular shift patterns and/or physical or mental health conditions, can all impact on a student's ability to engage effectively in their studies. In responding to the needs of part-time students, it is important for providers to plan and communicate the course timetable (lectures, seminars, assignment deadlines etc.) to part-time students as early as possible and to avoid changes as this enables the students to organise their own schedules (e.g. childcare or shift patterns) accordingly.

### Tailored information, advice and guidance

IAG tailored to part-time students is also perceived to be an important enabler of access to HE for part-time students and an area that HEPs should focus on. Effective IAG can help prospective students make informed choices about the most appropriate course for them and raise awareness of the different study options available. At present, schools and colleges tend to only promote full-time study to students considering HE and there is a lack of tailored IAG for mature students. Stronger partnerships between providers, colleges, employers and other organisations such as Jobcentre Plus could help to ensure

students are fully informed about alternative study routes, including part-time programmes for those who, for whatever reason, have concerns about their ability to engage on a full-time basis.

There is widespread evidence that work experience benefits both the students who take part and the employers that provide work experience opportunities. Students benefit from the opportunity to develop sector knowledge and the generic skills required to succeed at work; employers have the opportunity to access a wider talent pool and reach individuals from diverse social backgrounds. Less is known about models of work experience for part-time students and whether it would suit particular employers more than others, for example small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) rather than large corporations. These questions could be explored through further research. Guidance about employment and placement opportunities for part-time students would also enhance the student experience, potentially aiding retention and success. One of the providers consulted reported that they are seeking to enhance their placement offer for part-time students, recognising that shorter rather than the long-term placements undertaken by full-time students are more appropriate for part-time students, and those with existing work experience in particular. There is widespread evidence that work experience can benefit both students and employers – students are able to develop both sector knowledge and generic skills required within the workplace, whilst it can help employers to uncover a wider talent pool and reach individuals from diverse social backgrounds.

#### Support to integrate with student population

As noted earlier in this chapter, there is a perception that lack of integration of part-time students can deter some students and negatively impacts retention, progression and success. Considering ways to help part-time students feel more integrated into the university community is, therefore, important. The development of provision in this regard needs to take account of the personal circumstances of part-time students and the extent to which they are able and wish to participate in activities or events. One provider, as part of their commitment to enhance the student experience, now provides accommodation on a hotel basis for part-time students to enable them to access social activities and ensure they have a fully immersive experience.

One thing that universities are doing is having accommodation on a hotel basis, so if students want to stay over for one night for work or for the social bit, they can stay for one night in university accommodation at a reasonable rate. (Academic interview)

Providers thus have various ways to help students overcome barriers and enable them to access HE on a part-time basis, as well as improving attainment and progression into successful outcomes. These approaches are considered in more detail in the case studies in Chapter 7. A common theme running throughout the case studies is that approaches to widening access to part-time students and supporting their achievement and progression

are most effective when they are embedded within providers and delivered as part of a holistic approach with the support and buy-in of senior leadership.

## 06. STUDENT SURVEY

This chapter explores student motivations for studying part-time and the challenges they experience, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups.

### Key findings

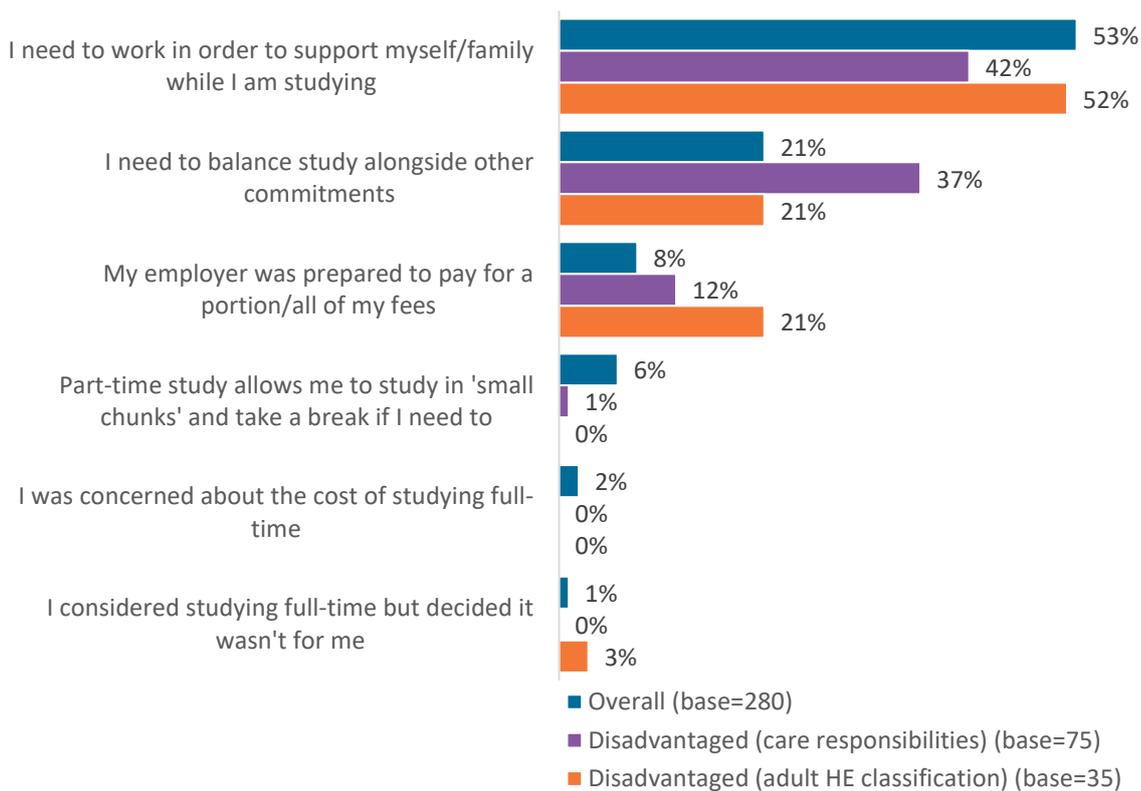
- The key reason why students choose to study part-time is to enable them to continue to work and support themselves and their family. Employer contribution is not a key driver - only 8 per cent of students opted for part-time study because their employer was prepared to contribute to the cost of their tuition fees.
- Students overall report that they are motivated to study in HE because they need the qualification to get the job they really want.
- Disadvantaged students most commonly report that they have not been in a position to study HE previously and were motivated to study now by a long-held ambition to gain an HE qualification.
- Delivery method and a perceived lack of choice are key reasons why students choose their provider.
- Disadvantaged students (defined using care responsibilities) are most likely to be relying on a loan to pay for their tuition costs.
- Of those who had not made use of the loan system, over a third are unaware that part-time students could be eligible for a tuition-fee loan.
- Financial considerations are generally a bigger concern for students than non-financial matters, such as the timing of lectures.
- Disadvantaged students in particular report experiencing difficulties meeting the cost of education, with course-related expenditure and living expenses of greatest concern.
- Students perceive that most elements of their course meet their needs as a part-time student. The provision of social, emotional and pastoral support are the main exceptions. Students defined as disadvantaged using the adult HE qualification variable are particularly dissatisfied with this element of their HE experience.

### Main reasons for studying part-time

For just over half of respondents (53 per cent), the main reason for choosing to study part-time is because they needed to work simultaneously so that they could support themselves and their family. A further 8 per cent opted for part-time study because their employer was prepared to contribute to the cost of their tuition fees. Just under a quarter indicated that they needed to balance study with other commitments (such as family), suggesting that a substantial minority of students are only able to engage with HE because of the flexibility afforded by part-time modes of delivery. Very few students reported that they decided to study part-time because they were put off by the cost of full-time study; even fewer had

considered studying full-time. This suggests that there are groups of students who would not engage in HE without the option to study part-time (Figure 19).

We find very similar results to the population as a whole when we look at responses from disadvantaged students defined by the adult HE classification measure. In contrast, when using the proxy formed from the care responsibilities variable, there is an almost equal split between the number who state that other commitments were their main reason for studying part time (37 per cent) and those for whom the need to work while studying was essential in order to support themselves or their family (42 per cent) (Figure 19).



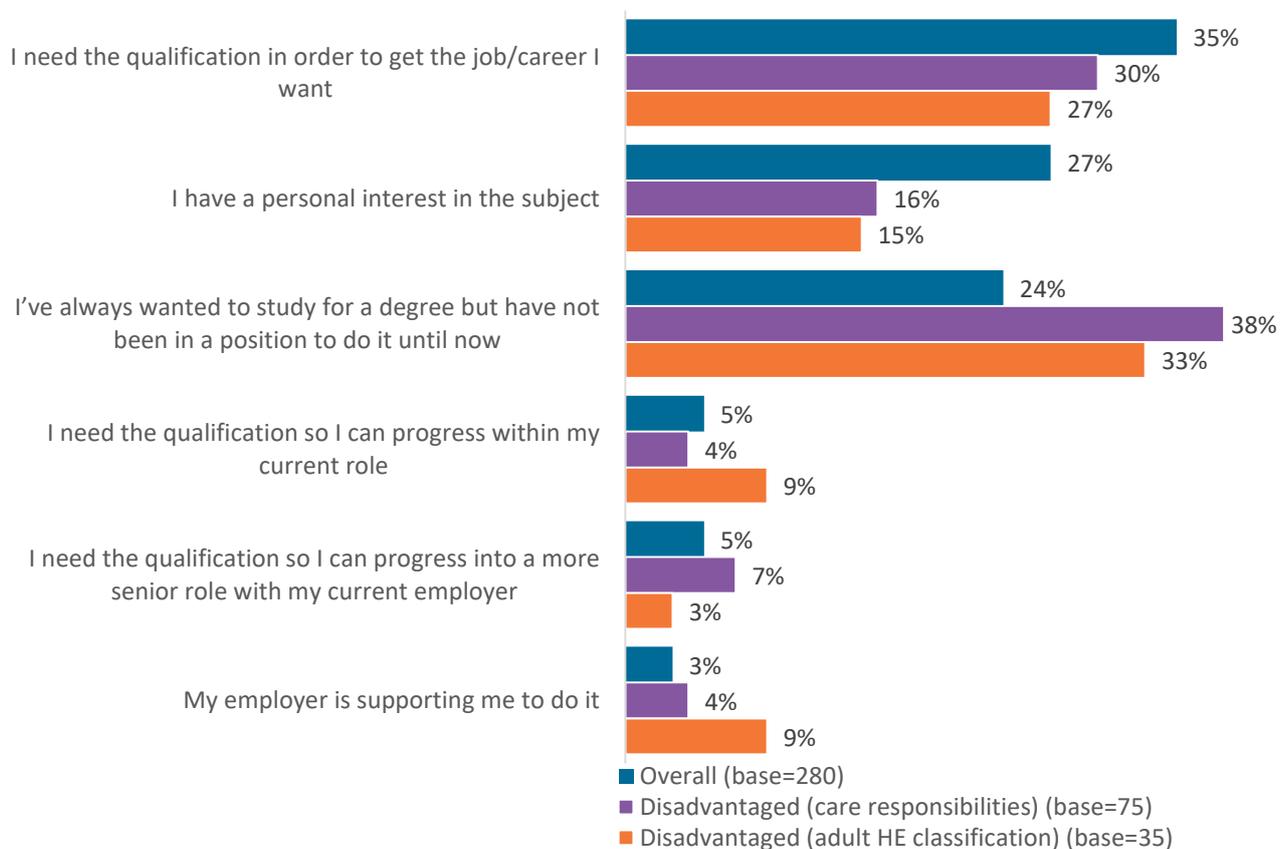
**Figure 19: Reasons for studying part-time**

## Main reasons for studying in HE

Respondents are motivated to study in HE by a number of different factors, but the most common reason is that they need the qualification to get the job they really want (35 per cent). Interestingly, in the context of higher fees, just over a quarter of respondents said they were studying part-time out of personal interest. Almost a quarter of respondents (24 per cent) had always aspired to enter HE, but had not been in a position to engage until now. A minority are seeking to progress in their careers, either within their current role (5 per cent) or into a more senior role (5 per cent) and perceive that the qualification will help to facilitate that process. This illustrates the diversity seen in part-time education, with students having varying motivations for pursuing their programme. It is expected that the trend towards upskilling and reskilling within existing careers will continue in the coming

years, aligned to the Fourth Industrial Revolution.<sup>55; 56</sup> This could help to encourage a more open dialogue about the ways in which part-time provision could help to address skills gaps and inform providers' strategies for addressing specific skills shortages.

The overarching figures mask clear differences by disadvantage (Figure 20). Regardless of which measure of disadvantage is used, it is the desire to study in HE (but only now being able to do so) that is the main motivation for disadvantaged students. This is closely followed by the fact that they need the award to achieve their career ambitions, with personal interest being far less important for these groups. These findings demonstrate how part-time education can help achieve a number of key objectives, such as helping to upskill the labour force and giving those from less affluent backgrounds the chance to fulfil their potential by accessing university at a later stage in life.



**Figure 20: Main reasons for undertaking part-time study**

<sup>55</sup> World Economic Forum (2017) Accelerating workforce reskilling for the Fourth Industrial Revolution: an agenda for leaders to shape the future of education, gender and work. Geneva: WEF

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/civil-society-and-fourth-industrial-revolution/>

## Main reasons for provider choice

Irrespective of disadvantage, respondents most commonly report (41 per cent) that the main reason they decided to study at their chosen university was because it delivered the course in a way that suited their needs (e.g. through distance or blended learning, evening or weekend classes) (Figure 21). A further 26 per cent perceive that the university they are studying at is ‘the only place that offered the course I wanted to do on a part-time basis’. This complements the findings from our secondary data analysis which demonstrated that there may be a lack of provider choice for students seeking to study first undergraduate degrees on a part-time basis, with the OU currently being the major supplier. This raises an important issue in the context of the OfS’s role as the new regulator and for providers in the development of effective student protection plans. In the rare event that a course or provider is forced to close, a lack of alternative part-time provision in the area may result in some students being unable to continue with their studies. Providers will need to ensure transparency about the alternative provision available for part-time students and how easy it will be for students to transfer.

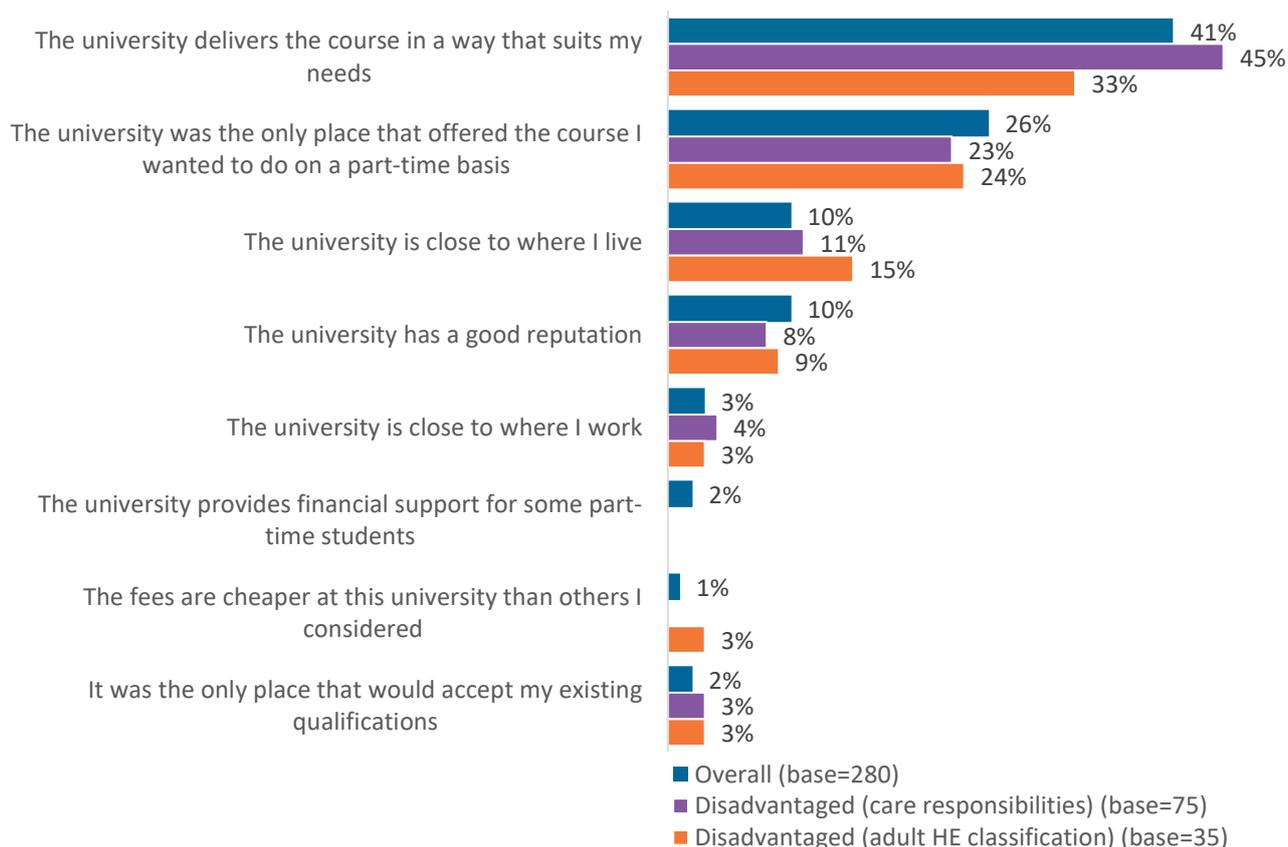
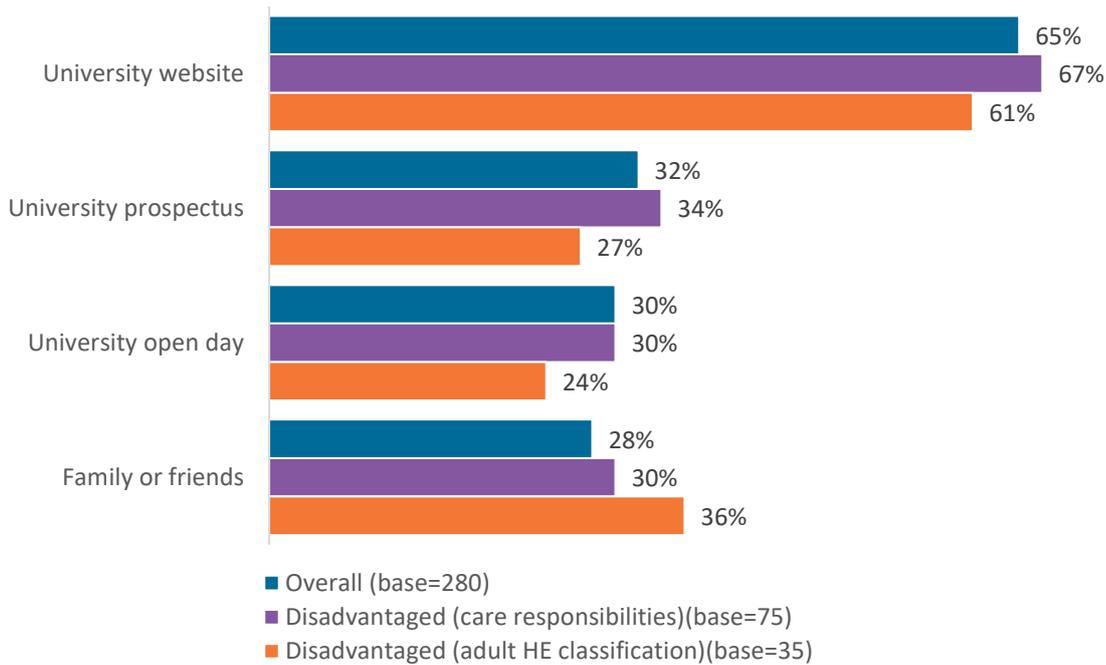


Figure 21: Main reasons for university choice

## Sources of information, advice and guidance

Universities, as opposed to family and friends, are the source of information about HE for the part-time students who responded to our survey. This is in contrast to the findings of

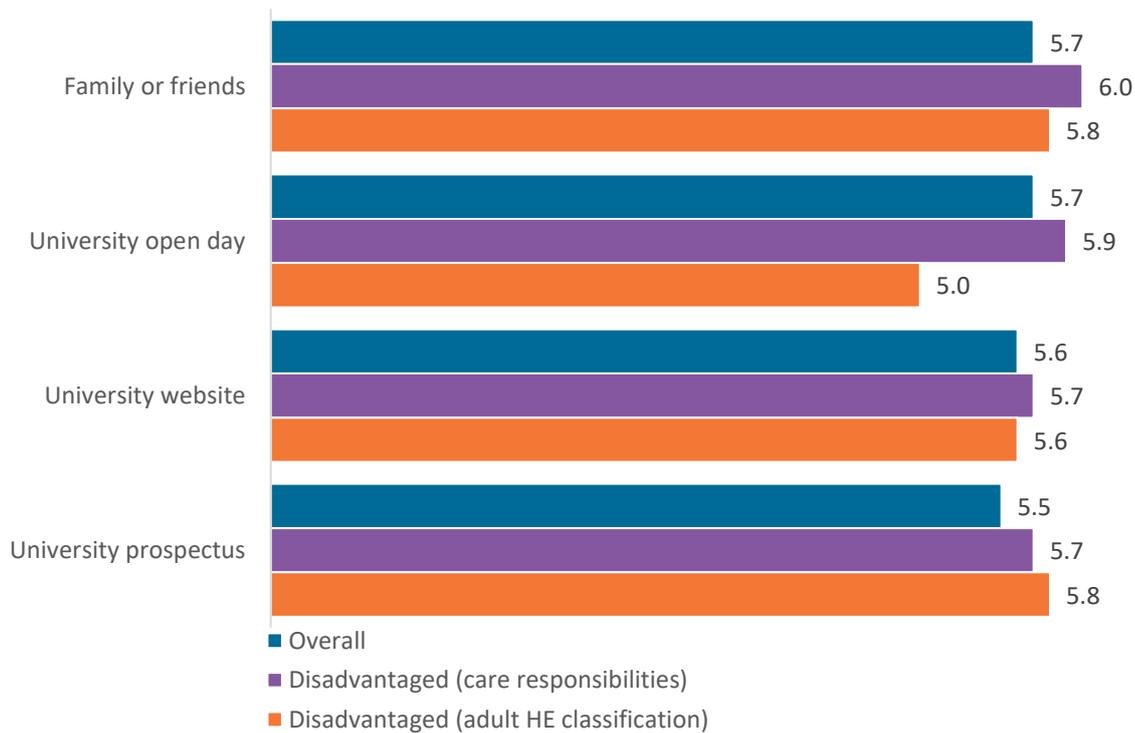
Callender and Jamieson.<sup>57</sup> University websites are the most common source of IAG used by two-thirds of students (65 per cent). Similar proportions of students accessed IAG from university prospectuses (32 per cent) and university open days (30 per cent). Mirroring the findings of other work on student decision making, friends and family are also a key source of information and advice for part-time students (28 per cent). Only very small proportions of individuals had accessed sources such as HE comparison sites and career services when deciding to study part-time (Figure 22). The same patterns are observed when we consider just disadvantaged respondents.



**Figure 22: Main sources of information, advice and guidance consulted**

On average, the sources of IAG that are most commonly used are also perceived to be useful. All of the four main sources scored an average of between ‘5’ and ‘6’ on a seven-point scale where ‘1’ is ‘not useful at all’ and ‘7’ is ‘very useful’. In almost all instances, disadvantaged students reported a slightly higher level of satisfaction with the advice and guidance they received. The exception to this is university open days, which is rated slightly less positively by students classified as disadvantaged using the adult HE marker (Figure 23)

<sup>57</sup> Callender, C. and Jamieson, A. (2010). The supply of part-time higher education in the UK. Universities UK, London. Published online at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2010/supply-of-part-time-higher-education-uk.pdf>



**Figure 23: Mean satisfaction ratings for information, advice and guidance consulted (1= not useful at all and 7 = very useful) (Base=varies)**

## Funding part-time study

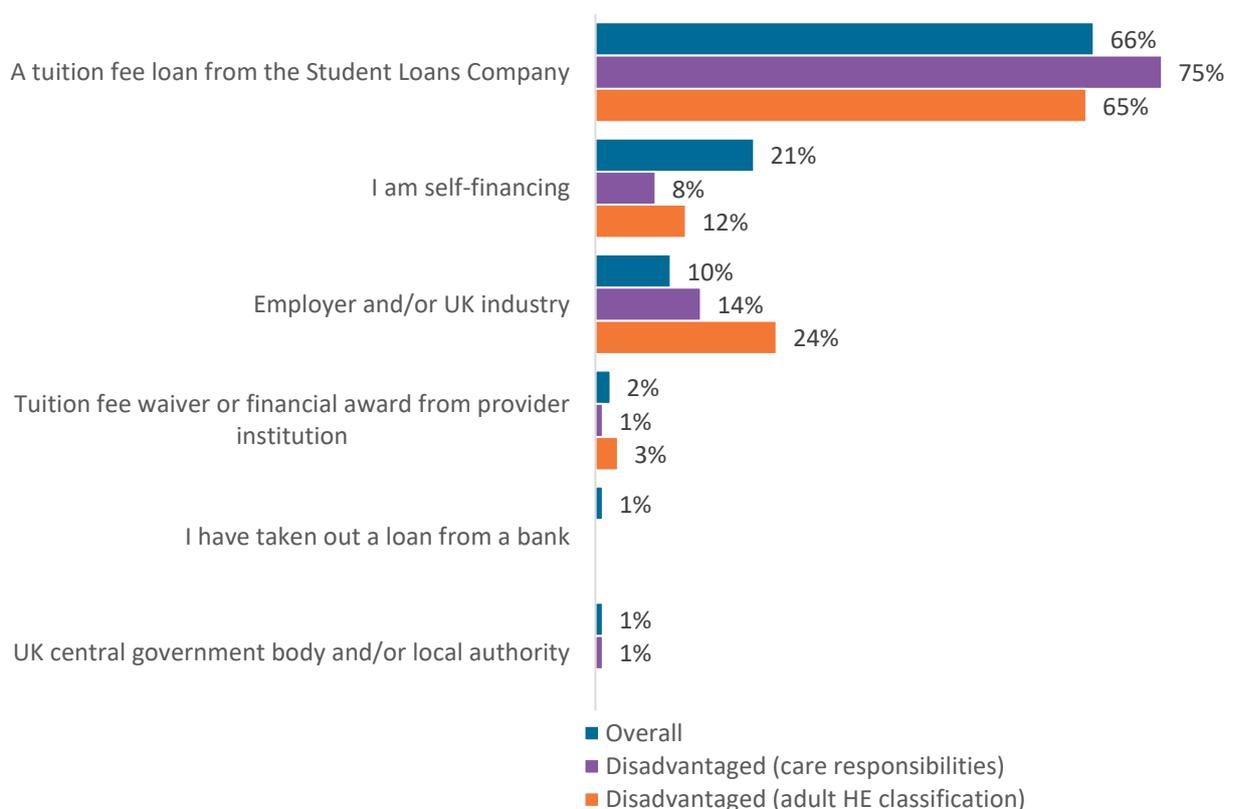
Alongside tuition costs, students enrolled on a part-time course must also cover their living costs and course expenses. Almost nine out of 10 (88 per cent) survey respondents stated that they were meeting these costs themselves. A loan from the Student Loans Company was the dominant source of funding for tuition fees, taken out by two-thirds of respondents. Just over a fifth of respondents are self-financing (21 per cent), with the remainder relying on meeting their costs through support from their employer or a central government body (11 per cent) (Figure 25). Amongst those who stated that they had not used a loan to fund their studies, 36 per cent had not realised that this option was available for part-time study.

Our findings suggest that access to finance is a key enabler for many students wishing to study part-time. Those who took out a tuition-fee loan indicate that they would have been unlikely to study part-time (a mean score of 1.6 on a seven-point scale where ‘1’ was ‘very unlikely’ and ‘7’ was ‘very likely’) if they had not been able to take out the loan. Similarly, those who are being sponsored by their employer indicate they would have been unlikely to study (mean score of 2.6) without this source of funding.

Disadvantaged students (as defined by our care classification) are more likely to use a tuition fee loan to cover their fees (75 per cent), when compared with the overall population. However, when we adopt the adult HE classification as the measure of

disadvantage, there is little difference in the proportion taking up a loan to study, predominantly due to a greater proportion of these students receiving employer funding (Figure 24).

The employment status of those who were defined as disadvantaged as a result of having no previous HE qualifications and having care responsibilities was explored. Just over two-thirds of disadvantaged students reported being in either in full-time or part-time employment, which is representative of the sample as a whole. The reliance on loans to fund their studies, despite being in work, highlights that this group may be earning modest disposable incomes which are not sufficient to cover the cost of tuition fees, a finding reflected in the recent study by Callender and Thompson.<sup>58</sup>



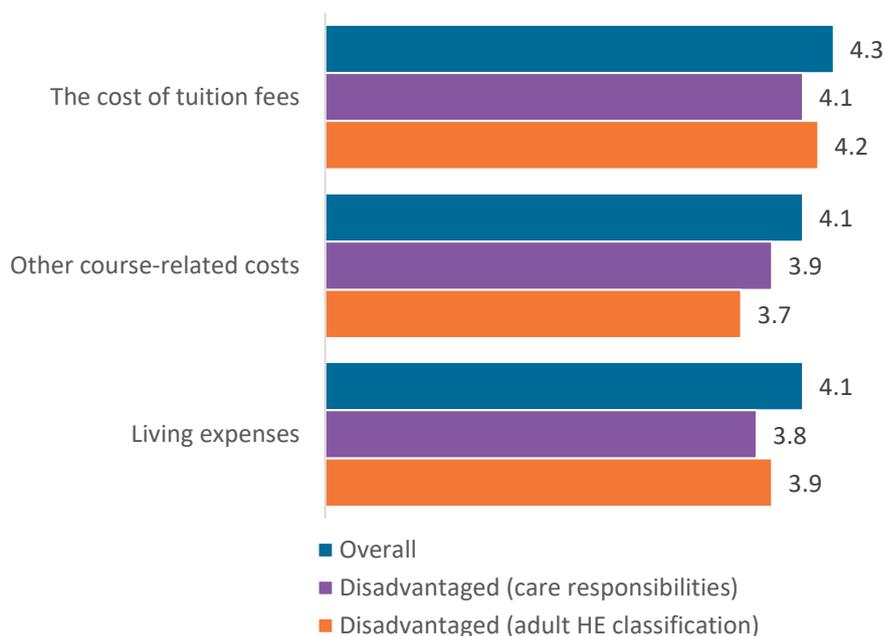
**Figure 24: How students are meeting tuition fee costs overall and by disadvantage marker (base=varies)**

### Ease of meeting part-time study costs

Part-time students experience the least difficulty meeting the costs of their tuition fees (average score of 4.3 on a scale where ‘1’ is ‘very hard’ and ‘7’ is ‘very easy’). Both living expenses and other course expenditure are, however, slightly harder to cover (average score of 4.1). Disadvantaged students overall report finding it slightly more difficult to

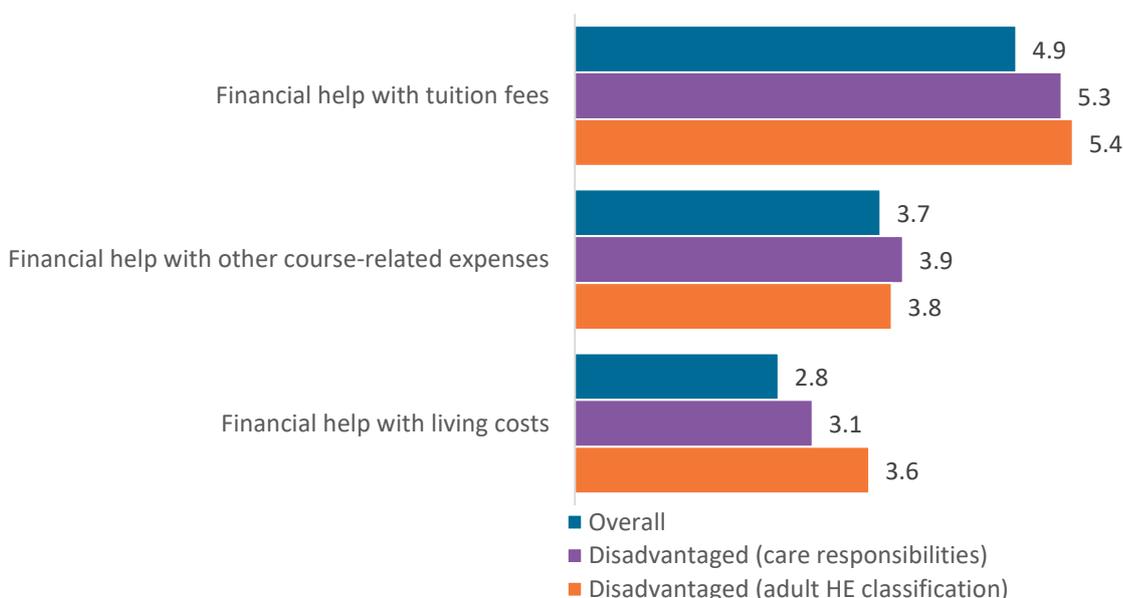
<sup>58</sup> Callender, C. and Thompson, J. (2018). *The Lost Part-timers. The decline of part-time undergraduate higher education in England*. London: The Sutton Trust.

meet course-related costs and living expenses compared with students overall (Figure 25). It will be interesting to explore whether the introduction of maintenance loans in August 2018 help to alleviate this pressure.



**Figure 25: Mean score showing the ease at which respondents are meeting the different types of costs to part-time study by disadvantage group (1 = very difficult to 7 = very easy) (base=varies)**

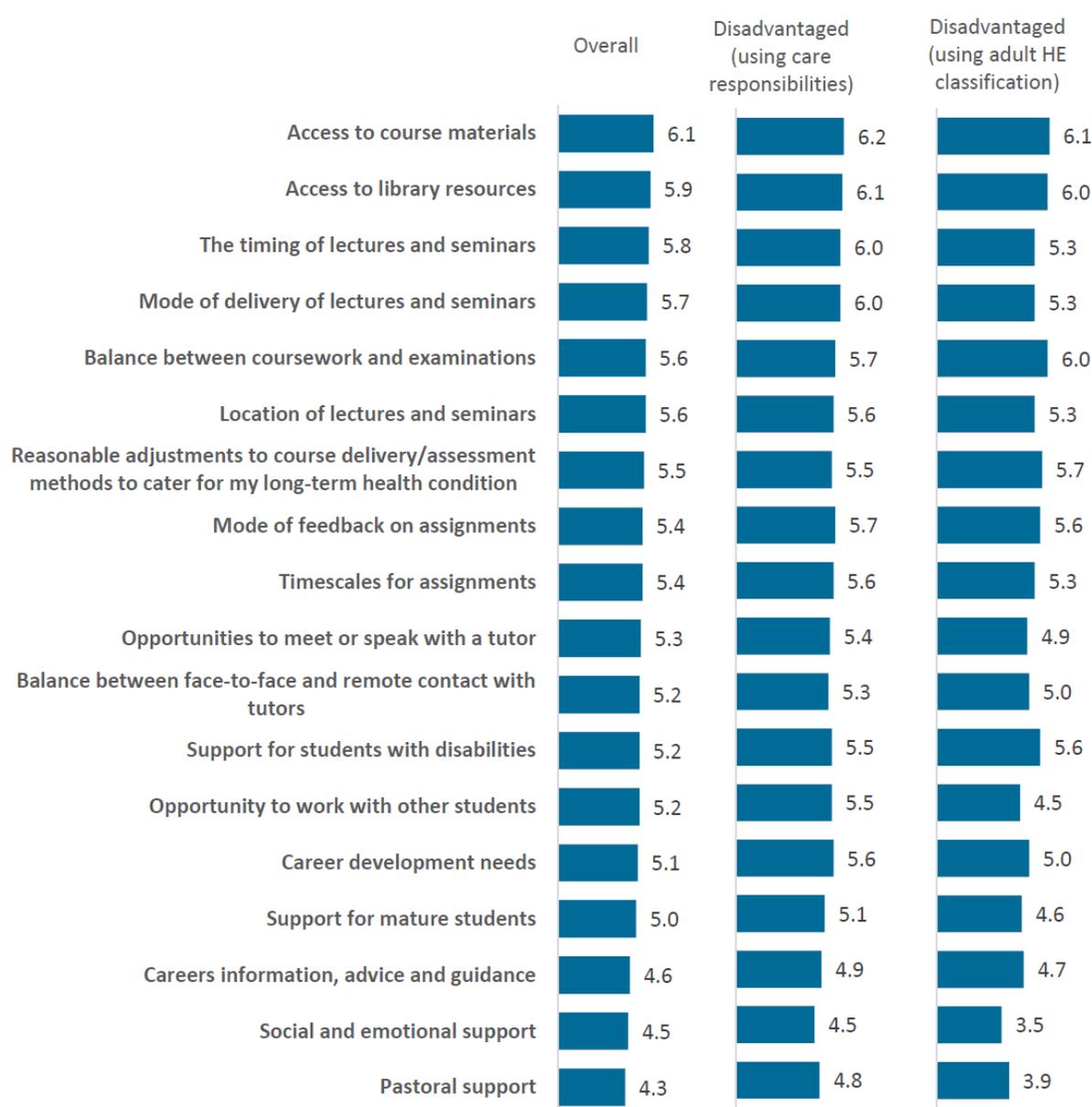
When students were asked to rate their satisfaction with financial help, the findings suggest that disadvantaged students are generally more positive about the extent to which the support available meets their needs, compared with students overall (Figure 26).



**Figure 26: Mean score showing the extent to which different types of financial support are meeting the needs of the respondents (1 = does not meet my needs at all to 7 = fully meets my needs) (base = varies)**

## Extent to which courses meet the needs of part-time students

Generally, higher levels of student satisfaction are found in relation to non-financial support and the extent to which it is meeting part-time students' needs. Figure 27 shows the mean score given by respondents when asked to rate different elements of their course on a seven-point scale (where '1' is 'did not meet their needs at all' and '7' is 'fully met their needs'). Respondents are on average most satisfied with access to course materials, libraries and the timing and mode of delivery of lectures and seminars. Two non-financial aspects where students have greater concerns are pastoral and social support. Interestingly, students classified as disadvantaged, due to having no prior HE qualifications and possessing care responsibilities, are generally more satisfied than students overall with the degree to which the features of their course meet their needs.



**Figure 27: Mean score showing the extent to which part-time study is meeting the needs of respondents (1= 'does not meet my needs at all' and 7 = 'fully meets my needs') (base=varies)**

## **Overall satisfaction**

Respondents are generally satisfied with their current course with a mean rating of 5.5 (on a scale where '1' is 'very dissatisfied' and '7' is 'very satisfied'). Disadvantaged students defined using the care responsibility variable reported a greater degree of satisfaction (mean score of 5.7) with their course, although the figure is slightly lower when the alternative definition of disadvantage which relied upon the adult HE classification is used (5.4).

## 07. CASE STUDIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS

# Supporting retention and progression

London South Bank University (LSBU) is committed to ensuring all part-time students receive a positive student experience. **Student Engagement Interns** have been employed to provide dedicated support. This is having a direct impact on the retention and progression of part-time students.

---

### Background

LSBU has a substantial campus-based part-time provision with over 7,000 students, making up around 40 per cent of their total student population. Industry employer-sponsored students from the School of the Built Environment and Architecture and students on CPD health modules make up a significant proportion of part-time provision. LSBU is proud of its partnerships with industry and professions, developed to ensure a positive student experience. These partnerships are directly aligned with the university's research activity and the strategic vision for LSBU – to have real world impact and develop real world solutions.

### Student Engagement Interns to enhance the student experience

Developing a sense of belonging is often a key challenge for part-time students. The majority are in full-time employment and balancing the demands of their course and external commitments, such as caring responsibilities. As a result, part-time students often have limited time to participate in extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, many of LSBU's part-time students are from disadvantaged backgrounds and are the first in their family to enter HE. LSBU recognises that these factors can have a negative impact on student retention, re-enrolment and progression rates. To address this, the Student Engagement Interns scheme was conceived in partnership with Student Services and the School of Business. The scheme was initially small-scale, with one full-time employed Student Engagement Intern, but it has been so successful that the scheme is now managed centrally and has been rolled out to six schools within the university. The success of the scheme is attributed to the range of support provided by the Interns which includes:

- **Support to settle in and integrate into the student body:** The Intern ensures that each new part-time student is greeted by 'a friendly face' who helps them to settle in to student life and then supports them throughout their course. Interns report that students who are the first in their family to attend university are often less confident than those who come from families with HE experience and lack self-belief in their abilities. They are often also less likely to be fully informed about the expectations of studying at university. The Student Engagement Interns scheme is designed to help overcome these issues so that students

are able to fully integrate. A key role of the Intern is maintaining contact with students over the summer, providing support and reminders about re-enrolment and term dates.

- **Single-point of contact enabling student queries to be promptly dealt with:** Interns have access to student attendance and engagement dashboards to enable them to identify any students who are showing decreased attendance, reduced access to online and library resources and/or failing to submit coursework. This information enables them to target those students who appear to be at risk of dropping out and provide tailored support. If a student indicates that they intend to withdraw from their studies after an intervention from their Intern, senior student advisers are on hand to provide additional support, including an 'exit interview' to ensure the student fully understands the implications of withdrawing from their studies.
- **Peer-to-peer academic, financial and pastoral support:** A high proportion of part-time students at LSBU are disadvantaged. Many have complex lives and face both familial and financial challenges. A key aspect of the Intern's role is to signpost students to relevant support services and follow-up with students to ensure that appropriate support has been provided. For example, Student Engagement Interns can arrange for students facing financial difficulties to meet with a university financial adviser and/or to access support with budgeting. They can also signpost students to other services, such as mental health, or disability services.

### Impact of Student Engagement Interns

Although support from the Interns is accessible for full-time as well as part-time students, LSBU report that part-time students particularly benefit. Through this enhanced support, LSBU have seen a large reduction in the number of withdrawals and an increase in the number of study interruptions. They believe this is as a result of enabling students to make much more informed choices about the options available to them.

The impact of the Student Engagement Intern scheme is also evident from central university data which demonstrates that the investment of £120,000 in six interns has achieved £5 million revenue for the university. Re-enrolment rates are also increasing, with a 5 per cent increase in the academic year 2017-18, equating to 550 extra students.

### Saturday WhatsApp Study Group

A group of industry-employed part-time students and full-time students have set up a Saturday WhatsApp study group to support each other's achievement and progression. Together, they worked on maths and physics coursework, which promoted wider collaboration and support. Conferring together enabled part-time students to receive academic support from their full-time peers, whilst full-time students benefited from insights about working in industry and examples of real-world impact from their study route. The study group also provided the opportunity to network and socialise, which helped part-time students to achieve a sense of belonging.

### Next steps

A key strategic aim for LSBU in 2018 was to further enhance the student experience. A review of the wrap-around support available to part-time students which includes 'virtual support' as well as 'frontline services' is currently underway. The aim is to develop a fuller understanding of how part-time students currently 'self-help' so that signposting as well as service delivery can be improved to better meet their needs.

# Using technology to provide a flexible offer

The Open University (OU) is focused on providing holistic support and a flexible and personalised offer to part-time students from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds. Recent investment to **make use of cutting-edge and innovative technology is helping them to do this.**

## Background

The OU is the largest provider of part-time study in the UK with approximately 170,000 students. It is considered a world leader in flexible distance learning, offering almost exclusively part-time study, with most students studying 30 to 60 credits a year. As an open-access provider with a focus on WP, a large proportion of students are mature learners<sup>59</sup>, entering the OU with limited prior educational qualifications. Many learners are from disadvantaged backgrounds including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) learners, carers, students in secure environments and disabled students. The OU has sought to maintain its part-time study offer by being agile and adapting to the changing part-time study landscape. Central to the OU strategy is the provision of a part-time experience that is equivalent to that of a full-time learner.

## A flexible and personalised learning experience

The OU is undertaking a transformational programme to ensure a flexible and personalised experience for part-time and disadvantaged students. This is being achieved through high-quality learning materials, academic and pastoral support delivered through enhanced online platforms, whilst recognising and exploring options to support the challenges that online learning presents for some students. The OU has seen a reduction in the number of students withdrawing from their studies and believe that one of the ways to overcome this is supporting students to make more informed choices before they start their studies.

A range of strategies and opportunities enable flexible study at the OU, including:

1. Open degrees that allow students to structure their own bespoke degree
2. Multiple course start dates
3. Options to complete modules and qualifications at different paces
4. Extended hours in support centres
5. Availability of online resources 24/7
6. Learning materials with enhanced digital content
7. Extended student inductions
8. Increased access to free learning materials
9. Increased use of technology in the tuition space

## Innovations in technology to enhance part-time study

---

<sup>59</sup> The OU has seen a reduction in the average age of learners over recent years. There is still a high proportion of students in their 30–40s, but the number of students in their 20s is steadily increasing.

As a major e-learning provider, the OU is committed to developing digital technologies. This can help to support WP. Significant investment in technology is enabling the OU to develop student-focussed systems and processes. These include:

**Adobe Connect:** Student survey findings suggest that it is the student/tutor relationship that really helps to boost student confidence. Technology is enabling more online tutor support through seminars and tutorials. This means that students can be supported in their studies without needing to leave their home. This is facilitated by the Adobe Connect conference and collaboration tools, which replaced the OU-branded version of Blackboard in September 2017.

“The OU is going through an interesting pedagogical shift to meet student needs, with face-to-face seminars at study centres being replaced by online support and increased digitalisation to deliver course material.”

**Student Hub Live:** This provides the full OU community with opportunities to participate in live, online and interactive events. A key aim is to generate a sense of community by bringing students together virtually. Live chat provides opportunities to meet fellow students and to pose questions to guest speakers and academics in the studio. Students can also discuss learning materials with their tutors. The live chat function is managed and facilitated by the ‘Hot Desk’. If students are unable to attend live events, catch-up sessions can be accessed

**Student Hub Live – Boot Camps** Online, interactive boot camps have been popular among students and have boosted student engagement. The boot camps encourage students to share experiences and generate ideas on a topic. Recorded material can also be incorporated. The ‘study tips and tricks’ boot camp (open to new and continuing students) focussed on study skills and online learning techniques. The boot camps have been successful in bringing students and academics together, both online and in the studio.

through the OU YouTube channel.

**OpenLearn** provides a home for the OU’s free and open learning materials. Content can be accessed through different platforms including iTunes U. The huge volume of material includes free study units (which have received more than 26.7 million visits) and inspirational TV and radio. OpenLearn allows students to explore subjects and experience OU study, enabling them to make more informed choices about what to study before investing substantial time and money.

**FutureLearn** is a wholly owned subsidiary of the OU providing a digital education platform in partnership with other universities and specialist providers. A diverse range of courses across 13 disciplines (such as business and management, health, and psychology) are offered on a free basis. Learners have the flexibility to study at their own intensity and pace and can join other learners from around the world in online discussion forums. FutureLearn courses are offered on a standalone basis, not directly linked to formal qualifications but can offer learners a taste of a particular subject, the online learning environment and an insight into learning at a higher level.

**Change Programme:** The OU is exploring new models to offer a more personalised learning experience through its change programme. The opportunities are being explored but include extended access to support centres and 24/7 online resources. This is enabling increased accessibility to tailored IAG and thus encourages potential learners to talk to staff before they make their final decisions to register with the OU.

**Learning analytics:** Substantial investment in learning analytics has been made by the OU. Predictive models based on live data have been developed to identify students who have missed assignment deadlines or tutorials. Students receive bespoke support interventions as a result. This is having a positive impact on student retention.

# Online Distance Learning Provision

A key objective of Online Distance Learning at the University of Derby is to widen participation for disadvantaged and under-represented groups through the provision of flexible and affordable modules and degree programmes.

---

## Background

The Online Distance Learning at University of Derby was established in the 2011-12 academic year. The development was informed by previous work designed to widen participation through more flexible modes of delivery, including an online programme for hairdressers and beauty therapists which was developed in 2000 with funding to provide access to HE opportunities for under-represented female groups. The university was also part of the Global University Alliance and worked with 10 universities to support the development of an e-learning strategy in the early 2000s. It was through this Alliance that the university was able to enhance its understanding of online pedagogies and build on best practice in developing and delivering online learning. Since its launch, the Online Distance Learning platform has succeeded in attracting increasing numbers of part-time learners to HE, and mature students aged 30-45 in particular. In 2015-16, a quarter of Derby's undergraduate students were studying part-time, and approximately half of these students (1,222) were studying through the Online Distance Learning.<sup>60</sup> Distance learning students are typically professionals within the workplace wishing to change career or seeking to 'top up' their existing qualifications (e.g. move from a diploma to a degree-level qualification) in order to gain recognition and progress within their current role.

## Parity between Online Distance Learning and campus-based study

The University of Derby was rated Gold in the recent Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and a key objective of the university's teaching and learning strategy is assuring parity in terms of the quality of online and campus-based provision. The university has developed a virtual campus system so that online learners have the same opportunities as campus-based learners. This includes:

“Fees are an issue because when you're a mature consumer you're considering buying a house, going on holiday, paying for kids, investing educationally or career-wise. It's got to be an attractive proposition, it's got to be affordable, and there's got to be ways of paying for it that make it accessible.”

---

<sup>60</sup> See University of Derby's TEF submission: <https://www.derby.ac.uk/about/tef/>

- Online library services (more online books and journals).
- Specific academics that understand the paradigm of online learning.
- Support services (in particular for mature learners who are new to HE).
- A system called ‘Ally’, which enables materials to be presented in a way that is tailored to the need of learners.
- Support for learners with English as a second language.
- A programme committee sponsored by the student union to represent the views of disadvantaged and under-represented groups. Committee meetings are held by webinar to maximise the number of students that are able to attend.
- Personal tutors
- Alternative format resources, including video and audio materials for hearing-impaired and vision-impaired students.

“We want to assure our students that the academic integrity is exactly the same as what you would get with a campus-based model. We actually shape it that way, so we have academics, who moved specifically from campus to online because they like this paradigm of work. They have learned how to deliver successful online teaching, and how often to engage with students. We have analytics to see how much effort the academics are putting in. They still have to deliver, albeit in a different way, and have to manage that quality experience.”

### Contribution to wider policy objectives

Students can study a range of subjects via Online Distance Learning at the University of Derby ranging from business and accounting, through engineering, to psychology, and health and social care. A number of the programmes on offer are designed to address skills gaps and shortages within the UK labour market, including in essential public services. For example, to help address the skills shortage in the UK and reduce the number of health care workers that leave the profession, Derby offers a range of courses to support the CPD of health and social care

“Without the part-time offer, we are not continuing to develop our workforce, our ageing workforce that needs to learn new skills.”

professionals ranging from short standalone 20-credit modules to full degree programmes. The University’s Nursing Studies BSc (Hons) Top-Up Degree is the only diploma-to-degree top-up nursing course in the UK to be accredited by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN). The online delivery mode is designed to enable nurses to enhance their career opportunities while working as well as enrich their professional practice.

### Supporting students with special needs

The Online Distance Learning platform is enabling the university to reach out to students who find it challenging to engage with more traditional modes of delivery because of a learning difficulty, disability or health condition such as anxiety or Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ADS). Students who express an interest in Online Distance Learning and declare a disability are automatically contacted, normally within 24 hours, and a support plan is put in place from the moment they apply. Two specialists are employed by the university to deliver services, including counselling, online to part-time students that require them, in order to ensure they are supported to progress and succeed in their studies.

Online Distance Learning presents a huge opportunity for Derby to expand their provision for part-time learners, including degree apprenticeships, and the team is working with online-learning advisors to improve their online-learning facilities. Although a large proportion of the university’s student population currently comprises disadvantaged and under-represented groups, the outreach team continues to work closely with communities, schools and families, in particular BAME groups, in the city as well as nationally in order to raise awareness of the opportunity to engage in HE through part-time and distance learning.

## APPENDIX 1: SECONDARY ANALYSIS – DATA TABLES

Table 1: UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to *full-time* courses by level of study in English HEPs

	First degree	Other undergraduate	Total
2006-07	266,415	42,540	308,955
2007-08	278,425	48,135	326,560
2008-09	298,640	52,640	351,280
2009-10	309,190	53,160	362,345
2010-11	308,795	46,215	355,010
2011-12	331,840	34,295	366,135
2012-13	295,905	21,060	316,965
2013-14	322,630	21,205	343,835
2014-15	333,360	20,070	353,430
2015-16	346,690	17,770	364,465
2016-17	351,570	18,795	370,360

Table 2: UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to *part-time* courses by level of study in English HEPs

	First degree		Other undergraduate	
	With OU	Without OU	With OU	Without OU
2006-07	52,750	24,970	205,830	160,945
2007-08	51,500	24,045	201,725	156,635
2008-09	55,555	24,640	209,080	161,555
2009-10	57,535	23,555	200,895	150,345
2010-11	56,055	21,695	172,735	127,950
2011-12	64,305	24,940	146,845	117,680
2012-13	47,585	16,370	87,375	73,390
2013-14	42,390	15,565	75,995	69,245
2014-15	36,210	14,885	70,325	64,925
2015-16	36,325	13,425	64,625	59,600
2016-17	33,560	12,265	53,390	49,515

**Table 3: UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses by age group in English HEPs (excluding the OU) <sup>61</sup>**

	<b>25 or under</b>	<b>26-39</b>	<b>40 or over</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	22.8	37.7	39.6	182,710
<b>2007-08</b>	22.4	38.2	39.3	178,940
<b>2008-09</b>	22.6	38.5	38.9	184,670
<b>2009-10</b>	22.8	38.4	38.8	172,230
<b>2010-11</b>	24.1	38.7	37.2	149,095
<b>2011-12</b>	23.7	38.7	37.6	142,205
<b>2012-13</b>	23.6	40.5	35.9	89,475
<b>2013-14</b>	23.7	40.9	35.4	84,760
<b>2014-15</b>	24.8	41.2	34.1	79,665
<b>2015-16</b>	24.8	41.5	33.7	72,960
<b>2016-17</b>	25.7	42.1	32.2	61,695

**Table 4: UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses by age group at the OU in England<sup>62</sup>**

	<b>25 or under</b>	<b>26-39</b>	<b>40 or over</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	23.7	42.7	33.6	72,655
<b>2007-08</b>	24.6	41.8	33.5	72,530
<b>2008-09</b>	25.3	41.9	32.8	78,420
<b>2009-10</b>	26.4	41.9	31.7	84,495
<b>2010-11</b>	28.7	41.1	30.2	79,105
<b>2011-12</b>	30.7	39.9	29.5	68,460
<b>2012-13</b>	31.0	41.5	27.5	45,190
<b>2013-14</b>	35.2	42.4	22.3	33,580
<b>2014-15</b>	35.2	42.8	22.0	26,720
<b>2015-16</b>	36.0	43.0	20.9	27,930
<b>2016-17</b>	38.0	42.0	20.0	25,170

<sup>61</sup> Those who report an unknown age are excluded from any analysis we conduct by this variable.

<sup>62</sup> Those who report an unknown age are excluded from any analysis we conduct by this variable.

**Table 5: UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants into English HEPs by mode of study and provider group (excluding OU)**

	Low-to-medium-tariff providers		High-tariff providers	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
<b>2006-07</b>	207,325	135,800	101,630	50,115
<b>2007-08</b>	219,025	137,670	107,540	43,010
<b>2008-09</b>	239,405	145,590	111,875	40,605
<b>2009-10</b>	253,150	142,385	109,195	31,515
<b>2010-11</b>	246,840	126,180	108,170	23,465
<b>2011-12</b>	256,750	121,160	109,380	21,460
<b>2012-13</b>	218,500	73,755	98,465	16,005
<b>2013-14</b>	233,175	70,325	110,660	14,485
<b>2014-15</b>	240,235	66,565	113,195	13,245
<b>2015-16</b>	243,065	61,670	121,400	11,355
<b>2016-17</b>	245,410	53,150	124,950	8,625

**Table 6: Proportion of UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses by provider group in English HEPs (excluding OU)**

	Low-to-medium-tariff providers	High-tariff providers
<b>2006-07</b>	39.6	33.0
<b>2007-08</b>	38.6	28.6
<b>2008-09</b>	37.8	26.6
<b>2009-10</b>	36.0	22.4
<b>2010-11</b>	33.8	17.8
<b>2011-12</b>	32.1	16.4
<b>2012-13</b>	25.2	14.0
<b>2013-14</b>	23.2	11.6
<b>2014-15</b>	21.7	10.5
<b>2015-16</b>	20.2	8.6
<b>2016-17</b>	17.8	6.5

**Table 7: Subject area of study for UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate entrants at English low-to-medium-tariff providers (excluding OU)**

	Subjects allied to medicine	Business and administrative studies	Education	Combined	All other subjects	Total
<b>2006-07</b>	27.9	10.8	20.3	4.1	36.8	135,800
<b>2007-08</b>	28.4	12.1	17.1	4.5	37.9	137,670
<b>2008-09</b>	30.2	11.6	16.5	6.4	35.3	145,590
<b>2009-10</b>	32.4	11.8	17.1	3.6	35.0	142,385
<b>2010-11</b>	32.3	12.8	14.8	3.7	36.4	126,180
<b>2011-12</b>	32.5	16.2	12.6	3.2	35.5	121,160
<b>2012-13</b>	41.6	9.3	11.2	0.8	37.1	73,755
<b>2013-14</b>	44.3	10.1	12.0	0.7	33.0	70,325
<b>2014-15</b>	48.1	8.3	10.0	0.9	32.7	66,565
<b>2015-16</b>	50.2	7.6	8.7	0.8	32.7	61,670
<b>2016-17</b>	48.3	7.1	9.1	1.0	34.6	53,150

**Table 8: Subject area of study for UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate entrants at English high-tariff providers (excluding Oxford and Warwick)**

	Subjects allied to medicine	Language s	Education	Combined	All other subjects	Total
<b>2006-07</b>	24.6	8.0	8.6	23.7	35.2	40,585
<b>2007-08</b>	28.0	2.1	7.2	39.0	23.7	33,680
<b>2008-09</b>	30.3	3.8	7.3	40.8	17.8	31,605
<b>2009-10</b>	42.4	4.6	8.0	21.9	23.1	23,255
<b>2010-11</b>	49.0	3.8	8.6	17.5	21.2	16,525
<b>2011-12</b>	54.0	3.5	8.7	13.9	20.0	15,375
<b>2012-13</b>	71.6	3.6	5.2	2.1	17.5	10,240
<b>2013-14</b>	73.6	4.0	4.9	2.2	15.3	10,075
<b>2014-15</b>	74.2	3.4	5.0	1.3	16.1	9,235
<b>2015-16</b>	67.5	4.3	6.3	0.7	21.3	8,135
<b>2016-17</b>	66.7	5.2	6.7	0.8	20.5	6,105

**Table 9: Subject area of study for UK-domiciled part-time undergraduate entrants at the OU in England**

	Biological sciences	Social studies	Business and administrative studies	Combined	All other subjects	Total
<b>2006-07</b>	6.5	11.5	6.7	45.8	29.5	72,665
<b>2007-08</b>	7.1	10.8	6.3	45.5	30.3	72,545
<b>2008-09</b>	7.3	10.3	6.9	46.9	28.6	78,440
<b>2009-10</b>	8.0	9.4	6.9	45.2	30.4	84,530
<b>2010-11</b>	8.1	9.3	7.2	47.0	28.5	79,145
<b>2011-12</b>	8.8	9.1	6.7	42.9	32.6	68,530
<b>2012-13</b>	10.6	9.3	8.2	37.6	34.3	45,200
<b>2013-14</b>	16.0	11.0	8.7	21.9	42.4	33,580
<b>2014-15</b>	18.8	10.7	8.6	18.3	43.6	26,720
<b>2015-16</b>	18.3	11.1	8.8	16.2	45.5	27,930
<b>2016-17</b>	18.4	10.6	9.4	14.7	47.0	25,170

**Table 10: Proportion of UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses classified as disadvantaged in English HEPs**

	Proportion including OU (%)	Total number of disadvantaged students	Proportion excluding OU (%)	Total number of disadvantaged students
<b>2006-07</b>	9.7	20,485	9.2	13,525
<b>2007-08</b>	9.5	20,505	9.0	13,605
<b>2008-09</b>	9.1	21,690	8.5	13,985
<b>2009-10</b>	9.3	21,900	8.6	13,380
<b>2010-11</b>	9.2	20,245	8.0	11,250
<b>2011-12</b>	8.9	18,055	7.7	10,400
<b>2012-13</b>	8.9	11,765	6.3	5,510
<b>2013-14</b>	8.9	10,305	6.1	5,030
<b>2014-15</b>	8.9	9,180	6.4	4,915
<b>2015-16</b>	9.1	9,005	6.1	4,325
<b>2016-17</b>	9.4	7,840	6.5	3,805

**Table 11: Number of disadvantaged UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses by provider group in English HEPs**

	<b>Low-to-medium-tariff providers</b>	<b>High-tariff providers</b>	<b>Open University</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	11,830	1,695	6,965	20,485
<b>2007-08</b>	12,215	1,390	6,900	20,505
<b>2008-09</b>	12,540	1,445	7,705	21,690
<b>2009-10</b>	12,275	1,105	8,515	21,900
<b>2010-11</b>	10,370	880	8,995	20,245
<b>2011-12</b>	9,700	695	7,655	18,055
<b>2012-13</b>	5,125	385	6,255	11,765
<b>2013-14</b>	4,650	380	5,275	10,305
<b>2014-15</b>	4,585	335	4,265	9,180
<b>2015-16</b>	3,995	335	4,680	9,005
<b>2016-17</b>	3,500	300	4,035	7,840

**Table 12: Number of non-disadvantaged UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses by provider group in English HEPs**

	<b>Low-to-medium-tariff providers</b>	<b>High-tariff providers</b>	<b>Open University</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	103,205	30,765	57,535	191,505
<b>2007-08</b>	108,885	28,180	59,300	196,365
<b>2008-09</b>	119,585	31,330	64,705	215,620
<b>2009-10</b>	118,810	24,240	71,550	214,600
<b>2010-11</b>	109,395	20,280	69,720	199,395
<b>2011-12</b>	106,165	18,630	60,540	185,335
<b>2012-13</b>	66,785	14,565	38,895	120,250
<b>2013-14</b>	64,110	13,240	28,270	105,625
<b>2014-15</b>	59,515	12,330	22,395	94,240
<b>2015-16</b>	56,030	10,520	23,130	89,680
<b>2016-17</b>	47,290	7,855	20,865	76,010

**Table 13: UK-domiciled disadvantaged undergraduate entrants to part-time courses by age group in English HEPs**

	<b>25 or under</b>	<b>26-39</b>	<b>40 or over</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	6,075	8,285	6,020	20,380
<b>2007-08</b>	6,235	8,190	5,990	20,415
<b>2008-09</b>	6,795	8,555	6,270	21,620
<b>2009-10</b>	7,245	8,560	6,030	21,835
<b>2010-11</b>	7,125	7,845	5,250	20,220
<b>2011-12</b>	6,525	6,980	4,525	18,030
<b>2012-13</b>	4,460	4,625	2,670	11,755
<b>2013-14</b>	4,005	4,170	2,125	10,300
<b>2014-15</b>	3,590	3,695	1,895	9,180
<b>2015-16</b>	3,640	3,705	1,650	9,000
<b>2016-17</b>	3,395	3,110	1,335	7,835

**Table 14: Disadvantaged UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses at English low-to-medium-tariff providers by subject area (excluding OU)**

	<b>Subjects allied to medicine</b>	<b>Business and administrative studies</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>All other subjects</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	3,160	1,305	2,425	4,935
<b>2007-08</b>	3,220	1,425	2,730	4,840
<b>2008-09</b>	2,950	1,540	2,700	5,350
<b>2009-10</b>	2,890	1,610	2,680	5,100
<b>2010-11</b>	1,965	1,810	1,965	4,630
<b>2011-12</b>	2,245	1,930	1,685	3,840
<b>2012-13</b>	1,225	545	960	2,395
<b>2013-14</b>	1,030	605	955	2,060
<b>2014-15</b>	1,240	470	740	2,135
<b>2015-16</b>	1,115	345	610	1,925
<b>2016-17</b>	1,070	260	465	1,710

**Table 15: Disadvantaged UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants aged 40 and above to part-time courses at English low-to-medium-tariff providers by subject area (excluding OU)**

	<b>Subjects allied to medicine</b>	<b>Business and administrative studies</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>All other subjects</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	1,320	325	785	1,420
<b>2007-08</b>	1,320	345	970	1,270
<b>2008-09</b>	1,325	420	890	1,280
<b>2009-10</b>	1,240	365	920	1,225
<b>2010-11</b>	880	445	650	1,150
<b>2011-12</b>	1,015	485	495	845
<b>2012-13</b>	540	140	250	490
<b>2013-14</b>	465	140	240	335
<b>2014-15</b>	580	105	145	330
<b>2015-16</b>	415	90	110	265
<b>2016-17</b>	380	45	90	220

**Table 16: Disadvantaged UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time first-degree courses at the Open University in England by subject area**

	<b>Biological sciences</b>	<b>Social studies</b>	<b>Combined</b>	<b>All other subjects</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	395	395	915	1,390	3,090
<b>2007-08</b>	450	400	930	1,345	3,125
<b>2008-09</b>	535	415	970	1,735	3,655
<b>2009-10</b>	640	505	1,010	1,865	4,020
<b>2010-11</b>	750	515	1,115	2,035	4,415
<b>2011-12</b>	670	510	1,340	2,230	4,755
<b>2012-13</b>	730	625	540	2,405	4,300
<b>2013-14</b>	885	585	520	2,505	4,495
<b>2014-15</b>	845	375	365	1,925	3,510
<b>2015-16</b>	925	440	335	2,295	4,000
<b>2016-17</b>	785	405	265	2,120	3,580

**Table 17: Disadvantaged UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to other undergraduate courses at the Open University in England by subject area**

	<b>Biological sciences</b>	<b>Social studies</b>	<b>Combined</b>	<b>All other subjects</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	110	550	2,035	1,175	3,870
<b>2007-08</b>	110	500	1,995	1,170	3,775
<b>2008-09</b>	115	520	2,355	1,060	4,050
<b>2009-10</b>	145	535	2,530	1,290	4,495
<b>2010-11</b>	90	535	2,930	1,025	4,580
<b>2011-12</b>	85	350	1,715	750	2,900
<b>2012-13</b>	35	105	1,445	365	1,955
<b>2013-14</b>	45	140	225	370	780
<b>2014-15</b>	75	150	140	395	750
<b>2015-16</b>	70	135	120	350	680
<b>2016-17</b>	50	80	110	220	455