

**University of Strathclyde**

**Department of Educational Studies**

**An exploration of the experience of part-time students within the  
Department of Continuing Education, University of Paisley**

**Anne Isabel McGillivray**

**In part fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Education**

**2000**

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## **DECLARATION**

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to two very special people, my Mum and Dad. I appreciate all they have done for me.

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What will they all do when I come out of the attic!

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## **Abstract**

There has been a rapid growth in the number of part-time students studying within the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Paisley. The University is committed to providing flexibly structured courses to provide opportunities to a wide and social representative constituency of adults.

This research investigates how the University can meet the needs of the part-time student population by exploring their experiences. It focuses on four main areas

- The trend in the profile of the part-time student population was analysed to gain an insight into the general characteristics of the student population.
- The enquiry experience of the individual. This analysis involves telephone interviews with individuals and considers the reasons why they choose to enrol or not.
- The initial experiences of new part time students at the University. Using a postal questionnaire students were asked about their initial experiences.
- The reasons why new students withdrew were investigated using a telephone survey.

Because it involved action research where actions were taken based upon the results of the analysis the investigations were repeated the following academic year. This allowed for evaluation of the actions and further recommendations to enhance the part-time student experience.

Evidence emerging from the research will facilitate improved recruitment strategies, support systems for part-time students and inform retention strategies for the part-time student population.

Meeting the needs of the part-time student population is an institutional challenge. The Department of Continuing Education currently has over 2000 students enrolled and studying, during the day in the evening and at weekends. This research has reviewed the needs of such students by exploring their experience, making recommendations and taking action.

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.0 Introduction

The concept of lifelong learning has increased in social prominence. It is now a high priority in the Government's agenda. Lifelong learning implies a process of educational experience that continues through life and occurs alongside other professional and/or social/familial commitments. It goes hand-in-hand with part-time provision and flexible learning structures. Embedding flexible learning within existing academic structures presents many institutional challenges. Greater demands emerge in terms of access and recruitment from non-traditional groups, quality assurance, student retention and academic guidance systems. When I first started this work and developed the research strategy all students paid fees for part-time study. There is now a Government policy for waiving fees for low-income part-time students. The Scottish Office agreed to pay part-time fees for people on low incomes, or on benefit, who can not afford to study at university. This was publicised as a front page 'exclusive' in the Glasgow Herald (28<sup>th</sup> April, 1998), 'New free deal for part-time students.' From autumn, 1998 some students pay fees and some do not. There is therefore a strong emphasis on encouraging more adults to undertake part-time learning opportunities. Higher Education is available on a part-time basis to adults irrespective of their educational background. It is therefore a major priority for Higher Education institutions to address the needs of and provide all part-time students with a suitable learning experience.

**"The University of Paisley is committed to meeting this need and is keen to provide challenging opportunities to a wide and social representative constituency of adults, enabling them to fulfil their potential through the pursuit of high quality, vocationally relevant, flexibly structured courses."**

**Extract from the University of Paisley Mission Statement, 1999**

The overall aim of this research was to explore the experience of the part-time students through a detailed investigation of the experience of enquirers making their initial contact, newly enrolled students' initial experiences including those who withdrew. The part-time students investigated were all students enrolled with the

Increasing numbers of part-time students, increasing modular provision and increasing modes of study indicate an urgent need to investigate how students make their module choice, why they decide to make changes to their programme and why they decide to withdraw from a module or a programme. Emerging evidence of patterns of student behaviour will facilitate improved recruitment and retention strategies and enhance the quality of the part-time student experience.

## **1.1 Rationale**

This investigation was set up to explore the learning experience of the part-time students with the purpose of enhancing their learning opportunities. Many professionals are currently employed to assist and guide the learning of other adults: I am currently employed by the University of Paisley as the Senior Education Guidance Advisor and Course Leader of the Combined Awards Programme within the Department of Continuing Education. This involves dealing with part-time students and providing them with academic guidance on an individual basis. I am also involved in lecturing within the more traditional academic programmes in addition to lecturing to students participating in the Combined Awards Programme.

The Combined Awards Programme allows students to enter university with prior credit from appropriate sources, for instance HNC, HND, Open University or professional qualifications. That credit then forms the base from which they progress through a programme of study, leading to a further qualification. However, prior credit is not necessary for access. There is a large selection of modules that are suitable for those with no prior educational qualifications. My involvement with the students has highlighted the diversity of the student population and in particular the different needs of the part-time student. A major change in the student population is the increase in non-traditional students, studying in part-time mode. These large-scale changes have been charted in the recently published Institute for Employment Studies (IES) Report (Connor, 1996). In the ten years preceding 1993/4, the number



of people entering full-time higher education in the United Kingdom has increased by over 76%. However, it is not just the increase of student numbers, but also the increasing diversity of students, which has led to the need for greater flexibility.

## **1.2 Credit Accumulation and Transfer: A framework for flexible learning**

Credit Accumulation and Transfer Schemes (CATS) provide a framework for flexible access to higher education, enabling individuals to benefit from a university experience which might otherwise be denied them through a lack of formal entry qualifications or because of employment, domestic or other commitments. Therefore the scheme both encourages non-traditional entrants and provides an effective vehicle for meeting the continuing professional development needs of both employers and employees. It was first introduced to England and Wales in 1986 by the CNAA which was then the main United Kingdom degree awarding body outside the traditional university sector. The CNAA was abolished by Parliament in the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) but the Council's particular variant of CATS remains the most widespread model existing in England and Wales today. In 1989 a Scottish model was devised known as the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (SCOTCATS).

In Scotland, by 1991, all higher education institutions were signatories to the SCOTCAT Agreement which provides a framework within which credit values can be assigned (HEQC, 1995:iii). However, the extent of the use of Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is varied and indeed it is often viewed with suspicion, if not hostility, by the most traditional academic members. It is also seen as the real revolutionary instrument for the new era of higher education (Monasta, 1997).

The recommendations in the Report of the National Committee (1997) and the Scottish Committee (1997) both specifically refer to the importance of access and admissions with respect to part time CATS programmes. However, the perceived shortcomings, because of widening access, are the non-traditional qualifications of

the part-time mature student. Watson and Taylor (1998) offer examples of 'private grief' within the continuing education community. They identify widening participation being seen as a threat to traditional patterns of recruitment rather than an opportunity for new types of students and 'knee-jerk' condemnation of external quality assurance (the principle of which has to be especially important for part-time, mixed mode and other types of lifelong learners).

Delivery of programmes needs to take account of work and domestic responsibilities using time creatively. The flexibility of CATS at the University of Paisley enables students to attend on a full or part-time basis; to attend classes during the day, in the evenings, at weekends and during the summer.

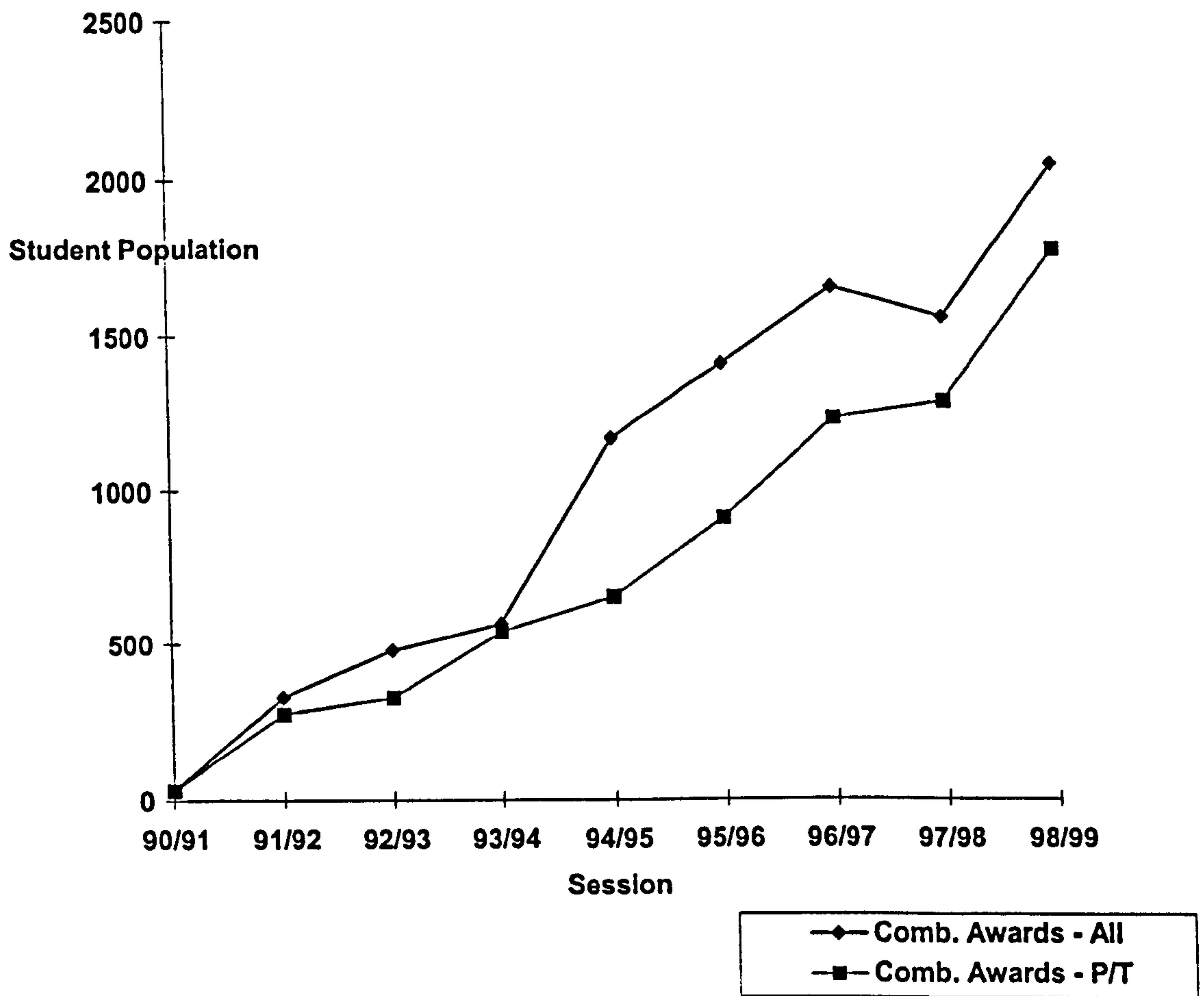
The students are able to import prior credit from appropriate previous higher or further education study, professional qualifications or experiential learning. Consequently this enables the design of an individual programme of study which best meets their personal or professional development. Students may exit with successful completion of an individual module or a university award: the award can range from Certificate or Diploma of Higher Education through BA and BSc Ordinary and Honours degrees to the postgraduate awards of Certificate, Diploma and Master's degree. Thus students can obtain credit for the successful achievement of a small amount of learning or they can continue to study and use the credit they have accumulated towards a nationally recognised award.

Flexibility in provision increases participation rates and widens access to higher education thus increases the diversity in student population. The evidence of the University of Paisley CAT scheme widening access is that the gender balance, age profile, employment status, mode of attendance and use of prior credit among CAT students distinguishes them from those traditionally attracted into the University (Knox, 1996). The trend from other institutions with similar CAT schemes for the adult returnee reflects the experience of the University of Paisley.

Institutionally, the University of Paisley has derived considerable benefit from the

introduction of flexible provision. The development of CATS has increased significantly from marginal activity (32 part-time students who attended during the day) in 1990/1 to a significant aspect of institutional provision. The student population comprised 28% CATS students by 1995/6. Of those students, 79% studied part-time attending in the evening. These figures illustrate the importance of providing quality flexible provision within the University. Figure 1 summarises the growth in student numbers and diversity of provision from 1990 to 1999.

**Figure 1 Combined Awards Student Numbers 1990 - 1999**



The Department of Continuing Education within the University of Paisley offers flexible learning opportunities based on the principles of Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), enabling students to choose subjects of their choice and at times to suit their personal circumstances. Students therefore have the opportunity to add to

existing qualifications or develop new skills.

### **1.3 The part-time student**

The initial introduction of credit accumulation and transfer was to benefit full-time but migratory students facilitating transfer between institutions. However, the accumulation of credit has become more important than the transfer. The student groups conventionally regarded as benefiting from credit accumulation and transfer are mainly part-time students who may see advantages in a credit system in order to gain credit for learning achievement. They are regarded as 'non-traditional' students because they are not studying full-time, have not entered university based on their school-leaving qualifications and are not following a prescribed course leading to a named degree. Often they will include the following categories, not of course, mutually exclusive:

**Employees: seeking academic credit for professional training and continuing professional development**

**Adult returnees: claiming academic credit for experiential learning or adults, who, for some reason, have not had the opportunity to study in higher education**

**Women returnees: particularly women subject to interrupted participation in higher education because of family reasons.**

Whilst it is certain that the development of CAT arrangements will continue to improve access to learning for many students it becomes increasingly important that effective educational guidance is provided to students presenting as an enquirer, as a new admission, as an ongoing student and as an exiting student. As learning opportunities are extended to an increased number of eligible students, offering them an increased subject choice and flexibility, student retention becomes more of an issue. A learning programme must be constructed leading to successful achievement with the prospect of increased employability.

## **1.4 Current concerns of the learning experience of the part-time student**

Credit Accumulation and Transfer Schemes are therefore used to facilitate and address issues of flexibility, student choice and academic programmes at many institutions. However, it is important that as these academic developments progress and part-time provision and the widening access agenda are promoted and adopted they are accompanied by a detailed system that addresses the complexities of flexibility whilst maintaining quality. The process must be efficient and effective and address all student needs.

Whilst there is an abundance of information on the volume of students entering and exiting using credit accumulation and transfer, there is limited evidence of studies of the pattern of student behaviour. Important themes to consider are access, student choice, appropriate student support, student completion and non completion and maintaining quality at a time of resource constraint.

With increasing module availability there is a need to investigate how they make their module choice. Where learners have a largely free choice over which combination of modules to study – a state of affairs which is often derided as the ‘cafeteria’ approach – where does the responsibility lie for ensuring that they are able to make some overall sense of their programme of study?

With an increasing part-time student population it is important to address their needs. How do part-time students find their initial experience of returning to education? Why do they decide to withdraw from a module or a programme? Do part-time students know that there are resources available to facilitate their studies?

It is expected that numbers will continue to increase by providing free part-time education to attract students from non-traditional student backgrounds. The

introduction of Individual Learning Accounts will attract more employed people for continuing personal and professional development. Consequently, it will be necessary to ensure the implementation of effective systems to ensure coherent pathways and provide the necessary academic support. A major purpose of this research is to address these current issues.

## **1.5 The attrition rate of the part-time student**

Most studies of adult education and training have focused either on the characteristics of the learners or on the nature of the learning opportunities available to them. Less attention has been given to the success or otherwise of the learning experience, and the reasons for this, despite continuing concerns about the numbers of adults who fail to complete or drop out courses or programmes. The whole area of evaluation has often been regarded with limited interest (Edwards, 1991; Harris and Bell, 1990), though this is changing in light of current concerns with quality.

One of the problems with assessing completion and non-completion is the lack of agreement over definitions. For example the Further Education Funding Council uses the term 'withdrawal' specifically for a student who has taken a decision, confirmed in writing, to withdraw from studies or has not attended classes for four continuous weeks before November 1<sup>st</sup>. The Higher Education Funding Council takes a broader perspective of non-completers as those students 'who are deemed not to complete their studies in the period for which they are registered'. This difference is compounded by the greater flexibility of study modes now available and failure to take account of part-time provision. Credit transfer schemes, modularisation and independent study may all contribute to unjustifiably high non-completion rates or ones that are apparently unjustifiably high when set by certain definitions and measures (as described above). It is argued that changed funding criteria linked to targets for student retention, and the needs for indicators for student satisfaction in an increasingly competitive further and higher education market, have compelled institutions to look more closely into why students drop out

(McGivney, 1996). McGivney et al investigated the attendance and withdrawal patterns of mature students in the further education and higher education sectors. Their most significant finding concerns the lack of available data. As the author states:

“The figures available nationally are inadequate, and comparisons between institutional figures are problematic because of differences between data collection methods and variations in the way institutions define and measure non-completion...As a result, the non-completion rates revealed by institutions and research investigations are too diverse to be conclusive.”(p16)

It is apparent that part-time students have been omitted from surveys carried out and agreed that in the policy context of lifelong learning this needs to be addressed (SRHE/HEFC, 1998).

SHEFC have now identified progression from low participation groups as a diagnostic indicator of institutional performance, however examination of the HEFC, 1999 report indicates that there is no mention of part-time students.

By providing the increasing number of learners with control of their learning, enabling much greater student choice, creating stepping stones to higher education for previously excluded groups of adults and awarding credit for learning, the learners' needs and interests, rather than institutional needs, should be better served. It is vitally important to continuously develop effective educational guidance operational procedures that in addition to ensuring academically sound programmes could also address the issue of the non-completing student.

Attention needs to be given to how information is provided and what happens to the individual once they have started a learning programme.

Adult learning is now a major area of government policy. The agenda is set by the continuing governing rhetoric, that Britain needs a highly skilled, 'flexible' workforce to be competitive in the world market (Osborne and Gallacher, 1995). It is a recommendation by Garrick (1997) that institutions review the needs of their

part-time students. The students have a vital place in the responsibility for their own learning. Continuous active involvement with evaluation of their learning is required to ensure that students are able to achieve optimum success leading to their desired professional and personal opportunities. McGivney (1996) suggests that the first step in improving retention rates would be for institutions to acknowledge and accommodate the experience and needs of a more diverse student body.

## **1.6 Aims**

The overall aim of this project was to explore the experience of the part-time students through a detailed investigation of students enrolled with the Department of Continuing Education.

There were four main aims:

1. Survey the most popular times and modes for module delivery for the non-traditional student studying at the University of Paisley.
2. Improve recruitment of part-time students within the context of life-long learning.
3. Develop strategies to improve the retention of part-time students.
4. Enhance the part-time student experience.

In order to achieve these aims there were a number of objectives. A profile of the part-time student population enrolled within the Department of Continuing Education during 1998/9 was analysed from information obtained from the University database. Students from this database were used to survey the most popular times and modes of delivery for the current part-time student population.

An evaluation of the experience of individuals making enquiries about part-time learning opportunities informed improved recruitment strategies. Evaluation of information, induction and educational guidance of new part-time students provided an insight of any difficulties that were being experienced and enabled more effective educational systems to be implemented.



Evaluation of procedures for ongoing guidance and the provision of pre-exit educational guidance facilitated student motivation and progress. Recommendations were made based on the analyses of the data and changes implemented. Further evaluation after the modifications allowed for a comparative study and a measurement of the impact of the changes and identification of further recommendations.

# CHAPTER TWO

## 2.0 Literature Review

### Overview

This literature review brings together some of the available literature and research from institutions concerned with meeting the needs of adult learners. Whilst there is an abundance of available data on the characteristics and experiences of mature learners there is less available literature in serving the needs of part-time learners in higher education institutions and the institutional challenge that this 'non-traditional' population presents.

### 2.1 The development of the concept of lifelong learning

The aim of the European Year of Lifelong Learning (1996) was to raise awareness regarding the concept of lifelong learning and to develop initiatives at local, national and international levels (European Commission (EC), 1995). The emphasis of the EC is on the role of education and training developments in life long learning. The EC's accent is on lifelong education. The ideal of lifelong learning was adopted as a concept by the UNESCO in 1970 (Coombs, 1968; Dave, 1976; Faure et al, 1972; Kallen, 1979; Lengrand, 1989). Its origins have been traced back to the writings of Dewey, Lindeman and Yeaxlee in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Jarvis, 1995). In essence, lifelong education is portrayed as education throughout life, as needed and desired, for everyone.

The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation sponsored recurrent education as a concept in the 1970s. Recurrent education can be used to facilitate lifelong learning:

“The essence of the recurrent education proposition.....is the distribution of education over the life span of the individual in a recurring way. This means a break with the practice of a long, uninterrupted pre-work period of full time schooling, which has been described as a 'front-end' model. It also implies

the alternation of education with other work activities, of which the principal would be work, but which might also include leisure and retirement. One of its essential potential outcomes is to make it possible for the individual to abandon the unalterable education-work-leisure-retirement sequence and to enable him to mix and alternate these activities within the limits of what is socially possible and in accordance with his own desires and aspirations”.

(Council of Europe 1973, p7)

The Association for Recurrent Education has been recently renamed the Association for Lifelong Learning. Houghton, an early member of the Association, identified twelve features, which might be deemed essential for a recurrent education system (Houghton, 1974, p7). These were ordered under the headings of availability, access and relevance. His analysis, which has been labelled ‘radical’ by some (Jarvis, 1995; Lawson, 1977) argues for the greatest possible choice, variety and flexibility.

Adult learning is now a major area of government policy. In the past 15 years there has been more legislation relating to adult education than there had been in the previous 50 years (Barr, 1996).

“We have asked the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council to encourage part-time and continuing education provision”

(Lord James Douglas Hamilton at a conference, 1996)

“There should be maximum participation in initial higher education by young and mature students and in lifetime learning by adults, having regard to the needs of individuals, the nation and the future labour market”.

(Report of the Scottish Committee, 1997)

In the DfEE Green Paper (1998) lifelong learning is defined as:

“Lifelong learning means the continuous development of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are essential for employability and fulfilment”.

(DfEE, 1998 p11)

These concepts and changes leading to an increased diversity have been recognised by the University of Paisley and the institution has responded by adopting a modular system and credit based system which allows studying to be pursued in less rigid ways.

## 2.2 The adult as a learner

It is important to define what is meant by an adult and to establish what distinguishes adult education and adult learning in a more general sense.

“A wide range of concepts is involved when we use the term ‘adult’. The word can refer to a stage in the life cycle of the individual; he or she is first a child, then a youth, and then an adult. It can refer to a status; an acceptance by society that the person concerned has completed his or her novitiate and is now incorporated fully into the community. It can refer to a social subset: adults as distinct from children. Or it can include a set of ideals and values: adulthood”.

(Rogers, 1986, p5, original emphasis)

Of course it would be naive to believe that merely surviving long enough to wake up on one’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, or passing through puberty, automatically changes one from being a child to an adult. However, if adulthood can be considered as a state of being which gives status and rights to the individuals and simultaneously confers duties and responsibilities upon them, then adulthood could be defined as: “an ethical status resting on the presumption of various moral and personal qualities” (Paterson, 1979).

Common to the wide variety of definitions used for the term ‘mature student’ within the literature reviewed was a break of varying duration between secondary school and higher education.

There is now a broader range of acceptable entry qualifications for higher education and this has implications for the skills that adult students bring with them. One third of full time first degree students enter with qualifications other than ‘A’ levels or Highers (Connor, 1996). While school leavers remain a significant proportion of higher education recruits, they arrive with different learning experiences from the mature student. There was a 203% increase in the number of mature students (25+) entering higher education between 1988/9 and 1993/4 (Connor, 1996). They differ from the school leaver by usually having experience of work (sometimes at managerial level), of raising a family and having excellent time management skills (Connor, 1996). It is clear that the individual members of a class of the late 1990s

and early 2000s will have different approaches to study compared to members of classes 20 years ago. The individuals will need targeted support to help them build on their different strengths and overcome their different weaknesses, and the opportunity to negotiate programmes of study that meet varied personal and professional developmental needs.

There are important features of mature students as learners. The current thinking in adult education holds the learner-centred philosophy as vital in adult teaching. This is also the prevalent method with young adults in secondary and undergraduate education. Much of this thinking has been derived from the efforts of Knowles (1984) who invented the term 'andragogy' – the study of how adults learn. His assumptions are that the differences between child and adult learners are:

1. There is a development of the self-concept from dependency to self-direction
2. Adults have accumulated experiences and these can be a rich resource for learning
3. In adults readiness to learn is a function of the need to perform social roles
4. Adults have a predominantly problem centred orientation to learning

Important resulting implications arising from these assumptions are:

- Learning experiences for adults should build upon their past experiences and knowledge
- It will be important to involve learners in identifying what they need to learn
- The adult learner's experience constitutes a very important resource for themselves and others
- Programmes designed for adult learners should provide learning experiences applicable to current practice

It is interesting that Thorndike in 1913 identified the following factors for successful work related learning to take place:

- Interest in work
- Interest in improving performance
- The relevance of the training to some goal of the learner
- A 'problem attitude' where the learner is made aware of a need that will be satisfied by the learning

(Cited in Cline, 1990, p24)

There is indeed agreement between Thorndike's findings in 1913 and the resulting implications arising from Knowles' assumptions in 1984.

Deci and Ryan (1985) suggested that adults are more likely to find learning interesting if adult learners are allowed to do the following:

- Experience a degree of self-determination and choice in relation to what they learn and how they learn it.
- Feel that the activities they are engaging in are increasing their competence, by obtaining informational feedback which helps them to improve in areas identified by themselves.

The Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) promotes the development of participants as self-directed learners. It provides the student with an increased responsibility for and expertise in identifying their learning needs, defining their learning objectives, planning learning programmes and evaluating progress.

Many students have to juggle their studies with other major commitments. Mature students often have dependent relatives to care for, and may continue to hold down a permanent job while studying part-time. Higher education courses need to be more flexible to help students cope with so many conflicting demands on their time. Students need more choice over the time, place and pace of their studies. Labour market requirements are also changing (SLIMS, 1997). Everyone is expected to continually update his or her knowledge and skills. No one now expects a job for life so people need to be more self-motivated and make conscious decisions about their

futures developing in response to the needs of the organisations that require a multi-skilled, responsive and adaptable workforce.

### **2.2.1 Reasons for adults entering higher education**

In Graham's (1991) study of mature students, personal interest in an academic subject was the most frequent reason for embarking on a particular undergraduate course, closely followed by the need for a career change. Smithers and Griffin (1986) also reported that mature entrants to university embarked on higher education out of a need to change or further their careers and/or more generally for self-fulfilment. This latter motive embraced students who were following up a subject in which they had always been interested as well as those seeking to regain self-respect after their perceived failure in the educational system.

Woodley et al (1987) noted the predominance of instrumental factors in motivating a return to study. Although they draw attention to the multiplicity of likely reasons for mature students enrolling on courses, they also observed that older students were less likely to give instrumental reasons than younger students were, and that women were less likely to do so than men. Johnston and Bailey (1984) identified similar sex and age differences in motivation. Thus men were more likely than women to cite vocational reasons for returning to study, while women were more likely than men to cite subject interest. Johnston and Bailey (1984) and also Hollinshead and Griffith (1990) noted that, when students were asked to rate various possible motivating factors, subject interest was of greatest overall importance to all mature students, with 91% rating it as 'important' or 'very important'. But Bourner et al (1988), who considered only part-time students, found that almost 75% of students on part-time undergraduate degree courses were aiming to improve their career prospects. And personal and subject interests were of secondary importance - which is contradictory to the findings of Johnston and Bailey (1984) and Hollinshead and Griffith (1990). Tight (1991) suggests that this is understandable given the vocational orientation of many part-time qualifications. The current literature therefore indicates that vocational considerations and subject interest are powerful motivating factors, sometimes acting in combination.

In Sargant's (1991) study of participation in adult learning in the UK it is observed that participation in adult learning can be related to major life events and changes. Wanting promotion at work, moving house, involvement in a marriage, a relationship breakdown or losing a job, were all reasons related to participating in learning. Similarly, Bourgeois (1999) identifies that such critical incidents, particularly for adult learners, can act as catalysts. Findings emerged from Graham's (1991) data with implications for policies and practices for mature students. Graham noted the breadth of experience and the highly chequered careers of many mature student entrants. This is not necessarily a bad thing and may reflect a wealth of prior experiential learning. However, Graham also observed a relative lack of planning particularly on the part of older students. Few attempted to build upon their previous experience. For, despite having accumulated a wealth of knowledge and skills, many mature entrants consistently undervalued their previous achievements and, rather than build upon it, tended to discard it.

### **2.2.2 Achievements of mature students in higher education**

Most of the monitoring exercises that have been carried out since the 1960s indicate that mature students do as well as (particularly mature students between 30 and 40 years of age), if not better than, younger students (Graham, 1989). Bourner and Hamed (1987) reported that entrants with 'non-standard' entry qualifications outperformed those with standard qualifications. However, Woodley et al (1987) drew attention to slightly higher rates of academic failure and non-completion in mature university students.

There is interesting data in this area undermining assumptions that access and quality are incompatible. For many institutions the choice has seemed to be one of widening access or maintaining standards. As long ago as 1984 the University Grants Committee showed that school examinations are not always good predictors of achievement in higher education, and that other qualities and experience can be important determinants of success (UGC/NAB, 1984). Yet a year later the DES cautioned institutions against accepting "too high a proportion of mature students and/or students lacking the normal minimum entry qualifications if too high a



proportion of students is accepted for courses not designed for them they may founder and staff may be tempted to lower standards” (DES, 1985). Sharma (1990) found in a study of institution mission statements that the number of institutions who viewed widening access and striving for excellence as mutually enhancing activities were very few. The majority either emphasised their approach to access or their current standards of excellence in teaching and research. Increasingly, however within all universities there has been a shift towards promoting social inclusion. The outcomes of this may be tensions by staff with respect to quality standards, (Fulton, 1997). Clearly, these concerns relate to all ‘non traditional’ students. There is now a growing interest in addressing issues of student retention. This was predicted by Oldham (1998) who wrote that it would take a few years of serious failure rates following the widening of access before retention would seriously be addressed in the UK. Although there has always been interest in the higher education student experience with changes in the higher education environment (Trow, 1996; Coffield and Williamson, 1997).

### **2.2.3 Mature students entering higher education**

Mature students approach higher education from a variety of routes. They may hold conventional entry qualifications, they may have completed Access courses or hold some other professional vocational qualification. Each entry qualification may have associated difficulties. Smithers and Griffin in 1986 attempted to follow up students to whom application forms had been sent for entry into full time higher education programmes, but who had failed to proceed with their application. They identified several factors serving to discourage students at the enquiry stage: some of these originated from students’ circumstances (improved employment prospects, illness or lack of family support) but others indicated a lack of responsiveness on the part of the institution. Although there is no such available literature for part-time students, it is reasonable to argue that similar factors will apply, and probably even more forcibly, to part-time students. Smithers and Griffin (1986) reported that students were discouraged by the complexity of procedures, lack of advice and information and an overall discouraging response from the institution. In a study by Bourner et al (1988) course leaders indicated that the application form used by both full-time and

part-time applicants was the same. Their study indicated that many part-time applicants were being asked to complete a long application form that was designed for completion by younger applicants to full-time courses.

#### **2.2.4 Sources of information for mature students entering higher education**

Whitburn et al (1976) reported that the majority of mature students found out about opportunities in higher education from friends, newspaper advertisements or employers. Some had also been provided with basic information by professional associations. Whilst Smithers and Griffin (1986) had similar findings, newspapers advertisements were rarely mentioned and careers advisory services and libraries were included. In Johnston and Bailey's (1984) study, the most important source of information was employers. Interestingly, in light of the variety of entry qualifications mature students may have, they reported that only half the students appear to have sought advice before application and almost 1/3 had no academic contact before enrolment.

Friends and personal contacts were an important source of information for more than half of Hollinshead and Griffin's (1990) sample, as well as careers services, libraries and, to a lesser extent, local information services and employers. Woodley et al (1987) and Locke et al (1992) noted that course prospectuses were the most frequently used information source and the most useful. Ball (1989) argues that much more can be done at the local level to raise aspirations and stimulate demand. Locke et al (1992) emphasises that procedures for handling enquiries i.e. before the application stage are more significant in the case of potential mature students than of students straight from school. McGivney (1996) states:

“The importance of student loss in the early stages of a course highlights the importance of good pre-course contact, information and advice”.

Once students decide to enter university then personal contacts with staff and students become important. Locke et al (1992) draw attention to the importance of an institution's response to their students' initial enquiries, in such that students cited

the friendly nature of the personal contact as important. Both Locke (1992) and Chiswick (1991) recommend staff development programmes aimed at non-academic 'front-line' staff as well as clear signs directing students to appropriate sources of information.

### **2.2.5 Domestic commitments**

Mature students are more likely to have other family commitments as well as caring for children or elderly parents. There are no national data on proportion of mature students with such commitments, but existing sources provide figures of somewhere between 36% (Hollinshead and Griffith, 1990), 37% (Johnston and Bailey, 1984), approximately 40% (Graham, 1991; Woodley et al, 1987) and 65% (Chiswick, 1991). Data from Redpath and Robus (1989) show that 13% of single mature students have dependants and among married students 75% were supporting more than one dependant. Although this data refers to full-time mature students it provides an indication of the profile of adult students with other commitments. Family commitments may not always present problems. However, one in five mature students reported severe problems caused by family commitments (Smithers and Griffin 1986) and Woodley et al (1987) noted that 62% of students aged 31-40 expressed difficulties with finding time to study and attributed these to family demands. While institutions may not always be able to alleviate these difficulties, Cody (1991) pointed out that a number of institutions actively encouraged mature students to apply, yet relatively few attempted to modify existing structures to accommodate the needs of mature students with family commitments. Blaxter and Tight (1994) highlight the necessity of efficient, effective and economical educational services for part-time students. For example, students highlight the facts that the university was close to their home or work and that the courses were at times that were convenient for them.

### **2.2.6 Lack of confidence**

There is evidence that mature students entering higher education experience high levels of anxiety. Johnston and Bailey (1984) observed that 55% of students expected difficulties in coping with workloads and 38% expressed worries about

exams. Similarly, Woodley et al (1987) found 38 % lacked confidence in their abilities and women were more likely to express this than men.

However, while institutions, particularly tutors and lecturers, need to be aware of possible lack of confidence in students there is a danger of perpetuating a mature student stereotype. Contrasting evidence does exist (Roberts and Higgins, 1992) that mature students have slightly more confidence in their ability to pass the course than their younger colleagues. Although it is frequently suggested that mature students need to gain more confidence, Stephenson and Percy (1989) cautioned that confidence is a multifaceted concept. Mature students lack confidence in a variety of different areas and need help to build confidence in a variety of different directions. However there are students making the transition from school into higher education who also experience high levels of anxiety, and Rickinson and Rutherford (1995) conclude from a study based on new full-time undergraduates that more attention and resources need to be directed at the preparation for higher education stage. They recommend that universities should review their induction and academic support programmes to ensure that students need are adequately addressed.

### **2.2.7 Mature learners' expectations of teaching and learning**

Cody (1991) reported that students were unclear of the level of work involved, the amount of time to be spent on study seminars or in private study. The mature students in Roberts and Higgins' study (1992) were asked to rate their institution on various aspects of course delivery. They tended to rate communication with staff, quality of lecturing, student participation and personal support more highly than traditional students did. Findings like these may reflect differences between mature and traditional students in terms of priorities and values. On the other hand, it may simply be that mature students have different expectations of the course process. Woodley et al (1987) also surveyed mature students for problems with their course and found that only a few students were reporting 'great' problems in any of the areas examined. The major problem was one of time management. Bourner et al (1988) reported a higher than average first year rate of non-completion by part-time students who encountered greater than expected difficulties with time management. This is in

contrast with Connor (1996) who remarks upon the excellent time management skills of the mature student. Lack of study skills and associated difficulties were reported by about 25% of the sample; even for that 25% they were only experienced as slight problems. In contrast, Smithers and Griffin (1986) reported problems with study and exam techniques in almost 75% of their mature students. Roderick et al (1991) suggested that this reflects a greater conscientiousness compared with their younger counterparts. Locke and Johnson (1990) caution against treating mature students as a special case. They claim that, whilst study skills needs should be identified and provision made, the assumption that such provision should be targeted specifically at mature students is unwarranted.

Assessment procedures vary; some courses are all exams based, others are entirely continuously assessed, and others are a combination of the two. Students in Warner Weill's (1989) study voiced their concerns about exams. Students in Smithers and Griffin's (1986) study generally disliked exams. For some students there was a perception that they actively interfered with effective learning. However, although reduction of formal exams may promote less superficial teaching and different learning approaches, the stress associated with assessment is not necessarily reduced. (Knox et al, forthcoming). Smithers and Griffin (1978) comment that continuous assessment "imposes its own form of relentless pressure throughout the course". Duke (1987) argued that assessment procedures would vary according to what is assessed, why it is assessed and who is assessed. Neither school leavers or mature students are homogeneous groups, and it is likely that unseen exams will advantage some and disadvantage others in both groups.

### **2.2.8 Course organisation and mature students' perceptions**

Lack of communication was one of the most frequently mentioned problems by part-time students in Johnston and Bailey's (1984) study. Organisation and efficiency of course delivery were mentioned by a number of students in Roberts and Higgin's 1991 study and by Johnson and Locke (1990). Efficient organisation is of importance to all students, but part-time students are particularly hard hit when lectures are cancelled or relocated at the last minute. A frequently voiced need is

that lecturers should take into account the fact that mature students have other responsibilities (Johnson and Locke, 1990; Cody, 1991; Chiswick, 1991). A number of students in Johnston and Bailey's (1984) study comment that accountability seems one way. For example, they are concerned that there are penalties imposed upon them if coursework was not submitted on time and yet there can be a considerable elapse of time in provision of feed back from coursework.

### **2.2.9 The most popular time for students to study**

A survey carried out at the University of Portsmouth has identified that the most popular times for lectures are 9.00am-12.00noon and 6.00-9.00pm. The most unpopular time for the part-time student was between 2.00-5.00pm., (Lyons, 1993). There is no other available evidence of surveys investigating the most popular time for part-time delivery. However, institutions are increasingly varying their provision and modes of attendance. Flexibility of provision requires careful organisation, and part-time students are particularly disadvantaged if this breaks down. Flexibility of timetabling is an important factor in catering for mature students. As more full-time students work part-time the part-time/full time distinction may decrease as institutions choose to increase flexibility and adopt multi-session days.

## **2.3 Literature review conclusions**

Whilst part-time higher education is now regarded as one of the distinctive features of lifelong learning the information available concerning part-time higher education experiences remains limited. The introduction of the Fee Waiver Scheme in 1998 and the new initiative of Individual Learning Accounts launched in July 2000 would indicate that the increasing trend in part-time enrolments is set to continue. The number of part-time students in higher education institutions rose by 8% in 1998/99. (SHEFC, 2000; SFEC, 2000).

Further knowledge about the experience of the part-time student in higher education is the primary focus of this research as this is the area where available information is most limited and it is an expanding and important area.

# CHAPTER THREE

## 3.0 Methodology

The University of Paisley currently holds the largest database of part-time students on credit and accumulation and transfer programmes in Scotland. This database was used to identify students for the study. Analysis of data was using quantitative and qualitative methods.

Rossmann and Wilson (1984) suggest linking qualitative and quantitative data for three main reasons:

1. To enable confirmation or corroboration of each other via triangulation.
2. To elaborate or develop analysis, providing richer detail.
3. To initiate new lines of thinking through attention to surprises or paradoxes, 'turning ideas around', providing fresh insight.

Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research (Campbell and Fiske, 1959). Using two or more methods of data collection to explore the part-time students' experiences reduces the chances that consistent findings were attributable to similarities of method (Lin, 1976).

The data collection involved steady integrated collection of both quantitative and qualitative data as needed. The study therefore benefited from both numerical data and qualitative information.

The data was collected and analysed simultaneously to allow important understandings to be discovered along the way and then pursued in additional data collection efforts.

The study involved action research. Action research (Watkins, 1991) is designed to solve particular problems through a cycle of reconnaissance, planning, action and re-reconnaissance. Halsey (1972) offers a conventional definition of action research:

“Action research is a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention.”

The use of action research can therefore be resolved in two stages: a diagnostic stage in which the problems are analysed and the hypotheses developed; and a therapeutic stage in which the hypotheses are tested by a consciously directed change. Changes were implemented and evaluated within the scope of this project. The results of the data analysis provided information on areas where change was necessary and therefore guided the exact nature of the actions taken.

This research study involved acting after an inquiry. In the second phase, changes were implemented wherever feasible because of the initial outcomes. The outcome was then re-evaluated.

The manner of presentation throughout this dissertation is the use of text boxes and script to highlight recommendations based upon the results.

For example:

*Recommendation 1998*

- *To use text boxes and script to highlight recommendations for action.*

Therefore these text boxes are interspersed throughout the dissertation.

Chapter twelve details the recommendations made based only upon the findings from session 1999/00. It is anticipated that actions will be taken where possible and further procedures implemented and re-evaluation of the students' perceptions in 2000/1. This is the cyclical nature of action research.



The project plan, which related the methodology to time scale, is shown in Appendix A. By using an emergent design, not all the specifics were outlined in advance. It was recognised at the design stage that choosing an appropriate time scale for the investigations was important to the success of this research.

In particular, the time scale of the action activities within this project was critical as it was tied to the University Annual Calendar with respect to semester dates, induction, enrolment and exam diet arrangements. This imposed strict time limitations within which the research activities were to be conducted. Any deviation from the planned activities would result in serious inconsistencies and it was recognised that this posed as a possible threat to the investigation.

### **3.1 Validity and reliability**

Most authors use the terms reliability, validity and credibility as criteria for robustness of their findings. 'Trustworthiness' is the term used by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to encompass the concepts of reliability, validity and credibility. Maykut and Morehouse (1997) specifically discuss trustworthiness and I have adopted this concept as I feel that it benefits this research. Therefore, the methodology used in this research includes many steps that will increase the trustworthiness of the qualitative aspects of this research study. Reliability and validity were established by cross-checking similar questions and cross checking with other methods of data collection.

An audit trail of the research methodology, which provides the outcomes, is provided in Appendix B. The multiple methods used for data collection increase the understanding of the phenomena of interest and were used as part of the constant comparative data analysis contributing to the audit trail.

Mishler (1990) who has made a valuable contribution to the topic of trustworthiness

proposes that the ultimate test is if actions are taken because of the findings:

“The key issue becomes whether the relevant community of scientists evaluated reported findings as sufficiently trustworthy to rely on them for their own work.”

(Mishler, 1990 p419)

Similarly, Patton (1990) notes:

“The ultimate test of the credibility of an evaluation report is the response of decision makers and information users to use that report.”

(Patton, 1990, p31)

### **3.2 Sample**

The enquirer’s sample was drawn from a database of individuals who made enquiries about studying part-time. It included individuals who enquired and then enrolled and also those who made an enquiry and subsequently did not enrol.

The student sample was drawn from part-time students who enrolled within the Department of Continuing Education and who were studying or withdrew before completion.

The staff sample included the five Educational Guidance Advisors and five of the 16 Departmental Co-ordinators. A key aspect of the role of an Education Guidance Advisor is to provide students with information to help students make an appropriate module choice. Departmental Co-ordinators are lecturers who are involved in teaching to Combined Awards students and in addition act as a point of contact for providing specific information about the content of modules or suitability of modules for some students. Departmental Co-ordinators were selected for in-depth interviews. The aims of the focus group and individual interviews were to gain a deeper understanding of how the part-time students’ needs could be addressed.

Enquirer and student representativeness was achieved using simple random sampling. Therefore, because of probability and chance, the sample should contain students with characteristics similar to the part-time population as a whole. The sizes of the random samples were determined by exercising prudence together with consultation of tables which indicate the appropriate size of a sample derived from a mathematical formula (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970).

A maximum variation sampling strategy was used to document diverse variations and identify common patterns of student behaviour (Cresswell, 1998). In this way the maximum variation sampling was emergent and sequential (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) allowing building and broadening of theoretical insights in the ongoing process of data collection and analysis. A range of typical sampling strategies was employed, a brief rationale and purpose was clearly stated for each strategy with an evaluation of its use. Information from the research participants was collected, data analysed and preliminary results suggesting important variables thus identified. As a consequence recommendations were made and procedures agreed for future action based upon the evidence.

### **3.3 Methods of data collection**

In this study a variety of methods of data collection were used to achieve a better understanding of the behavioural patterns of the participants and increase the credibility of the findings.

#### **(a) Survey of the profile of the part-time students enrolled in the Department of Continuing Education for session 1998/9.**

The data were collected using the registry database and the profile of the students analysed. Factors analysed were gender, age and whether or not they were bringing in prior credit from previous qualifications. This provided an overview of the profile of the population of students enrolled to study part-time within the Department of Continuing Education. The progression rate of the part-time student population was

also analysed.

#### (b) Participant observation

Two evening classes were attended by the researcher in the first semester of 1997 studying on a part-time evening mode in an area of interest but not familiar to me. Observations were made on various aspects of the students participating in the studies, but the emphasis was on identifying features and understanding the reality of working full-time, having home and family commitments and undertaking the modules and assessments. A reflective diary recording observations was maintained. This approach of changing roles from that of an outsider to an insider through the course of the ethnographic study is well documented in field research (Jorgenson, 1989). Data were gathered using methods of participant observation (Silverman, 1993). This provided an insight into the type of information to consider when exploring the part-time students' experiences, and therefore the data were used to inform and develop the questionnaires.

#### (c) Survey of the most popular time for a student to study on a part-time basis

A simple postal survey to explore the most suitable time for students to study was conducted in October 1998. The aim of the survey was to obtain simple frequency counts about preferred times and modes of study from students who were currently enrolled with the Department of Continuing Education and studying on a part-time basis.

#### (d) Enquirers' experiences

To evaluate people's perceptions of their experience of making an enquiry to the University of Paisley an investigation was conducted using semi-structured telephone interviews. Telephone interviews were selected as the most appropriate method to contact the enquirers as they tend to be shorter, more focused and useful for contacting busy people (Harvey, 1988; Miller, 1995). In addition it was considered that this was the best method to contact people who had enquired and not enrolled. This involved telephoning individuals who made an enquiry to the University during

1998 with a view to starting part-time study in September 1998. Enquirers who had not subsequently selected to study at the University together with those who had become students were included in order to provide as accurate view as possible of all enquirers' experiences. The information gained from the interviews was both quantitative and qualitative, thus providing statistical data supported by interviewees' statements giving information at an individual level that represented general issues. The findings from this part of the research allowed recommendations to be made and implemented wherever possible in an attempt to improve the experience. To evaluate the effects of new procedures put in place this investigation was fully repeated with new students who enrolled part-time in September 1999. This allowed for comparative analysis following the introduction of changes made based upon the initial findings.

(e) Postal questionnaires to students about their experience of first few days

A postal questionnaire was designed to investigate the part-time students' perceptions of the information and guidance available to them at the University. The advantages of using a postal questionnaire to explore their experience included ease of administration and avoided bias; and the analysis reflected each student's experience over a similar duration and at the same time. For this reason there was no reminder administered after the initial contact to achieve a maximum response rate. It was recognised that a vital limitation of mail surveys is the difficulty of receiving an adequate response (Moser and Kalton, 1977). The extent of non-response is important as certain viewpoints may not be represented. A further disadvantage of the postal questionnaire was that there was no opportunity for clarifying or probing. However, for the purpose of this study a postal survey was identified as the most appropriate tool to make contact with the students.

(f) Telephone interviews with students who had informed us that they had left the course

Telephone interviews were used to reach those students who had informed the University that they had left the course. This was considered to be the most appropriate method to gain a response although certain precautions needed to be

taken when considering those who had withdrawn. However, it was considered that there would be greater frankness on the part of respondents and that the individual would feel less threatened, particularly if their reason for withdrawing was of a sensitive nature (Nias, in Walford, Ed.,1991: 151). The interviews were conducted using an interview schedule including closed and open questions in order to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The interviews were semi-structured so that respondents could provide information which they thought was relevant to their experience when studying at the University and which influenced their decision to leave. It was aimed at four main issues: motivation to study, when they attended their classes, when they left and their reasons for withdrawing.

#### (g) Focus group with the Educational Guidance Advisors

The five Education Guidance Advisors were brought together to discuss the topic of providing educational guidance. The strength of this focus group was their insight into the role of an Educational Guidance Advisor. In a focus group the participants' rather than the researcher's agenda views should predominate and the emerging data relies on the interaction of the group discussing the topic (Morgan, 1988:9). In order that the maximum group dynamics could be achieved and so that the meeting could be open ended but to the point, the researcher did not participate and asked two researchers within the University to chair the focus group.

#### (h) Interviews with the Departmental Co-ordinators

In depth interviews with Departmental Co-ordinators focussed on their perception of their role as a Departmental Co-ordinator and communication links with students and Educational Guidance Advisors. A semi-structured interview schedule was constructed which also considered possible prompts and probes to enable the interviewer to ask respondents to extend, elaborate, add to, provide detail for, clarify or qualify their response. Patton (1980:238) discusses the hallmarks of successful interviewing and the importance of prompting and probing to address the depth, comprehension and honesty of the responses. The ethical dimension of the interview was borne in mind, ensuring informed consent and confidentiality. The interviews were taped and transcribed. The interview data was collected and interpreted and

clusters and emerging themes noted. The interviewees each received a copy of their transcript to confirm that it fairly reflected the interview.

(i) Student programme questionnaires

All course leaders issue student programme questionnaires providing feedback on various factors at the end of Semester 2 to all students. The Combined Awards students receive them by post. The results provided qualitative and quantitative data from many part-time students studying in 1998/9 and these results provided an interesting study by comparing responses from the respondents with results from the research into the new part-time student experiences. The emerging themes gave further validity to other findings from the experiences of the new students and identified features important to all part-time students and not only new part-time students.

The questionnaires are optically read and analysed quantitatively by an optical mark analyser. The information is fed into a computer and the database product, Pinpoint, makes the data presentation. Responses to open questions were coded and qualitatively analysed.

### **3.4 Confidentiality**

The use of follow-ups is clearly an important feature of questionnaire surveys. However, this means that the survey is not anonymous. The questionnaire and respondents' replies were treated as confidential and the only biographical information recorded during the telephone interviews was gender. It was hoped that current students would be more likely to give their true perceptions of their experience as a part-time student if an assurance about confidentiality was made. The research was conducted in line with the University guidelines for ethical research with human subjects, (Appendix C).

## **3.5 Data analysis**

### **3.5.1 Qualitative analysis**

A constant comparative method to analyse the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used. This non-mathematical procedure is designed to identify themes and patterns in qualitative data. The findings were systematically analysed using an audit trail and the findings presented descriptively and using matrices, (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

### **3.5.2 Quantitative analysis**

Numerical analysis includes descriptive accounts, and statistical testing to establish confidence in results. The software package, SPSS, was used to analyse the data quantitatively. A frequently used statistic was the chi-square statistic for a 2x2 contingency table. The CROSSTABS command in SPSS was used to process the data. The chi-square statistic measures the difference between a statistically generated expected and an actual result to see if there is a significant difference between them. The chi-square statistic addresses the notion of statistical significance, itself based on notions of probability. However, it is important to highlight that only those results which had values which reached a statistical significance are reported and used as an aid to illuminate and aid the qualitative analysis.

## **3.6 Enquirers' Experiences**

### **3.6.1 Population and Data Collection Procedure, 1998**

The population included in this part of the investigation was individuals who made enquiries to the University of Paisley during 1998 to receive further information on part-time learning opportunities available to them in the academic year 1998/9. The enquirers included those who became students at the University and those who did



not. This was in an attempt to remove any bias towards positive responses and to give an accurate a view as possible of the experiences of individuals making an enquiry about part-time learning opportunities.

A list of 110 enquirers for accessing part-time courses in September 1998 who did not enrol at the University was selected randomly from a University Direct database within Corporate Communications. Another list of 110 enquirers was randomly selected from the total number of part-time students who had newly enrolled at the University. Ten names from each list were used to pilot the semi-structured telephone interview. As a result of the pilot, several minor changes were made to the questionnaire to enhance interviewees' understanding of the questions and to take account of their likely responses. Each interview was conducted using a script but allowing for differences in the interviewee's response. The introduction was particularly important to explain the reason for the call and to break the ice with interviewees and gain agreement to take part and answer the questions asked (Frey and Oishi, 1995). Each interview lasted between five to ten minutes. Forty individuals from each group were interviewed. Each individual was selected systematically on a random basis within the practical limitations of the study. This should be taken into account when considering population representativeness. For consistency all the interviews were carried out on Mondays to Thursdays after 6pm. A pre-printed questionnaire (Appendix D) was completed whilst interviewing each person. This included closed and open questions in an attempt to acquire quantitative data whilst allowing individuals the freedom to outline their perceptions of their enquiry experience. The questionnaire focussed on:

- when, why and in what manner their initial enquiry was made;
- what information the enquirer sought and whether this was received;
- the perceived usefulness of the prospectus and information sessions;
- whether the enquiry experience could be improved;
- the reason for making a decision on whether or not to study at the University;
- if they chose not to study at the University did they opt to study elsewhere;
- the intended goal of each individual at time of enquiry.

The results of this survey provided an understanding of the important aspects of the enquirer's experience, allowed recommendations to be made and new procedures to be implemented to address issues raised.

### **3.6.2 Population and data collection procedure, 1999**

This investigation was conducted in exactly the same manner for students who had enrolled for the first time in September 1999 and the results compared. As a consequence of the previous years gender analysis of enquirers who participated in the study additional information was collected from the database on the gender of enquirers in 1999.

## **3.7 New students' experiences: First days and first semester**

### **3.7.1 Population and data collection procedure**

The sample involved 200 individuals selected on a random basis from the 567 new part-time students who had, at that time, enrolled with the Department of Continuing Education for semester one, 1998/9 excluding those students who had already been involved in responding to the enquiry experience. This was to minimise the effect of the questionnaire becoming part of their experience.

A postal questionnaire (Appendix E ) was designed to examine the experiences of part-time Continuing Education students during their first semester at the University. This included three aspects of the learning context they experienced during the first few days:

Information provided to new part-time students during their first few days on:

1. **Dates and Times:** was there adequate information on important dates such as induction, timetables, semester dates?
2. **Places:** was the information provided to them useful and did they find it difficult to navigate around the campus?
3. **People:** were the students aware of whom their personal Education Guidance

Advisor was; did they know other students and whom did they get needed information from?

Participants were asked about the following aspects of their first semester:

- whether the information they received was available to them at the time they needed it;
- whether they had sought advice on issues such as module choice;
- whether they knew who was employed by the University to provide advice on various aspects;
- who they would seek advice from.

Participants were also asked to make recommendations that might improve the initial experience for part-time students.

The questionnaire was piloted to increase the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire (Oppenheim, 1992; Morrison, 1993; Wilson and McLean, 1994: 47). Alterations were made based on the 18 returns and data analyses.

The questionnaire (Appendix E) and a short explanatory letter were posted to 200 students. This included a direct reference to the confidentiality of the respondents' answers. A stamped addressed envelope was enclosed for the respondent's reply. However, there were only 50 responses (25%). Possible reasons for the low return rate may have included pressure on the student's time or a belief that the questionnaire would not be accepted after the stated return date. One of the factors that Hoinville and Jowell (1978) discuss in connection with maximising response levels is the follow-up letter, which has been shown to be the most productive. Therefore consideration was given to a reminder being sent out to increase the response rate. However, due to time constraints within the study and the possible effect upon validity that an increased delay by students responding to the questionnaire might have this method was not adopted. The questionnaire responses were coded and analysed and SPSS was used to provide statistical analysis of the

nominal level data.

### **3.8 Pre-exit guidance experience of students who withdrew**

The focus of this part of the research was specifically on the quality of support and information provided to former part-time students before withdrawing from their course. It targeted the reasons given by those students for their decision to withdraw and their attitudes to undertaking higher education in the future.

#### **3.8.1 Population and Data Collection Procedure**

The population investigated was drawn from the students who had enrolled within the Department of Continuing Education for the first time in 1998/9 and additional new students in 1999/00 to study part-time. In this study a withdrawn student was defined as one who stopped attending the module/s for which they had enrolled before the end of semester one. All the students in this study had notified the University that they had withdrawn.

*A number of students who withdraw do not tell us and this is an area identified as important research for the future.*

Telephone interviews were carried out to investigate the former students' pre-exit experiences (Appendix F). It was considered that this would provide a more personal contact to enable the interviews to go into more depth regarding their perceptions.

In 1998/9 there were 106 individuals who had notified the University that they had withdrawn. Of those 106 who had withdrawn four had been previously involved in this research and therefore would not be further contacted. There were three who were not contacted due to the circumstances of their withdrawal and 31 provided no contact number.

Of the 68 potential contacts in 1998/9, 33 were contacted. Of those, four declined to

take part.

Of the 97 individuals in 1999/00 who had notified the University that they had withdrawn, three had been previously involved in the research, three who were not contacted because of the circumstances related to their withdrawal and 27 left no contact number.

Of the 64 potential contacts in 1999/00, 30 were contacted and three declined to take part.

There were therefore 60 semi-structured telephone interviews carried out on withdrawn students. The interviews were conducted using a schedule that included closed and open questions in order to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The interviews were semi-structured to allow respondents to provide information considered relevant to their experience whilst studying at Paisley and which influenced their decision to leave. It was aimed at three main issues:

1. Why respondents selected a course at the University of Paisley and why they left.
2. Their perceptions of the support and information available to them before they left.
3. Their current attitudes to higher education and to the University of Paisley.

To examine these issues the questions were focussed on:

- respondents' motivation and reasons for studying at the University of Paisley;
- when they attended their classes and when they left the course;
- all of the reasons and the principal reason for leaving their course;
- a comparison of their expectations and their experience of higher education at the University of Paisley.
- whether they were aware that pre-exit support was available at the University;
- their experience of pre-exit information and support;
- respondents' current perceptions of and intentions with regard to returning to higher education and to the University of Paisley.

Most interviews took approximately 10 minutes, although several of the calls lasted considerably longer as the respondent wanted to discuss at length their experience at the university. The data collected were coded and analysed using SPSS. Descriptive information is provided and categorical analyses used where appropriate within the limitations of the small numbers in the sample and the data collected.

### **3.9 Focus group with Education Guidance Advisors**

A focus group was conducted in May, 1999 to investigate current guidance procedures adopted by the Continuing Education Department to provide information and guidance to Combined Awards students. The group included the five Education Guidance Advisors employed by the university and two researchers. To allow discussion without my influence the researcher did not participate in the focus group activities. The Education Guidance Advisors all agreed to take part and were assured that their comments would be treated in confidence.

### **3.10 Personal interviews with Departmental Co-ordinators**

Five in-depth interviews were carried out using a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix G) to explore the experience of the Departmental Co-ordinator with respect to dealing with part-time Combined Awards students. They were selected from the 15 Departmental Co-ordinators. The role of the Departmental Co-ordinator, as agreed by the Modular Programmes Board is outlined in Appendix H. All agreed to have their interviews taped and the participants agreed the accuracy of the content of the transcripts.

In this exploration it was the enquirers' or students' perceptions of their experiences that was being investigated. The investigation also explored the staff's perceptions about dealing with the part-time students. The researcher was aware of the importance of setting aside any preconceived ideas and to focus entirely on the experiences of the students.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **4.0 Background to the part-time students enrolled within the Department of Continuing Education**

### **Overview**

This chapter reviews the development of the growth of the part-time student population since its inception in 1990/91.

The student data upon which this information was compiled was drawn from the registry database. This database can provide robust but limited information on the characteristics of students. Gender, age, Accreditation of Prior Learning and trends in their progression were analysed.

The responses to a survey exploring the most popular modes of study (section 3.3 (a)) by the part-time students are presented.

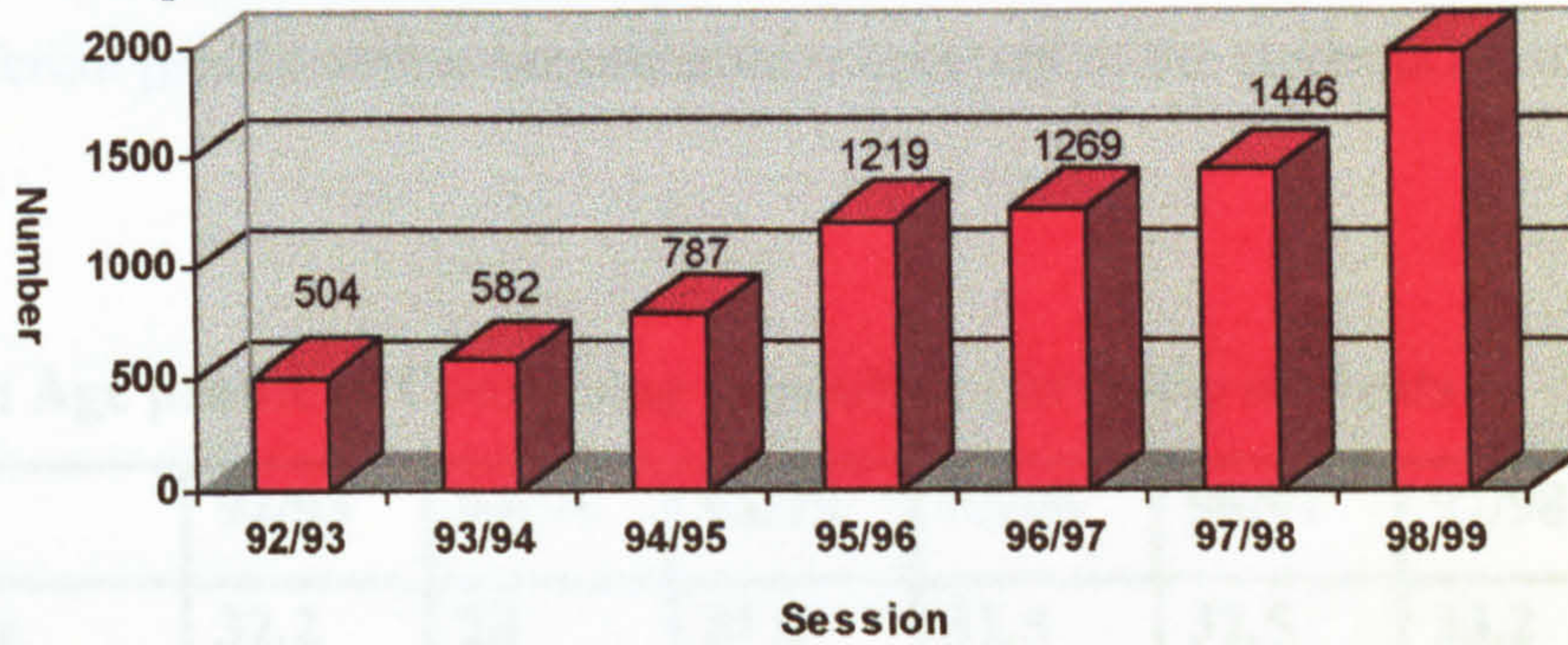
### **4.1 Continuing Education part time student numbers**

A significant feature of Credit Accumulation and Transfer at the University of Paisley was that it introduced part-time study into the University on a scale not previously seen. An academic community can be observed in the evenings from Monday to Thursday and on Saturday mornings.

Part-time day learning opportunities were introduced in 1990/1 (32 students) and evening study was introduced in 1991/2 and since then there has been a steady growth in student numbers. Figure 4.1 shows the growth in part-time students since 1992/3. The numbers participating in part-time day study has shown relatively flat

growth (Knox et al, 1994).

**Figure 4.1 Combined Awards Part-time Numbers 92 - 98 1984**

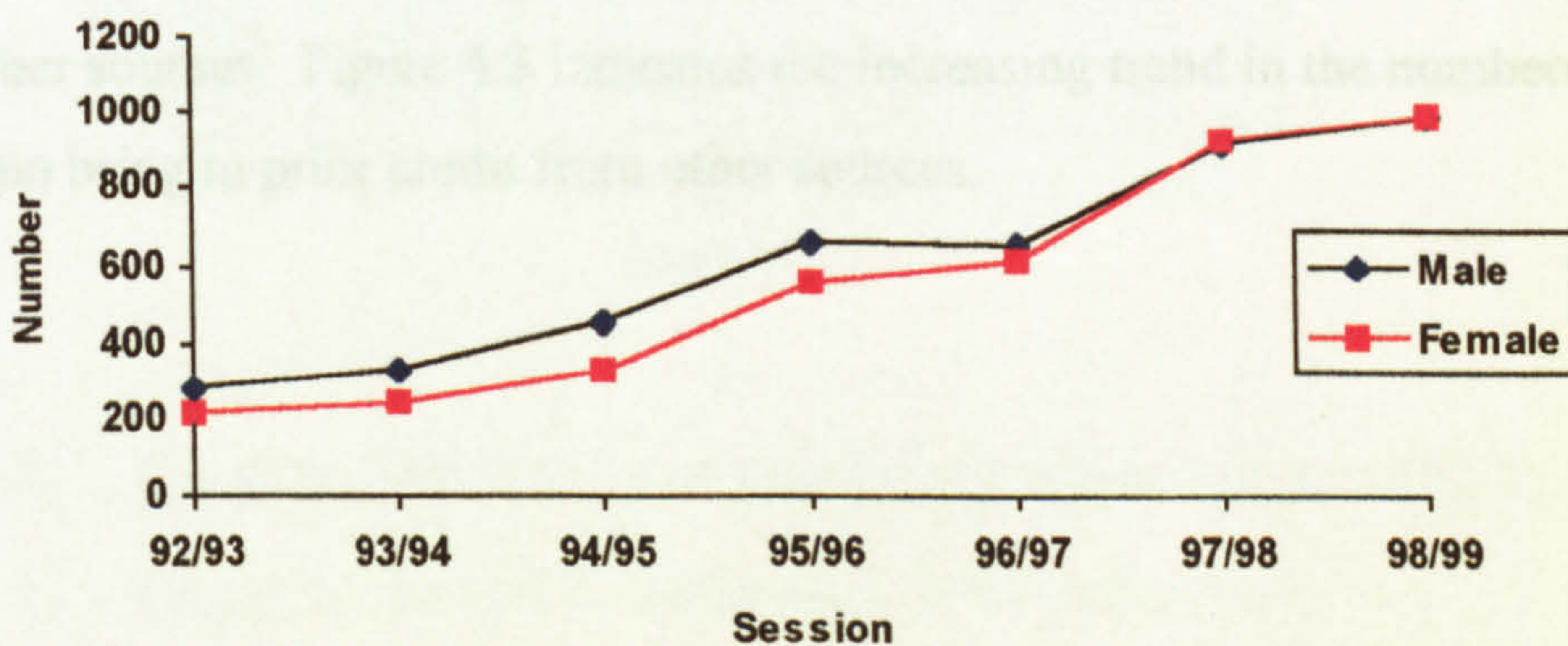


## 4.2 Gender profile of Continuing Education part-time students

Although numbers have expanded, the overall gender balance within the part-time student population has remained fairly consistent until 1996/97. Since 1996/7 there have been an almost equal number of males and females studying part-time.

Figure 4.2 indicates the gender split from 1992-99.

**Figure 4.2 Gender Split 92 - 98**





### **4.3 Age profile of Continuing Education part-time students**

Analysis of the age profile of the part-time student population indicates that the growth of student numbers has not affected the mean age of the part-time student population. As is shown in Table 4.1 this has (with the exception of 1993/4) consistently been in the early 30s. The age profile for the whole University portrays a very different profile with a considerable proportion of the students aged between 18 and 22.

**Table 4.1: Age profile of Continuing Education part-time students**

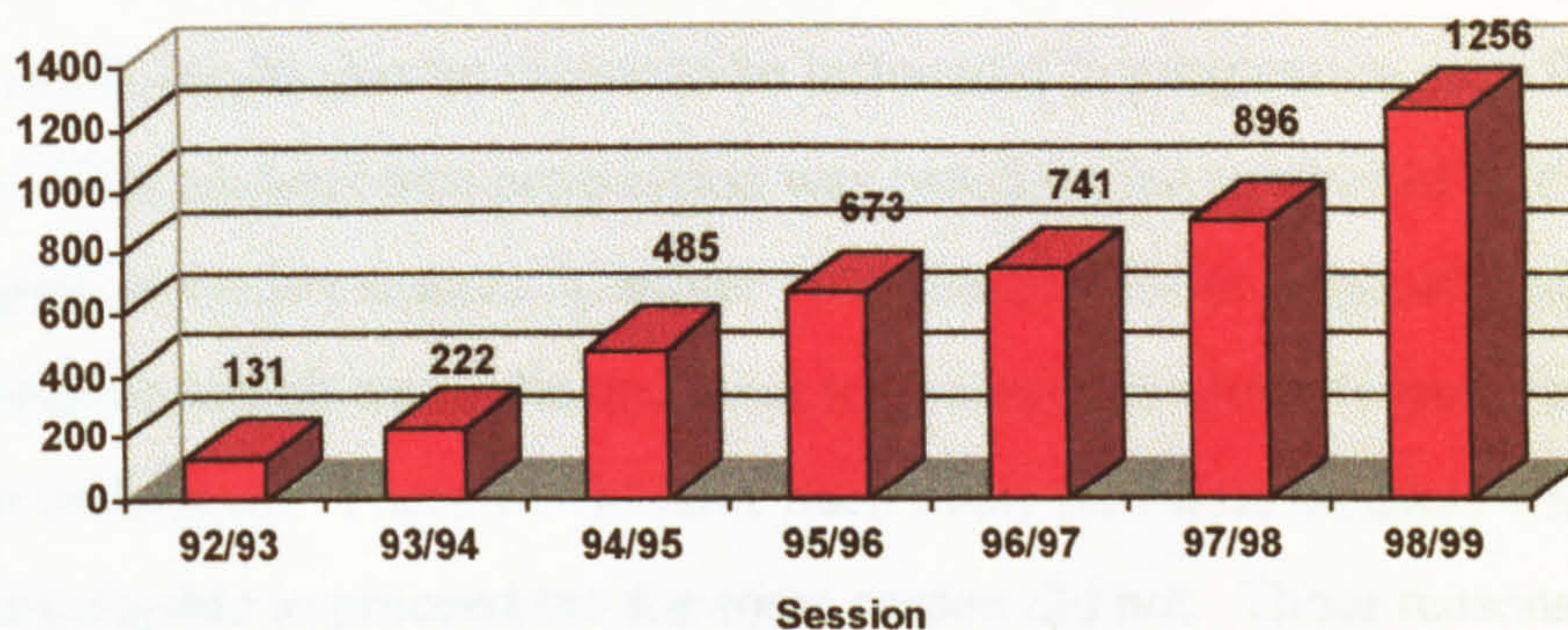
<b>Session</b>	<b>92/93</b>	<b>93/94</b>	<b>94/95</b>	<b>95/96</b>	<b>96/97</b>	<b>97/98</b>	<b>98/99</b>
<b>Mean Age</b>	<b>32.2</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>31.8</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>32.5</b>	<b>33.2</b>	<b>33.4</b>

### **4.4 Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) for part-time students**

In addition to examining age and gender of the part-time student population the extent to which credit from prior learning was being imported and used towards a University qualification was analysed.

Analysis of the numbers of part-time students who were entering with APL from previous sources revealed that many of the students bring in credit rated learning from other sources. Figure 4.3 indicates the increasing trend in the numbers of students who bring in prior credit from other sources.

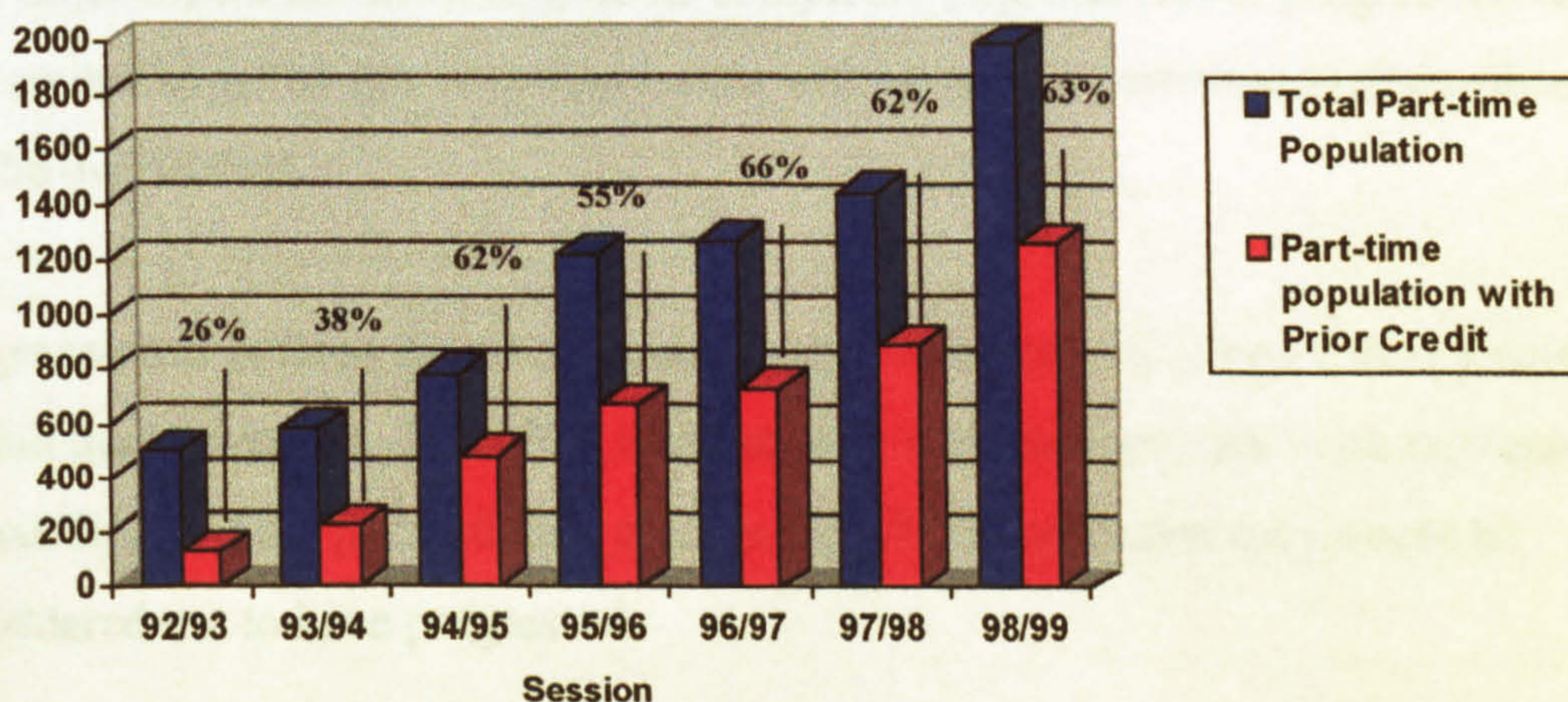
**Figure 4.3 Part-time Students With Prior Credit**



The amount of APL was also analysed by gender and whilst there were slightly more males with accreditation of their prior learning until 1997/8 there is currently an almost equal division.

Figure 4.4 indicates the percentages of the part-time population who have entered with prior credit since 1992/3. The sources of prior credit vary but about 50% were derived from HNC or HND qualifications.

**Figure 4.4 Part-time Students with Prior Credit**



#### **4.5 Progression Rates of part-time students enrolled within the Department of Continuing Education**

It is interesting in light of falling student retention rates to have analysed the limited

characteristics available from student records database such as gender, APL qualifications and age. These factors, which are associated with widening access (Knox, 1994), might also be shown to be influential in progression rates for part-time students. This analysis into progression was based on the number of students who did progress to further studies. Chapter 10 explores a wider range of student characteristics, which was collected from telephone interviews to part-time students who had withdrawn. There would have been many part-time students who would have been eligible to proceed but for some reason did not. Those reasons could include such characteristics as continuing their learning at an alternative learning institution, or that the individual had completed successfully their own goal and was not aiming for an award. Other reasons for non-progression can be personal or work related and these students may only temporarily withdraw and return to part-time study at an appropriate time. Non-progression for part-time students should therefore distinguish between academic failure and a choice not to enrol onto further modules. These factors in part-time study must be taken into account when considering retention of part-time students. It is probably for this reason that there are few available studies on part-time retention and progression. With increasing part-time student numbers, despite its complexity, the analysis of progression rates and an investigation into retention issues with respect to part-time students should not be overlooked.

Progression is defined in this analysis as those who actively pursued their studies within the University. Therefore if the student had been provided with the option of proceeding and not pursued their studies the following session they would be considered not to have progressed.

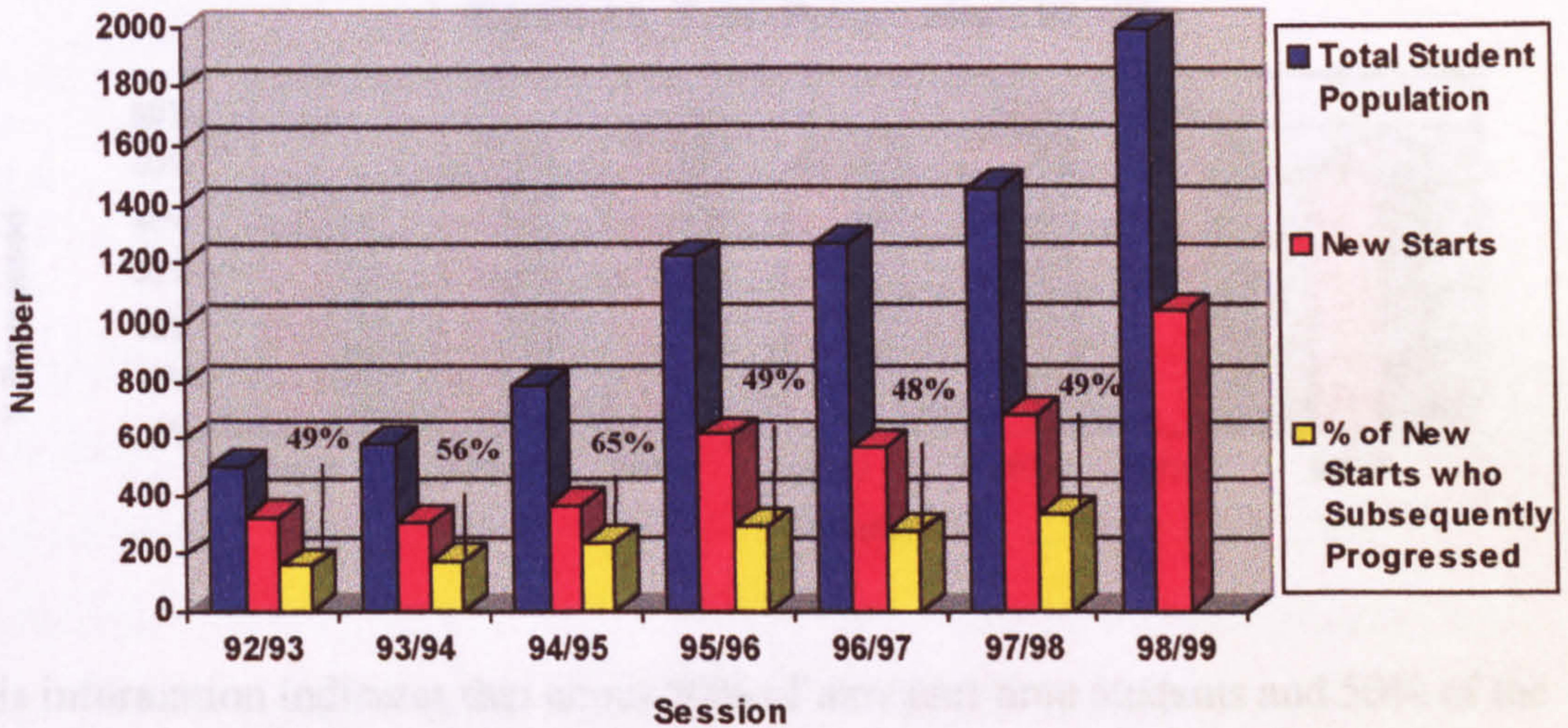
This is in contrast to Johnston's study (1999) which analyses factors influencing undergraduate progression in full-time first year, where it is the exam panel decision to proceed that is used to investigate progression and retention.

Within the progression analysis in this study there has been a focus not on the exam

panel's decision to proceed but upon retention.

Figure 4.5 and Table 4.2 both show the % progression rates of students who had newly started the previous session. It was considered worthwhile analysing this as previous studies indicate that retention and progression is lowest with first year, full-time undergraduate students.

**Figure 4.6 % of New Starts who Subsequently Progressed**



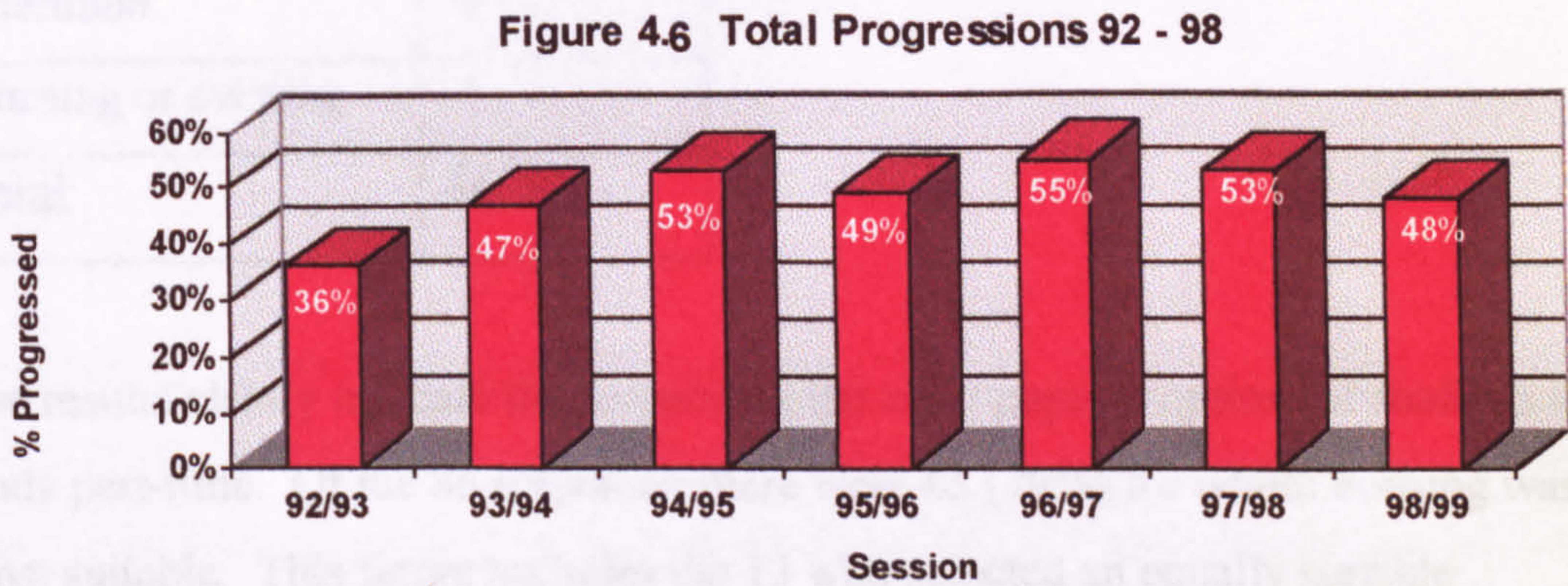
**Table 4.2: % New starts who subsequently progressed**

Session	Total Student Population	New Starts	New Starts Who Subsequently Progressed
92/93	504	323	159 (49%)
93/94	582	306	171 (56%)
94/95	787	368	239 (65%)
95/96	1219	617	300 (49%)
96/97	1269	575	275 (48%)
97/98	1446	682	337 (49%)
98/99	1984	1036	N/A

To draw a comparison between new students and continuing students the total part-time student population was analysed for year to year progression. Students who

would not be continuing to study as they were exiting with a student award were removed from the student numbers prior to this analysis.

The result of this analysis of year to year progression by the total part-time student population is shown in Figure 4.6.



This information indicates that about 50% of new part time students and 50% of the part-time student population **choose** not continue to study.

#### **4.6 Survey of the most popular time to study part-time**

A postal survey was used to investigate the most popular time to study as a part-time student. Of the 200 questionnaires sent out to part-time students in September, 1998. 86 were returned. The first question students were asked was to indicated the most suitable time for attending class. The results are shown in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: The most popular time to study part-time**

Most suitable option	Frequency
Evening	52
Morning	9
Saturday	8
Afternoon or evening	7
Saturday or evening	5
Afternoon	4
Morning or evening	1
Total	86

The results clearly indicate that evening is the most popular option for students who study part-time. Of the 86 responses there were 65 (76%) for whom evening was the most suitable. This figure includes the 13 who selected an equally suitable alternative. Evening was also identified by Lyons (1993) as the most popular time for part-time students to study. Their survey also found that afternoons were the least suitable time to study part-time.

This survey asked the students if their most popular option was not available what a suitable alternative might be.

The results are shown in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4 An alternative time to study part-time**

Most suitable alternative	Frequency
Saturday	42
Not to study	19
Evening	10
Afternoon	8
Evening or Saturday	4
Morning	2
Missing Response	1
Total	86

It is interesting that whilst Saturday was not distinctly more popular than mornings or afternoons that if evenings were not available Saturday mornings would clearly become an attractive option. Of the 85 responses 46 (54%) indicated that this would be the best alternative.

Also of importance was that there were 19 students who were currently studying in the evening and this was the **only** time suitable to them.

Finally, the students were asked whether semi-distance learning would be of interest to them. This was explained as a 'mixed mode' delivery that would require, for example, attendance four times per semester and be supported by learning materials. Of the 86 responses 62 (72%) indicated an interest.

Clearly, this is an area for future development.

*Recommendation:*

*Encourage development of mixed mode learning materials.*

## **4.7 Summary**

The profile of the part-time Combined Awards student population is quite unlike that of the rest of the University with an average age of just over 30 and currently slightly more than 60% coming in with APL and others entering with no formal entry qualifications. The University is committed to widening access, increasing participation rates and providing quality higher education which is responsive to market demands and student needs. The current market demands evening provision and Saturday mornings prove a popular alternative. There is evidence of demand for the delivery of semi-distance learning modules and their development is recommended.

The importance of sound educational guidance is central to the success of part-time provision both for the individuals and the University. This expertise is located in the Department of Continuing Education. The following Chapter provides an overview of the structure and function of the Department of Continuing Education.



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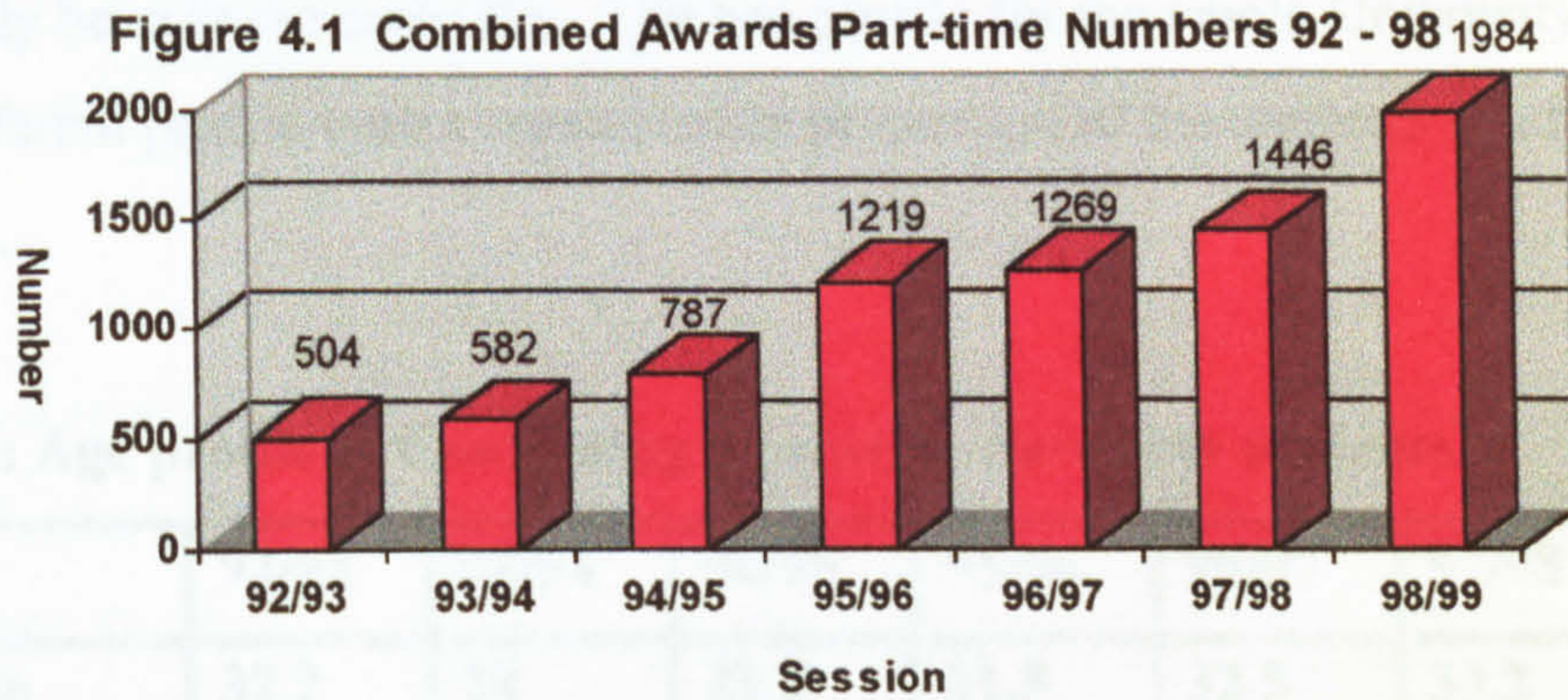
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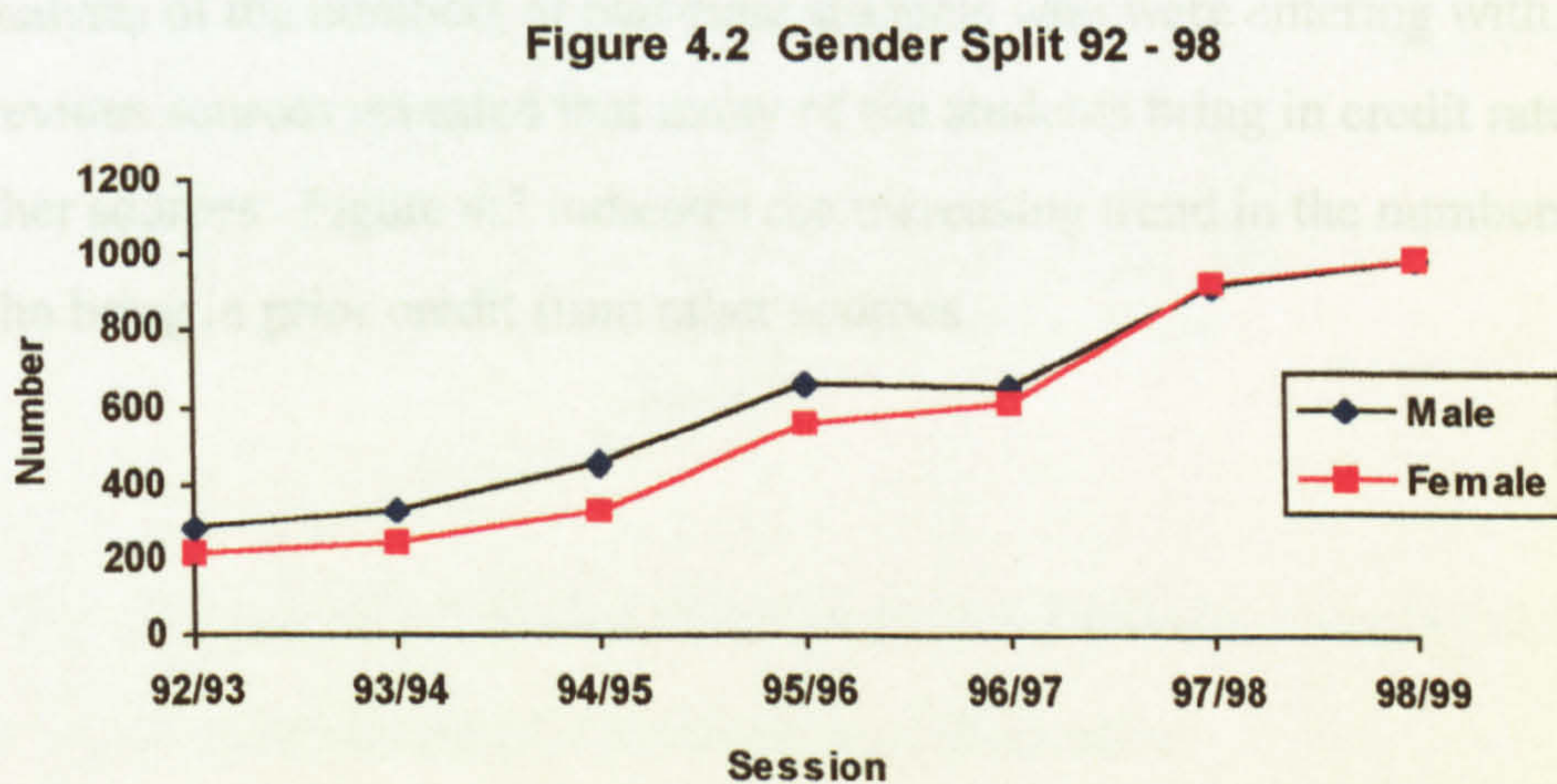
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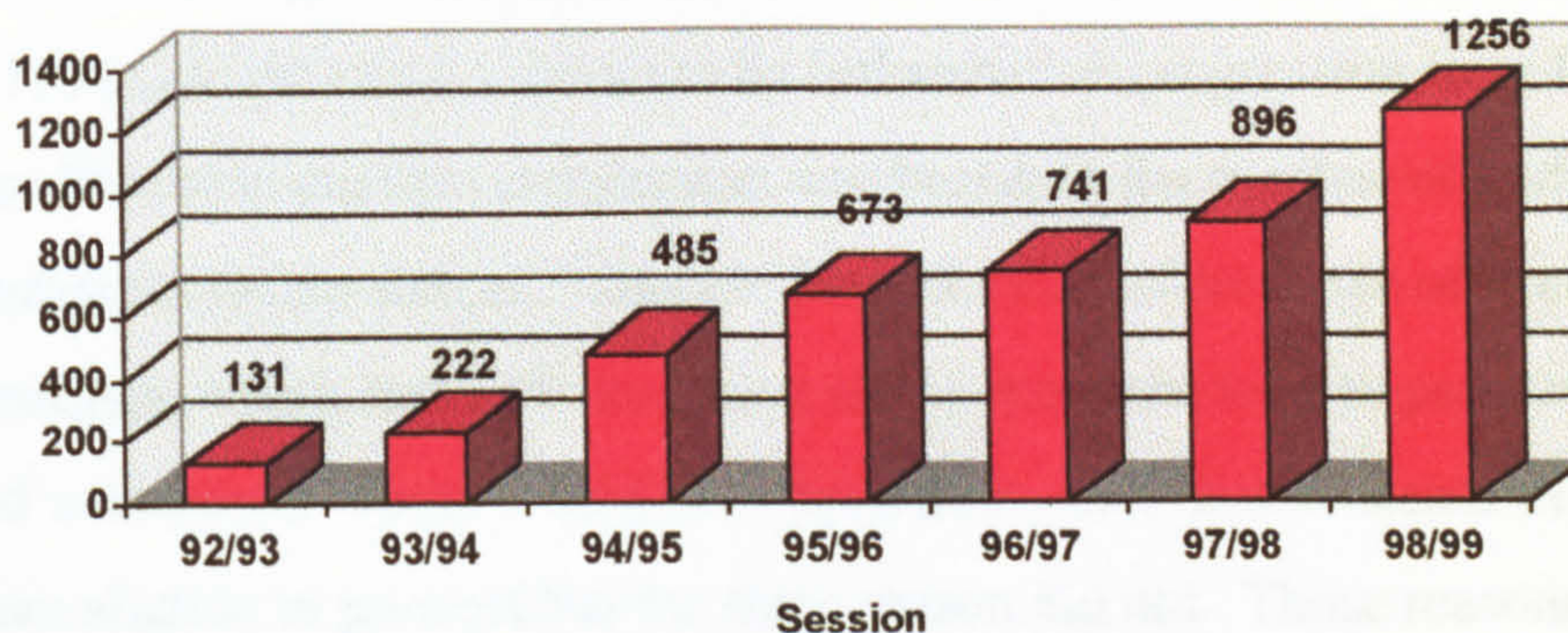
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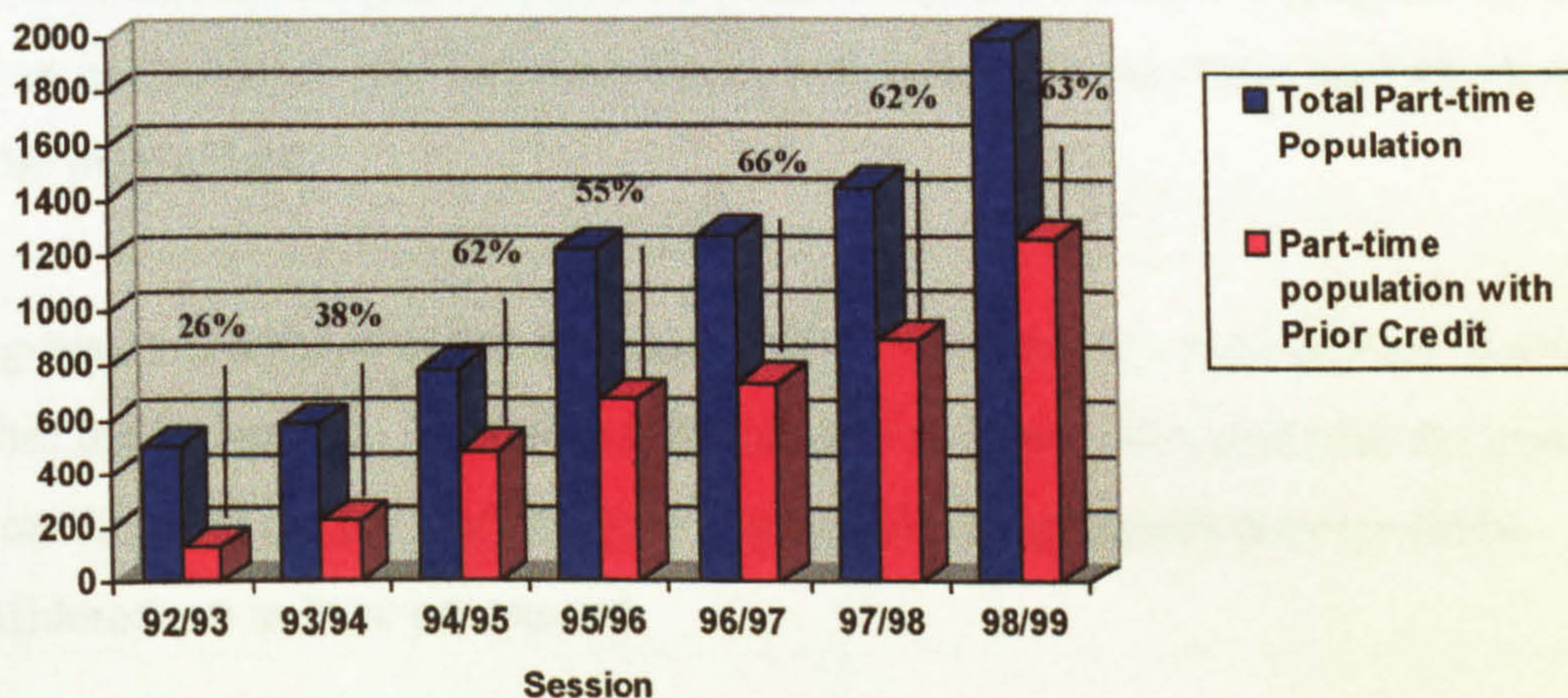
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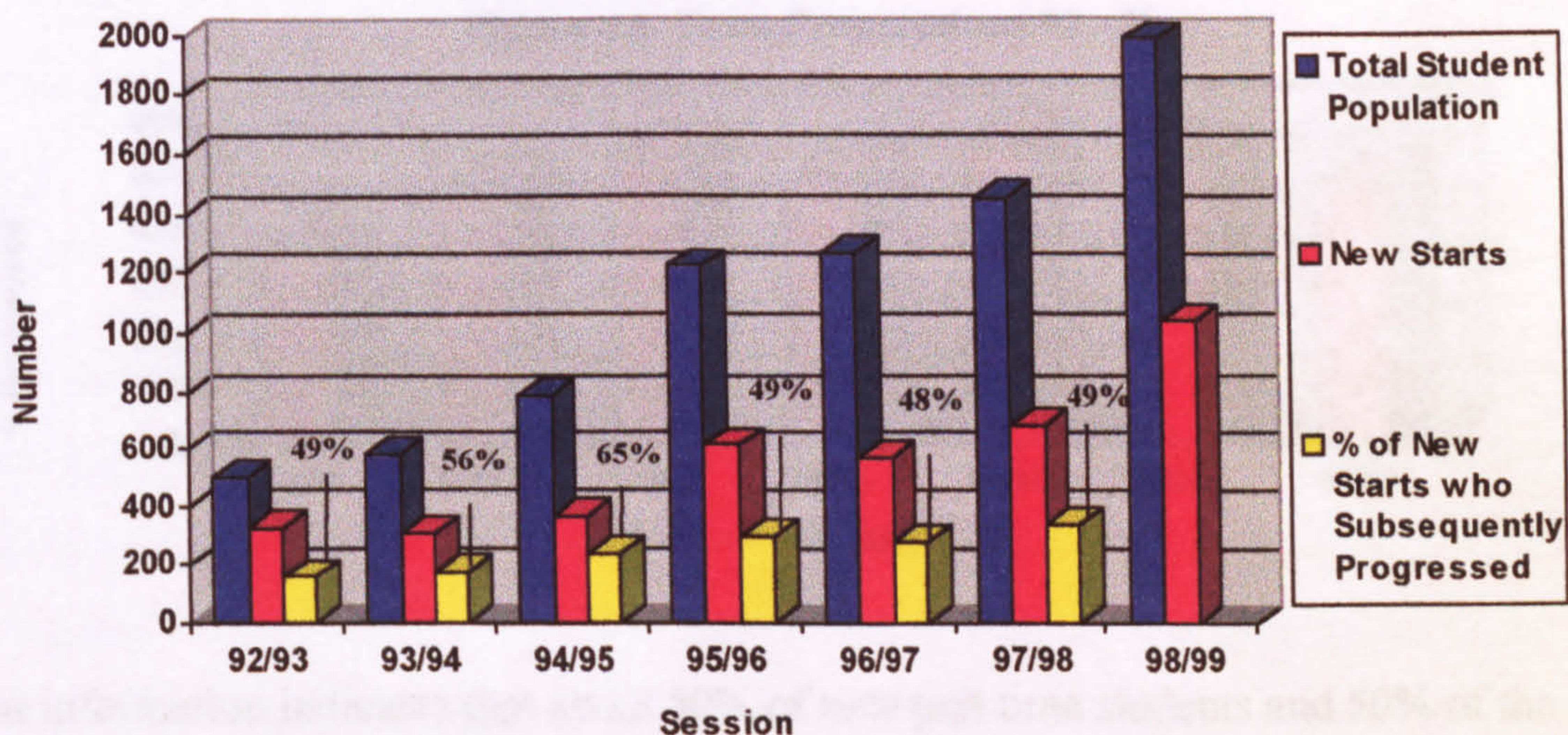
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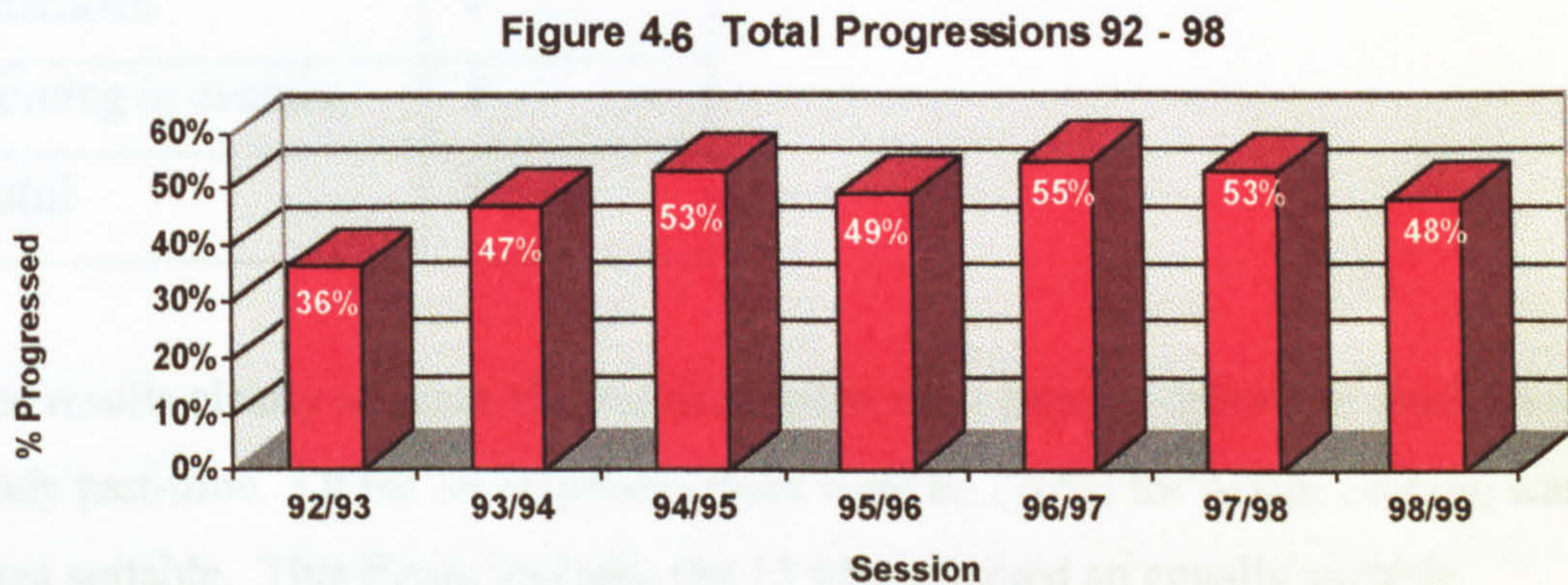
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*Encourage development of mixed mode learning materials.*

## **4.7 Summary**

The profile of the part-time Combined Awards student population is quite unlike that of the rest of the University with an average age of just over 30 and currently slightly more than 60% coming in with APL and others entering with no formal entry qualifications. The University is committed to widening access, increasing participation rates and providing quality higher education which is responsive to market demands and student needs. The current market demands evening provision and Saturday mornings prove a popular alternative. There is evidence of demand for the delivery of semi-distance learning modules and their development is recommended.

The importance of sound educational guidance is central to the success of part-time provision both for the individuals and the University. This expertise is located in the Department of Continuing Education. The following Chapter provides an overview of the structure and function of the Department of Continuing Education.

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **5.0 The Department of Continuing Education**

### **Overview**

There are many practical implications resulting from the provision of flexible learning opportunities. The Department of Continuing Education supports the students and manages and co-ordinates the part-time provision.

This chapter outlines the structure of the Department of Continuing Education. A focus group was held with the Department's team of Educational Guidance Advisors to explore used to explore their role. In-depth interviews were also conducted with Departmental Co-ordinators to discuss their role in supporting the students and liaising with Department.

To facilitate the insight into the part-time student experience an overview of the structure and function of the Department of Continuing Education who are responsible for the Combined Awards Programme is described below.

The students who enrol within the Department of Continuing Education are identified as studying on a Combined Awards Programme. The modules they choose to study are all credit rated and there are currently over 1,500 modules to select from. Of those there are approximately 200 available in the evening over an academic session. There are no formal entry qualifications to studying part-time and each individual application is considered. There are different entry levels appropriate dependent upon an individual's prior learning and requirements. They can choose from a wide range of subject areas and if they are returning to education after a period of no formal learning there are credit rated introductory modules which have been especially devised to facilitate the University experience for the adult learner.

Flexibility is a key feature of the provision - modes of study allowing students to select day, evening and weekend study; points of entry dependent on prior credit and individuals goals; tailor made individual programmes of study; exit awards and titles being based upon the amount of study and modules selected.

The Departmental structure currently comprises a Head of Department, a Senior Education Guidance Advisor who is also the Course Leader for the Combined Awards programme, five Education Guidance Advisors (Education Guidance Advisors), the University Access team (three individuals), an administrative assistant, a technical assistant, a research assistant and seven secretarial/ clerical assistants. The Departmental structure is illustrated in Appendix I .

There is therefore an established infrastructure to deal with communications and support to the increasing number of enquirers and enrolled students within the Department. The Education Guidance Advisors are pivotal to the success of the students in providing pre-entry educational guidance including advice on accreditation for prior learning, subject selection and devising cohesive pathways of study based on the individual. Ongoing educational guidance is necessary as students can select their modules on an annual basis or semester by semester. Frequently students who do select their modules for the session change their module selections before the start of semester 2. It is important that this is done in conjunction with an Education Guidance Advisor, as each course of study has to be checked and approved as modules are selected. Once a student has enrolled they are allocated to an Education Guidance Advisor who is responsible for approving each student's module selection and providing information or advice relating to their students.

In order to assist with subject specialist advice there are subject specialist co-ordinators. These Departmental Co-ordinators closely liaise with Education Guidance Advisors, assist with specific subject questions and are all members of the Combined Awards Programme Committee. The Combined Awards Programme Committee, which the Course Leader chairs, reports to Modular Programmes Board.

The Programme's Approval subcommittee is made up of members of the Modular Programmes Board and this provides the Quality Assurance procedures. The procedures involved with programme approval and how the Education Guidance Advisors are involved are summarised in a flow diagram in Appendix J.

Although adult educational guidance has worked its way up the political agenda it continues to suffer from a lack of clarity about what it actually is and what distinguishes it from the various activities that may contribute to it. Information is obviously an important element in the educational guidance process but Watts (1998) cautions against the notion that all adults need is information plus a little advice. Clark (1999) warns providers of educational guidance to adults that there is a danger, particularly with the current interest in the new help lines and the extensive databases developed to support them, that the provision of even more comprehensive information is seen as an adequate response to the needs of adults. Educational Guidance Advisors clearly need access to appropriate and comprehensive information. This remains to be an increasing challenge within the institution as module delivery changes to meet the needs of employers. Other changes need to be considered as the Government introduces strategies such as the Fee Waiver Scheme in 1998 for unemployed or on low incomes and more recently the Individual Learning Accounts introduced in Scotland, July 2000. The Individual Learning Accounts target individuals in full-time employment who want to study part-time. The role of providing educational guidance to an individual involves a wide range of activities which go far beyond the simple provision of 'information and a little advice'. It is itself an educational process which aims to enhance an individual's knowledge, confidence and understanding so that they can become more effective as lifelong learners.

When educational guidance is provided to the students the Education Guidance Advisors can investigate their aspirations, educational and vocational background and their expectations.

In 1998, 1,527 part-time students enrolled for the first time with the Department of Continuing Education. The Education Guidance Advisor's remit includes the provision of educational guidance to:

- explain the Combined Awards provision in terms of designing an appropriate programme of study for students;
- consider their prior credit and previous learning in relation to the most appropriate study direction;
- provide them with ongoing advice and ensure their module selection meets award and University regulations.

To explore further educational guidance provided to the increasing part-time adult learners a focus group with the five Education Guidance Advisors was held to explore how they perceived their role in relation to the student's experience.

To expand the understanding of the professional's role and their relationship with the part-time students the perceptions of the Education Guidance Advisors were first explored and later those of the Departmental Co-ordinators.

## **5.1 Focus group with Education Guidance Advisors**

The main issues addressed during the 90 minute discussion were:

- the definition of educational guidance provided by the Department of Continuing Education;
- consideration of the Educational Guidance Advisor's role;
- the profile of the part-time students who are likely to seek educational guidance;
- standardised procedures with respect to effective educational guidance;
- consideration of possible barriers inhibiting the effectiveness of guidance provision.

The Education Guidance Advisors were asked to define what they do that is educational guidance. After some group interaction describing in general terms what they do a more detailed definition evolved:

“facilitating access to the provision of the University in the most appropriate way for a particular individual.....and building on appropriate programmes of study for that individual according to his or her needs.”

Consideration was then given to how they fulfil this role. They believe that they are facilitators, directing students to appropriate study options. It was interesting that although they would advise students against a module selection if they felt that it was not appropriate that they did not describe themselves as honest brokers. Clearly, whilst they felt institutional pressures to maintain student numbers and they did see part of their role as promoting the University they believed that it was inappropriate for them to market courses.

“...we hope they choose the right course – obviously that’s where the guidance aspect comes in but fundamentally we’re not honest brokers”.

Impartiality is often cited as a key principle of guidance. Impartial guidance is integral to the Scottish Executives’ vision for lifelong learning and supports key initiatives to achieve that purpose (Adult Guidance in Scotland, 1999). However, in line with the obvious feelings of the Education Guidance Advisors one recent survey concluded that practitioners recognise this issue as problematic, (Connelly et al, 1996).

It was apparent that an important part of their role was to refer students internally to Departmental Co-ordinators, Student Advisory or to appropriate external agencies. One Education Guidance Advisor said:

“...if somebody cannot access the provision they want here...(we could say) it may be in your best interest to shop around and in that case hopefully refer the person onto the appropriate source such as careers service”.

They are obviously providing wide-ranging advice. One Education Guidance Advisor declared it could be about:

“anything from not being able to get books in the bookshop to giving advice on essay writing or alternative module selections”

In addition to providing advice to students they also see part of their role as providing advice to academic departments who do not have the same level of expertise in dealing with flexible learning programmes.

They felt that barriers to other guidance services existed as although part-time students could access all the available support provision they were not available in the evenings or at weekends. The Education Guidance Advisors felt that the other support services should consider increasing provision to this student group.

In a recent survey carried out (Freegard et al, forthcoming) the University of Paisley part-time student support provision was highlighted as an example of good practice. They were one of the few institutions that provided the full range of support services to their part-time students.

It was the opinion of the Education Guidance Advisors that the part-time student population also experienced problems accessing academic staff to ask specialist questions. This meant that part of their role was acting as a mediator between students and academic departments. For this to be effective the Education Guidance Advisors pointed out the importance of “the channels of communication and things actually being done, being carried through”. Although they cannot provide specialised information on all subject areas they can pass information on.

As a difficulty the Education Guidance Advisors mentioned the provision of timetabling to students studying during the day. The students have to be passed back to the department to receive accurate information. The Education Guidance



Advisors commented on how frustrated part-time students can be when they are given inaccurate information or are passed back to the academic departments concerned when they have many other commitments on their time. It was also raised that this issue is relevant for full-time students who are now increasingly in employment.

The profile of students who seek guidance was discussed. There was a suggestion by the Education Guidance Advisors that the student often want information to enable them to make choices rather than guidance.

“They tend to know what they are after and they want to know how they can access it...provided we can come forward with all the goods, that will solve the problem”.

A discussion about the dramatic increase in student numbers and the heterogeneous student population indicated that they were acutely aware of the different expectations and needs compared to the traditional school-leaving student. A number of students they see need information very quickly so they can obtain approval and financial assistance from their employer whilst others have been away from education for a long time and have issues with respect to their level of confidence and fear of returning to study. Alternatively, as shown in Figure 4.4, there are many building upon HNCs and HNDs or other sources of prior credit and their pathways have to be devised. Therefore, there was agreement about the variation in the level of guidance needed by an individual. They also recognised that there were many of the learners who took responsibility for their own learning and they had very little contact with whilst others they saw frequently.

The increase in student numbers and the diversity of the student population has implications for educational guidance provision. Guidelines do exist but standardised procedures are not always appropriate, as the Education Guidance Advisors have to tailor the advice to meet each individual's needs depending on their profile.

“...it’s quite demanding in that you have constantly got to be ahead all the time. It makes it very interesting but sometimes it’s quite terrifying as well because it’s not static”.

They felt that development of educational guidance procedures had developed informally and formally and have evolved in response to the expansion of the programme.

It was recognised by the Education Guidance Advisors that that their role has developed well beyond “building appropriate programmes of study....and promoting the Combined Awards Programme” as its popularity has grown. They also believe that they are best placed to hear what students say they want and are responding to that as well as looking at future needs. They stated that:

“communication within the institution is really vital”.

They felt that the student experience would be improved if a free flow of communication existed among all departments. There is agreement amongst them that they should be more involved in strategic planning and that academic and support provision needs to be considered by the institution. This confirms the suggestions made by McNair (1998) who indicates that to be effective guidance must be central to learner centred higher education courses rather than being an “emergency service added at the margins to cope with problems”.

## **5.2 In-depth interviews with Departmental Co-ordinators**

Five Departmental Co-ordinators were interviewed about their role. Each interview, which was taped, took about 1 hour in duration and was conducted during November 1999. They were selected on the basis of the first five volunteers to respond. The

departments that they represented were languages, management, land economics, mathematics and chemistry. The interview schedule was aimed to explore how they perceived their role and their communication channels with the staff in the Department of Continuing Education, in particular the Education Guidance Advisors, and the students. The interview schedule is available in Appendix G. It was explained to the co-ordinators that an investigation was being carried out exploring the student experience with a particular emphasis on the students' perceptions of the information and guidance provided at various stages.

Of the five interviewed all had been Departmental Co-ordinators for more than three years and two had been involved since the introduction of this role.

When asked about what the role of being a Departmental Co-ordinator involved the following themes emerged and the frequency of the factor is indicated in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: The role of the Departmental Co-ordinator**

Role	Frequency mentioned
Communication with module co-ordinators and lecturers	4
Communication with Continuing Education and Education Guidance Advisors	4
Communication with Students	4
Subject Specific Information and advice	4
Exam Panel Preparation	2
Administrative	2
Publicity	1

(N=5)

Clearly channels of communication between students and staff was seen as a major part of their role. Acknowledgement of the importance of their expertise in providing subject specific information was also recognised.

The importance of communication links and subject specific expertise were key features also identified by the Education Guidance Advisors in the focus group.

When asked about how often they especially met with Continuing Education students there was agreement that they tended to see some students on one or two occasions and that there were only a few they saw frequently. One co-ordinator commented that:

“There is no difference between the Continuing Education students and the other students – they don’t create any particular problems”.

The part-time students mainly contacted the co-ordinators by arranging to meet with them personally. Telephone was also frequently used.

One co-ordinator stated:

“They can phone me up and indeed they do, and my colleagues”.

However, the increase in the use of e-mail was mentioned and it was commented that:

“One or two students have picked up this idea of e-mail and then they use it quite a lot. But with the majority it just doesn’t occur to them at all. Most of them e-mail me from home if they have a machine”.

It is worth considering that the use of e-mail could be emphasised to students as a possible method for part-time students to make contact with appropriate staff if they have access to the Internet at home or in work. Although they are able to set up an e-mail account in the University it would not be an ideal channel of communication for a part-time student unless they could easily access the Internet. Feedback from a Continuing Education student programme questionnaire returned (427 responses) in July 2000 indicated that 68% have easy access, 18% restricted access and only 11% had no access (3% did not respond). However, whilst these figures are encouraging it only provides an indication of computer access and not to Internet access. The student programme questionnaire will be altered to ascertain this information for 2000/1.

It was apparent that the main issues that part-time students came with to Departmental Co-ordinators were related to either module content or timetables if the students were studying part-time during the day. The timetable issue was further consolidated when the co-ordinators were asked if there was one issue that students raise more than any other.

Similarly, the Education Guidance Advisors in their focus group had emphasised their difficulties in providing students with day timetabling information and the frustration that this often caused.

The co-ordinators were asked if they referred students to other advisory or information sources. There was only one co-ordinator who provided a negative response whilst others said they quite often referred them to their Education Guidance Advisor or sometimes to the student advisory services. There was a distinction made in identifying the appropriate referral.

“Occasionally I will refer them to SAS (*Student Advisory Service*) if they have some personal problems, learning difficulties or things of that nature – a general counselling.....”.

However, the importance of receiving educational guidance was also recognised.

“I’m only concerned with management (subject area).....many students want to fit management in with languages, accounting etc. If they had spoken to someone prior, they would have realised that they need to speak to someone else about that in Continuing Education”.

They were asked about any institutional procedures, which make their role as a Departmental Co-ordinator difficult. Lack of up to date information with respect to enrolled students and accurate module information on the module browser were identified as causing difficulties. Both of these procedures are the responsibility of registry.

Additional problems identified were capping of class sizes (this issue was resolved) and admitting students to modules that they are not suited for. This co-ordinator felt very strongly that the responsibility for admitting students to a module should be with the department that delivers the module. They discussed level and its complexity and emphasised that:

“You need to be really quite careful to establish which course is appropriate”.

This issue of suitability of module content and level is one that the students also raised. It was a key feature with those students who withdrew.

When asked if they had identified procedures that particularly helped them perform their role. Excellent communication channels with Education Guidance Advisors, development of an established system, provision of module lists and the University introducing blocked timetabling during the day were factors which were considered as beneficial.

Finally, each co-ordinator was asked if they could suggest any procedural changes to make their role more effective.

More support in providing timetabling information to students by Continuing Education was mentioned as was the importance of accurate timetabling information. Most timetable issues arise for those students who are studying on a part-time basis during the day. Currently, it is the responsibility of the academic departments to provide the students with this information. More information on which modules the students were studying was information that was requested by the Departmental Co-ordinators. One co-ordinator felt if Continuing Education could provide a checklist of Combined Awards students studying on their subject area and the modules being studied that this would help e.g. at exam panels. Necessary information could then be provided to and obtained from the Module Co-ordinators as required.

*Recommendation for 2000/1*

*To discuss the feasibility of providing each Departmental Co-ordinator with a list of students within their subject area and the details of the modules they are currently studying. These details could be provided during each semester allowing Module Co-ordinators and Departmental Co-ordinators to note anomalies e.g. at exam time.*

The difficulties of using the module browser (the database which holds the module descriptors) were recognised because of the lack of up to date information. This was an issue of concern by co-ordinators and is an on-going issue within the University.

*Recommendation for 2000/1*

*To pursue persistently the issue of the module browser not being up to date via Combined Awards Programme committee, the Modular Programmes Board and with the University Registrar.*

The staff within the Department of Continuing Education and the Departmental Co-ordinators are clearly aware that individuals can be left bewildered by the amount of information. As the amount of information available increases so does the need for help to make sense of it. Educational guidance is perceived by advisors as a great deal more than purveying the information adults need to make their next step but rather an integral part of their educational pathway.

The University has been acutely aware of the issue day timetabling. Classes during the day have been largely scheduled to meet the needs of the full-time students and hence may not be compatible with the needs of part-timers. In 1999/00 the University introduced blocked timetabling which will benefit the University staff and allow expansion for part-time day provision.



# CHAPTER SIX

## 6.0 Gaining an insight to the part-time student experience by active participation

### Overview

This chapter outlines a strategy used in the research design to help devise the overall planning of the project and instrumentation to be used.

By attending two modules over semester one of 1997 the experience of being a student whilst having both family and work responsibilities was explored. Le Compte and Priessle (1993:93-4) describe varying degrees of participation. They provide an overview of participant as observer and observer as participant. They also describe the 'complete participant'. In this instance it was the 'complete participant' method adopted. The researcher takes on an insider role in the group being studied. The class members were told at the outset that a better working knowledge was desired of what it was really like to undertake two modules per semester in an area, although unfamiliar, of interest and cope with the assessments, work and family commitments.

Two modules were selected in unfamiliar subject areas, Scottish History, pre-1707 and an Introduction to Literature. Both were credit rated at 15 points at Scottish degree level one. The aim was to gain a better understanding of what this type of commitment to studying entailed, to observe the ongoing behaviour of the other students studying part-time and identify any salient features to inform the design of the proposed research project exploring the part-time student experience. Because it took place over an extended period of time (the length of a semester is 15 weeks) a more intimate and informal relationship was developed with class members. By being a participant in each group over the semester the dynamics of the group, the situations, the people and their personalities was captured.

After each class brief notes were recorded as quickly as possible. This was never later than the following day. Impressions of the evening, topics of conversation relevant to the provision, observations and relevant views of participants were recorded.

In the Scottish History class there were four males and four females. The age profile of the group ranged from early 30s to late 60s. There was a strong personal interest in Scottish History and they represented individuals for whom lifelong learning was a high priority in their own personal and social life. Four individuals in the group had degrees in alternative subject areas and there was one individual whose new career, as Curator of a local Castle, inspired him to increase his knowledge of Scottish History. There were two members of this group who were retired and the others were all in full-time employment. Only four members (including the researcher) of the class made the commitment to undertake the assessment but all members of the class came well prepared to each class and were enthusiastic and keen to participate.

In the Introduction to Literature class there were nine students with ages ranging from early 20s to late 40s. There were seven females and two males. One female withdrew after two weeks because of work commitments. Again, all students were in employment and had selected the module on the basis of personal interest. Although, the module had been selected for interest there was an enthusiasm by each individual to undertake the assessments and upon successful completion gain the SCOTCAT credit. As with the members in the Scottish History group their motivation and enthusiasm was high. One noteworthy point within this group was not only their interest in the module being studied but also their desire to learn how the SCOTCAT system worked. Upon enrolling this was not considered important to them or their goal at that time. However, by the end of the module and after many discussions and increased understanding of the system each individual was aware of whether they had any prior credit from their previous qualifications and how they could build upon this towards an award. Each individual within this class selected

further modules and five planned relevant pathways building upon their prior qualifications.

This emphasised how students may start to study for personal interests and a clear initial goal but after gaining an increased understanding of how credit accumulation and transfer system works and the opportunity for it to fit in with other work and social commitments that their initial goal can alter. This supports Graham's (1991) findings which indicated that despite having accumulated a wealth of knowledge and skills, many mature entrants consistently undervalued their previous achievements and, rather than consider building upon it, tended to discard it.

The group dynamics were most impressive within both classes. It was also remarkable how much information individuals wanted and how as groups they were interested in each other's learning biographies and available learning options.

The main themes emerging were:

- the respect given to completing the allocated tasks and the amount of effort by each individual in preparation for class activities or assessments in conjunction with other commitments;
- the genuine interest in the subject being taught;
- the interaction between class members and lecturers benefiting all;
- the attitude of the participants recognising learning as being enjoyable;
- the motivation provided by the lecturers to the students and vice versa.
- the student's initial goal can change as their understanding of available options increases.

The main features observed were the different types of adult learners with a variety of goals, different enthusiasm levels, peer support and social behaviour and interaction with the lecturer. There was fear of assessment, typical of an adult learner, and evidence of genuine enquiry; "how can I find out about..?" "what can be done about..?" "who would I see about..?" and "where do I find these..?" were frequently asked questions with regard to both the subjects and more generally about

the university facilities and provision. There was clearly an interest in the wide range of learning opportunities available and how the SCOTCAT system worked. This was new to those adult learners.

These observations and participant activities were useful tools for giving insight into the part-time student experience. It provided a focus to help generate a set of aims about which data could be gathered by questionnaires and assisted in the design of the research project to explore the part-time student experience.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## 7.0 The Enquirers' Experiences

### Overview

This chapter outlines the results of an analysis, by telephone interviews, of the experience individuals had when making an initial enquiry to the University about part-time study in 1998; the recommendations made based upon the analysis; and the actions taken based upon the results. To evaluate the impact of the actions the telephone interviews were repeated during semester one, 1999 with another cohort of individuals making initial enquiries about part-time learning opportunities. The data collection procedure is described in detail in section 3.6. Gender was the only biographical information recorded to ensure the anonymity of participants in the study. The population included those individuals who made enquiries irrespective of whether or not they became students. It was envisaged that current students in particular would be more likely to give their true perception of their enquiry experience if anonymity were ensured.

### 7.1 Gender profile of enquirers interviewed:1998

Of the 80 students interviewed 54 were females. Table 7.1 indicates the gender split within each of the two groups. Group 1 are those enquirers who did not enrol as part-time students whilst Group 2 are those who chose to commence studies at the University of Paisley.

Table 7.1 Telephone interviews by gender, 1998

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Group 1 (not enrolled)</i>	<i>Group 2 (enrolled)</i>
<b>Males</b>	8 (20%)	18 (45%)
<b>Females</b>	32 (80%)	22 (55%)
<b>Total</b>	<u>40</u>	<u>40</u>

This gender split needed to be taken into account when interpreting the results. An investigation was therefore made into the relationship between gender and the decision of whether or not to study at the university. The possibility that the enquirer's goal at the time of enquiry might be related to undertaking a course was also considered.

The gender balance of the enquirers who participated in the study in 1998 does not reflect the fairly balanced gender division of the population of part-time students within the University. Figure 4.2 illustrates the gender profile of the part-time student population enrolled in part-time studies since 1992. One factor that was not considered in 1998/99 was the gender balance of all the enquirers. This factor was taken into consideration the following year to ascertain the gender profile of enquirers. Interestingly of the participants interviewed in 1998, 69% of the males who made an enquiry enrolled as students whilst only 41% of the females enrolled.

### 7.1.2 Gender profile of interviewees: 1998 and 1999

A comparison was made between the participants interviewed in 1998 and 1999. The following table compares the gender profile of the respondents. In 1999 the gender profile of enquirers interviewed was 46 females and 34 males. Of the 1,886 enquiries about part-time study opportunities between May and September of 1999, 43.7% were from males and 56.3% from females.

**Table 7.2: Successful interviewees by gender: 1998 and 1999**

Gender	Group 1 (not enrolled)		Group 2 (enrolled)		Total	
	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999
Male	8	14	18	20	26	34
Female	32	26	22	20	54	46
Total	40	40	40	40	80	80

59% of the male respondents who made an enquiry in 1999 enrolled whilst 43% of

the female respondents enrolled. Although, not quite so distinctly, this again indicates a similar trend to those who became students in 1998. An area of further study could be to research into factors contributing to why females in particular indicate an interest to study part-time but do not choose to enrol.

## **7.2 When enquiries were made: 1998 and 1999**

Of the 80 individuals who made enquiries about part-time learning opportunities for September 1998, nine made their enquiries just as semester one started and two of those individuals enrolled. In 1999 there were only four students who made their enquiry just after the start of semester. The majority of students made their enquiries between May and September. An indication of the total number of enquiries made for part-time study is that University Direct received 1,748 enquiries during May-September 1998 and 1,886 enquiries over the same period in 1999.

## **7.3 Methods of enquiry**

Individuals are increasingly encouraged to use on-line enquiry methods, to 'drop in' and enquire directly to the Department and postal enquiries are occasionally received. The introduction of University Direct in 1998 means that the Free Phone University Direct 'hot-line' number is widely publicised.

### **7.3.1 Methods of enquiry: 1998 and 1999**

Of the 80 interviewees making enquiries about part-time Continuing Education provision in 1998, 72 were by telephone to University Direct. There were four who called in person to the Department of Continuing Education, two who enquired by post and two who made an on-line enquiry.

Of the 80 respondents in 1999, 66 of the interviewees requested information by telephoning University Direct with 14 individuals calling in personally to the Department to make their initial enquiry. There were no postal or on-line enquiries from these participants.

The increase in the number of students calling in personally to the department was probably as a result of a major emphasis by staff and in the literature on the provision and availability of Educational Guidance.

#### **7.4 Main reason for enquiry: 1998 and 1999**

The participants all responded clearly as to why they had made an enquiry to the University. Advertising is an important method of informing the public about the part-time learning opportunities available and advertisements are placed in local and national newspapers throughout the year prior to the start of courses. In 1998 they were featured in the newspapers approximately two weeks before the semester started. Of the 80 enquirers who were interviewed there were 13 who responded in response to an advert. Only two of those 13 enrolled.

One interviewee who did not subsequently enrol called in response to an advert but found that the course that was of interest had started by the time the information pack had been received, whilst another discovered that the module of their choice was already full.

*Recommendations:*

- *Further consideration was required on timing and content of adverts;*
- *Consideration was given on how to address the issue of full classes;*
- *A closing date for applications was imposed so that those individuals making late enquiries did not receive information when it was too late for an application to be made*

Of the 80 students 16 provided the location of the University as their main reason for making an enquiry and eight of those enquirers enrolled. Fourteen students stated



that their principal reason for making an initial enquiry was the accreditation scheme, and seven subsequently enrolled.

Recommendations relating to course content and flexibility were made to enquirers who were looking for work-related study funded by their employers. The 'friendliness' of the University was also a recommendation to enquirers and this is an important factor to any individual but in particular to those who are considering returning to formal education after a break of several years. In 1998 there were nine of the interviewees who had the University recommended to them, and seven subsequently enrolled.

Table 7.3 provides information about the main reason for individuals making an initial enquiry and whether or not they subsequently enrolled in 1998.

**Table 7.3: Main reason for enquiry: 1998**

Main Reason	Group 1 (not enrolled)	Group 2 (enrolled)	Total N=80
Location	8	8	16
Accreditation	7	7	14
Response to Advert	11	2	13
Flexible Time tabling	5	8	13
Recommendation	2	7	9
Flexible Programmes	2	4	6
One of Universities called	2	2	4
Familiar with University	3	1	4
Fee waiver scheme	0	1	1

In comparison with 1998 there were 18 of the 80 interviewees in 1999 who made an enquiry in response to an advert and 12 enrolled. It is encouraging that by making minor modifications to the content of the adverts and changing the advertising schedule that there was clearly an increase in the number of enquirers who responded to the advert and who subsequently enrolled.

In 1999 there were 16 who cited location as the principal reason for their enquiry and 12 enrolled and 16 who enquired following a recommendation made by a friend or colleague, six of whom enrolled. Of the 12 students who made an enquiry because of the accreditation scheme six enrolled.

Table 7.4 compares the main reason for enquiry between the 1998 and 1999 students.

**Table 7.4: Main reason for enquiry; 1998 and 1999**

Main reason	Not enrolled		Enrolled		Total (N=160)
	1998	1998	1999	1999	
<b>Location</b>	8	8	4	12	<b>32 (20%)</b>
<b>Accreditation</b>	7	7	6	6	<b>26 (16%)</b>
<b>Responded to advert</b>	11	2	6	12	<b>31 (19%)</b>
<b>Flexible time tabling</b>	5	8	4	0	<b>17 (11%)</b>
<b>Recommend'n</b>	2	7	10	6	<b>25 (16%)</b>
<b>Flexible programmes</b>	2	4	6	2	<b>14 (9%)</b>
<b>One of universities contacted</b>	2	4	2	0	<b>8 (5%)</b>
<b>Familiar with university</b>	3	0	1	2	<b>6 (4%)</b>
<b>Fee Waiver Scheme</b>	0	0	1	0	<b>1 (1%)</b>

This evidence indicates that the university principally attracts interest from part-time adult learners because of its location, flexibility of timetabling, personal recommendation, effective advertising and the accreditation scheme. These are perhaps unsurprising attractions for enquirers interested in part-time study, many of whom also work and have other domestic and social commitments. They relate to the effectiveness of part-time students' time management, and Blaxter and Tight (1994) highlight the necessity of 'efficient, effective and economic educational services' for part-time students. The respondents indicated that it was important that

the University was near their home or work place and that the courses were delivered at a time that was suitable to them. The accreditation scheme allows students to enter higher education at an appropriate level of study. As can be seen in Figure 4.4 there are a substantial number (approximately 60%) of part-time students who enter the University with accreditation for prior learning. This prior credit is used to build upon and achieve a University award.

A number of respondents also highlighted the importance of the university being recommended to them. Recommendation is a strong encouragement as it informs and influences future behaviour (Schuller, Raffe, Morgan Klein and Clark, 1999).

The increase in number of enquiries resulting from advertising in conjunction with the increase number of enrolments of those enquirers in 1999 indicates the importance of focussing an effective message about the important aspects of the provision at an appropriate time for the enquiry to be pursued.

It was not surprising that there was only one enquiry made in 1998 in response to the Government Fee Waiver Scheme as it was introduced too late to generate (August 1998) many enquiries before the start of the first semester. However, in the University of Paisley in 1998 there were 214 students who took advantage of the part-time fee waiver scheme and of those 150 were new students whilst the remaining 64 students were continuing students who were now able to benefit from the scheme (Knox, 2000, work in progress).

However, more unexpectedly was that there were no individuals in 1999 who cited the part-time fee waiver scheme as their main reason for making an enquiry. Furthermore in 1999/00, 119 new students who benefited from the fee waiver scheme. This is an unexpected decrease and consideration must be given to raising the awareness of this opportunity.

*Recommendation for 2000/1:*

- *To consider methods to raise the awareness of the fee waiver scheme, Particularly locally.*

#### **7.4.1 Enquiries to enrolments**

It is interesting to look into the main reason for an enquiry being made and consider how many within that sub-category enrolled. However, caution must be exercised about drawing conclusions because once the 160 enquirers are split into their appropriate subcategories, the numbers are relatively small. The table below indicates the conversion from enquiry to enrolment for four of the most popular reasons cited. Over the two sessions, 1998/99 and 1999/00, 19% of the interviewees contacted the University in response to an advert. Although responding to an advert was one of the main reasons cited for making an enquiry about part-time study, this factor has not been included in the table below. This is because there were minor modifications made between each year that appeared to distinctly improve the enquiry and subsequent enrolment rate in 1999/00 and it would not have been appropriate to aggregate the results.

**Table 7.5: Conversion from enquiry to enrolment**

<i>Main Reason</i>	<i>Total Enquiries (N=110)</i>	<i>Total Enrolments (N=54)</i>
<i>Location</i>	32	20 (63%)
<i>Accreditation</i>	26	13 (50%)
<i>Recommendation</i>	25	13 (52%)
<i>Flexible timetables</i>	17	8 (47%)

These factors should be taken into consideration by an institution when dealing with promotion and enquirers. There is a suggestion that about 50% of those who enquire for those reasons will enrol. Therefore the University should be able to recognise its strengths within these specific areas and maximise targeting the local population,

flexible timetabling and how prior credit from previous qualifications can be built upon to gain a university award. Improving the University experience will increase the number of recommendations made by students about studying part time.

## 7.5 The main type of information requested: 1998/99 and 1999/00

The respondents were asked what kind of information they were principally seeking when they made their initial enquiry.

Table 7.6 provides an indication of the type of information requested by the enquirers interviewed in 1998 and 1999 and whether or not they subsequently enrolled.

**Table 7.6: Type of information requested 1998 (N=80) and 1999 (N=80)**

Type of Information	Group 1 (not enrolled)		Group 2 (enrolled)		Total N=160
	1998	1999	1998	1999	
<b>Module Specific</b>	25	22	14	14	<b>75(46%)</b>
<b>General</b>	6	2	8	6	<b>22(14%)</b>
<b>Accreditation</b>	2	6	8	6	<b>22(14%)</b>
<b>Time-tabling</b>	3	4	6	6	<b>19(11%)</b>
<b>Subjects offered</b>	4	6	4	8	<b>22(14%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	40	40	40	40	<b>160</b>

Clearly the main type of information that the part-time enquirer is principally seeking is module details. This evidence substantiates the findings from those individuals who clearly requested that the prospectus should contain more module specific detail and by those who suggested that their enquiry experience could have been improved by more module specific details being readily obtainable.

During the focus group with the five Educational Guidance Advisors they were asked what type of information new students asked for. They felt that many

individuals seeking guidance “tended to know what they were after” and the guidance required was how to access and obtain this information. Often the information was to obtain module specific details. The Departmental Co-ordinators clearly indicated from their interviews that providing course specific details and advising on the suitability of modules for individual students was a major part of their role. Other requests by enquirers were more straightforward relating to more general information such as timetabling. This information would be provided by the appropriate departmental clerical support staff.

*Recommendations for 2000/1 would be to have:*

- *Accurate module details available on the Internet allowing public access. (Enrolled students at the university can access module descriptors on-line using the module browser on the student Intranet);*
- *The module browser available at information session so that descriptors can be printed as required;*
- *The most popular modules identified and those descriptors readily available in hard copy at Information Sessions.*

## **7.6 Obtaining information: 1998/99 and 1999/00**

The interviewees were asked whether they received the information that had been requested and how had they obtained it. The majority of individuals in both 1998/99 and 1999/00 did receive the information they had requested. However, there were distinct differences in the main method used to obtain the information. Of the 80 students in each cohort there were six in 1998 and ten in 1999 who could not be certain about their response.

Table 7.7 indicates how their requested information was obtained.

**Table 7.7: Obtaining Information: 1998 and 1999**

Obtaining Information	1998 N=74	1999 N=70	Total N=144
Post	57	32	89
First contact	13	18	31
Further call	2	4	6
Academic Department	1	0	1
Information session	1	16	17

Whilst 57 of the participants who enquired in 1998 compared to 32 of those enquiring in 1999 said they received the information they required through the post, only one of the 1998 enquirers got the information they needed at an information session compared to 16 of 1999 enquirers. Considerable efforts had been made by various methods to encourage individuals to attend the information sessions where Education Guidance Advisors, Departmental Co-ordinators and additional subject specialist staff and student advisory staff were available to provide advice on matters such as accreditation, specific modules, or finance. These efforts were effective and there was a distinct improvement in the numbers of students who were provided with necessary information at these sessions.

*Recommendations for 2000/1:*

- *To encourage enquirers to contact Education Guidance Advisors and be provided with important details to aid their decision on whether or not to study;*
- *To continue to promote effectively the presence of Education Guidance Advisors and Subject Specialist Staff at Information Sessions.*

The students were asked how they felt that their enquiry experience could be



improved. These suggestions will be discussed in the following sections.

## **7.7 Student's perceptions of pre-entry information and guidance: 1998/99 and 1999/00**

Having made an initial enquiry to the university each individual was asked whether the information and support provided had been beneficial when deciding whether to enrol and in selecting suitable modules. Each individual was also asked if their enquiry experience could be improved. Many commented that their experience had been dealt with adequately or even better. One interviewee stated that, "this is my first experience of university and so far it has been very positive". However, there were suggestions for changes to improve potential students' enquiry experiences.

### **7.7.1 The Combined Awards Module Catalogue**

First, the perceived usefulness of the Combined Awards Module Catalogue for part-time study was explored. This 'prospectus' provides a module title, its SCOTCAT level, a very brief description of the module, the pre-requisites necessary and the day and time of delivery. Appendix K includes a sample taken from the Module Catalogue. Additionally, because of the complex way an individual programme can be tailor made, module route diagrams provide illustrations of typical pathways that can be pursued. A typical module route diagram is included in Appendix L.

Of the 80 interviewees in 1998 there were 70 who did receive a prospectus and 48 found it useful. Some commented that the prospectus was "very helpful and clear". There were seven of the 48 who qualified their 'yes', for example, one enquirer who subsequently started a module stated that the prospectus was useful to an extent but, "did not say which particular modules were needed". Difficulties cited by the 13 who did not find it useful included its complexity and lack of clarity regarding the modules that were appropriate or available for them to do. One person stated that it was;

"hard to understand what was possible with no qualifications – there seemed to be limited options".

This particular 'access' issue was considered and addressed in the production of the 1999/00 part-time module catalogue by including a section on 'Starting Out'.

It was interesting that seven stated as a major problem that there was insufficient detail on the content of each module or the expected level of knowledge/experience that would be required to successfully complete it. For example, one individual felt that he had selected the wrong module from the prospectus and had therefore, "wasted a semester" whilst another commented that:

"there was not much information on modules – you need to go and ask for more details.....and that was got three or four phone calls later".

Consideration was given to providing more detailed information on specific modules in the part-time prospectus. As there are approximately 200 modules briefly described a major drawback would be the amount of information in the prospectus and its resulting bulk. Indeed, there was one student who remarked that, "there was so much information in it, that then you really need to talk about it".

*Recommendations and subsequent actions for 1999 Prospectus:*

- *The 1999/00 prospectus pack highlighted the information session dates and the presence of subject specialists with Education Guidance Advisors available to discuss on an individual basis entry level and module option;*
- *Used published literature to encourage enquirers to seek educational guidance from the education guidance advisors by continuously increasing the awareness of their role and availability;*
- *Strongly recommended the introductory modules to adults returning to education after a long gap whenever possible.*

As a result several minor modifications were made to the prospectus for 1999/00. These included sections on frequently asked questions addressing issues such as 'starting out' and 'making your module selection' and 'who to obtain educational guidance from' and 'what to do next' and simple instructions explaining how to

matriculate. There were frequent remarks encouraging enquirers to contact the Department or attend an information session and speak with an Educational Guidance Advisor and discuss appropriate module selection.

Of the 74 enquirers in 1999 who received a prospectus 66 found it useful. There were ten who said "yes" but qualified their answer. Eight commented that there was insufficient detail on modules and two mentioned that although the prospectus had been informative about what was available the information on accreditation was not useful.

Six clearly stated that it was not useful and two could not remember. Of those interviewees who received a prospectus in 1998, 79% found it useful compared to 89% of the interviewees in 1999.

Of importance was the number of individuals from both cohorts who received a prospectus and commented upon the insufficient module detail. This matter must be considered for future enquiries. Module descriptors can be provided to students if they telephone and ask for further information. Subject specialists and Educational Guidance Advisors can also facilitate this process. However, as one student already commented they did not receive this information until a number of telephone calls had been made.

Until, as strongly recommended, module information is available more easily to staff, students and on the public server, this need will not be met unless the individual who is looking for more detail is proactive about retrieving it. As already emphasised it would not be possible to include this level of detail in the module catalogue due to the extensive provision available. However, encouragement to contact the Education Guidance Advisors is of the utmost importance because they can provide this level of detail and obtain module descriptors. They can also facilitate meeting with the subject specialist when necessary.

When individuals were asked about how their enquiry experience could be improved

in 1999 many mentioned improving the information in the prospectus. Some found the accreditation scheme complicated and stated that the information sent to them did not adequately explain “how the points system works”. They asked that this be clarified. Once again, several interviewees asked that more information on content be included in the part-time prospectus to enable them to make a “more informed decision on whether a module would be appropriate and within their capabilities”.

*Future recommendations 2000/1:*

- *Pursue actively the availability of module descriptors on both the Internet and Intranet;*
- *Actively promote pre-entry educational guidance and its easy accessibility; Encourage enquirers to attend information sessions supported by Education Guidance Advisors and subject specialists where they can obtain specific module details;*
- *To include in the prospectus a simple explanation of how accreditation for prior learning is awarded.*

### **7.7.2 Information sessions: 1998 and 1999**

The enquirers were also asked if they had attended an information session and their perceptions of the usefulness of the information session were explored. In 1998, 14 of the 80 interviewees attended an information session and subsequently 12 enrolled. Of the 12 who enrolled nine found the information useful. One interviewee stated that the “experience was excellent”. However, two of the three who did not find it worthwhile commented that the session was too crowded and that there was insufficient time to get all the information they wanted. One stated that, “there was no time to talk about things properly”.

Of the 36 who attended an information session in 1999 there were 26 who subsequently enrolled. Of those 26 who did enrol 22 found the information session useful. There were many comments on the sessions being busy but well organised and friendly. One person commented that,

“It was a really useful session because there were people who could talk to me about CATS points and other people to talk to about subjects, and it was at night. Everybody was busy but really caring. I felt that they thought it was important to do the right thing”.

Of the ten who did not enrol there were four who found it useful. Two students specifically mentioned that they had been provided with excellent advice and as a result were studying in an alternative institution. They had appreciated the educational guidance and appropriate referral.

This provides evidence of educational guidance having been impartial and the individual has been helped to clarify options about their future learning.

There was one individual who did not find it useful because she thought her case was different and she needed more specialised information which she later received from the appropriate referral that had been made.

One respondent specifically mentioned the information session when asked about how her enquiry experience could be improved. Although the module choices available to her were explained at an information session by the time she returned home she had forgotten what had been said. Her suggestion was that it would have been helpful to have been given a simple written note of the options available so that she could consider them fully later on.

*Recommendation and Actions 1999/2000:*

- *Education Guidance Advisors provided the enquirers with any notes and explanations made during the discussion.*

Whilst 14 people in 1998 attended an information session with ten finding it useful there were 36 attending in 1999 with 30 stating that they found it useful. It is encouraging that there was a marked increase in the number of students attending

information sessions and that they continued to be seen to be useful by the students. One danger is that the effectiveness of the information sessions becomes compromised as the numbers attending increase and there is considerable pressure upon the staff to provide appropriate time and guidance to all enquirers who have made an effort to attend.

It will be important to continuously review the management of the information sessions to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

Similarly, in 1999 the individuals were asked if their enquiry experience could be improved. There were 12 of the 80 respondents who felt that it could have been improved. One individual felt that “the course content could be better described to them as the course was not what they had expected”. Another individual commented that she “was not familiar with the wording used during her enquiry”. As in 1998 there was an individual who had forgotten by the time they got home, had to telephone back and would have appreciated something in writing.

*Recommendation for 2000/1;*

- *To provide a more structured form to all enquirers completed by the Education Guidance Advisor, with an outline of the learning opportunities available to them and details appropriate to their individual enquiry;*
- *To encourage the individual if they were following up their enquiry to bring the pro-forma with them in order to facilitate the provision of further advice by other colleagues.*

### **7.7.3 Further initial enquiry recommendations made and actions implemented: 1998**

#### **1. First Contact**

Several students raised the issue that to receive specific information they had to speak to several people, as they were unable to get the specific information as a result of their initial enquiry. One student remarked that, “it is difficult enough without having to run around for the correct information”.

*Recommendation and Action, 19989:*

- *To review the existing communication channels between Department of Continuing Education, Corporate Communications, Centre for Learning and Teaching, Student Advisory and the five Faculties.*

## 2. Finding Information

One individual who made an application in August felt that it was a long time before she received an offer. As a result she made several telephone calls to the university to find out what was happening. It was suggested that there should be some indication of the time-scale involved in processing an application.

*Recommendations and Actions, 1998/9:*

- *To ensure that upon receipt of application that the module selection be approved by the Education Guidance Advisor if appropriate and an offer made;*
- *The Education Guidance Advisor must contact the student as soon as a problem exists because of e.g. an inappropriate module selection or lack of information.*

Others considered that they had to chase for information on credit or course content despite having requested it. They felt that this should be unnecessary and that the information should be received without having to follow up the request.

Some who had difficulties in receiving specific information found that they did not know the appropriate person was to speak to. Suggestions were made that it should be made easier to know to whom they had been referred.

One individual was dyslexic and had received the prospectus and application form, applied and started studying without being aware of special sources of advice.

Unfortunately, he was not aware soon enough of the support that could have been

provided to him and this created difficulties with respect to arranging support in time for assessments. This exposed an area that needed to be considered in conjunction with Student Advisory for implementing effective procedures for part-time students.

*Recommendation and Action 1999/00:*

- *A special needs form distinct from the one that full-time students already do receive was included in the application pack and procedures implemented to deal with providing support to part-time students with special needs.*

### 3. Financial information

A few interviewees raised the difficulties they experienced in receiving accurate advice regarding the financial implications of studying. One person who enquired about the fee waiver scheme was told that the course he was enquiring about was full. There was a miscommunication because this person thought that there were no places left for those wanting a fee waiver.

*Recommendation and Action, 1999/00:*

- *A simple explanation concerning fee waivers was provided and discussions to ensure that Unidirect and Continuing Education staff were clear on how to communicate the fee waiver information to applicants.*

A review of the recommendations through meetings with Education Guidance Advisors, Departmental Staff, Corporate Communications, Departmental Coordinators and Student Advisory led to the modifications being made as indicated above.

There was strong agreement in the responses from both 1998 and 1999 cohorts of enquirers that the level of course and content must be appropriate to their individual needs. Offering the right subject choice was one of the most important factors necessary for full-time mature applicants Connor (1999). The enquirers felt that pre-entry educational guidance on module selection, creating individual module pathways and advice on accreditation was important. In the focus group held with



the Educational Guidance Advisors (5.1) they also emphasised the importance of educational guidance and impartial advice on available routes. A study by Cochrane (1999) indicates that the level of pre-entry guidance required can reflect the uncertainty felt by some individuals, returning to education after a long gap, about choosing the most appropriate course.

The Education Guidance Advisors are a most appropriate contact for individuals seeking further advice on part-time learning opportunities. They are able in most instances to deal with the enquiry and if necessary make an informed referral for specialist advice for specific questions.

The evidence provided by these findings assisted review of current systems in relation to recruitment, pre-entry guidance and provision of information to individuals enquiring about part-time learning opportunities.

The findings highlight the importance of effective communication channels within the institution in rising to the challenge of effectively meeting the needs of the part-time learners.

Further research into the demographic and biographical profile of enquirers to the University would be useful to identify part-time enquirers' intentions and requirements. As previously identified another area worthwhile researching would be the reasons why fewer females appear to enrol following their initial enquiry. The University would be able to focus its information and curricular provision to meet specifically identified requirements.

The following section within this chapter investigates why applicants having made an enquiry actually made the decision on whether or not to enrol. Whilst it is recognised that there may not be one single reason the individuals were asked to provide the major contributing factor to start studying part-time.

## **7.8 Reasons for decision on whether or not to study at the University of Paisley**

Of the 40 enquirers in 1998/99 who selected to study part-time at the University, 18 gave the location and 11 gave the flexibility of delivery times as the principal reason for their decision to actually enrol and study part-time. The accreditation scheme was an important factor for only three of the group and recommendation was not a factor. Suitable module provision was a factor for five people.

The cost of modules deterred four interviewees who did not take their enquiry any further and two were put off because they did not receive the information they had requested. The time of day that certain modules were delivered was unsuitable for four enquirers and there were four others for whom the location was unsuitable. For six enquirers the module they wanted to study was full. This raises a future challenge for dealing fairly with those students, perhaps by guaranteeing them a place for the next planned delivery if they do not want to currently select an alternative module. There were two people who could not accept their offer, as they needed access to crèche facilities. The remaining 16 who did not enrol cited personal reasons.

In 1999/00, of the 40 interviewees who enquired and subsequently enrolled, 18 students gave the modules available as the main reason for their decision to choose the University of Paisley, and 12 were attracted principally by the flexible time-tabling and 10 mentioned the University's location.

The 1999/00 students who did not subsequently enrol provided a more diverse list of reasons. However, the main reasons why people choose not to enrol were personal and therefore can not be addressed by the institution. The main reasons why people do actually enrol are because of location, the time the modules are delivered and the range of suitable module provision.

Table 7.8 indicates the reasons for selecting the University or not and provides a comparison between the responses by interviewees in 1998/9 and 1999/00.

**Table 7.8: Reason for selecting or not selecting the University of Paisley**

Reason for Decision	Total Enrolled N=80	Enrolled		Not Enrolled	
		1998	1999	1998	1999
Location	28	18	10	4	2
Timetable	23	11	12	4	8
Suitable Module(s)	23	5	18	6	8
Accreditation	3	3	0	2	0
Facilities	1	1	0	2	0
Cost	0	0	0	4	6
Not sent information	0	0	0	2	4
Personal issues	2	2	0	16	10
Not accepted	0	0	0	0	2

*The reasons why people choose not to enrol are ones we can in the main do nothing about.*

## **7.9 Individuals' Goals at Time of Enquiry**

The students who were interviewed came from diverse backgrounds with different goals and needs. Their reasons for studying were personal, vocational and for career development. Some had previous further or higher education experience whilst others had no post-compulsory educational experience. The level of pre-entry guidance and support they needed varied according to their individual needs and goals.

Each of the 80 individuals who did not enrol following their enquiry in 1998 or 1999 were asked what they were hoping to achieve when they made their initial enquiry. The remaining 80 who did enrol in 1998 and in 1999 were asked what their intended goal was when making their enquiry. They were also asked if their intention was to

study towards a University award or to complete one or two modules.

Table 7.9 outlines the intention at time of enquiry for those 80 individuals who did not enrol in 1998/9 and 1999/0.

**Table 7.9: Intention at time of enquiry of non enrolled individuals**

Intention	1998/99 N=40	1999/00 N=40	Total (Not Enrolled) N=80
One or two modules	31	14	45
University Award	9	26	35

In contrast Table 7.10 outlines the goal at time of enquiry for those 80 individuals who did enrol.

**Table 7.10: Intention at time of enquiry of enrolled individuals**

Intention	1998/99 N=40	1999/00 N=40	Total (enrolled) N=80
One or two modules	16	18	34
University Award	24	22	46

In 1998/99 the possible relationship between enquirers' intentions and their decision whether to attend a course at the University (Table 7.11) was analysed using a 2X2 contingency table and chi-square analysis.

**Table 7.11: Initial goal by enquirers in 1998 (N=80)**

Intention	Enrolled	Did not Enrol
One or two modules	16	31
University award	24	9

There was evidence of a significant relationship between intention when enquiring

and starting a part-time course (d.f.= 1, chi-square= 11.61, p<0.05.). This indicated that those students who enrolled may have been more likely to have a degree as their goal. Those who chose not to enrol were more likely to be interested in doing one or two modules at the time of enquiry.

However, as can be seen by examining Table 7.9 and Table 7.10 the evidence in 1999/00 did not substantiate this hypothesis as the majority of enquirers who did not enrol had stated a University award as their goal. Of the 40 enquirers, who did not enrol, 26 stated that their intention had been to aim for a University award. The remaining 14 indicated that one or two modules was their goal. In contrast, of the 40 students in 1999/00, who did enrol, 22 stated that their intention was for an award. The remaining 18 indicated that their goal was to complete one or two modules. Therefore the findings from 1998/99 were not substantiated. However, this may be an area of interest for future research with a larger population.

Interestingly there were six interviewees who had changed their original goal in 1998/9 from doing one or two modules to aiming for a university award and in 1999/00 there were ten. This substantiates the findings from studying with the students in first semester 1997 whose initial goal changed whilst undertaking their initial module (section 6.0) It also suggests the need to ensure that students are provided with the opportunity for on-going educational guidance, particularly in the initial stages of their studies.

The interviewees' serious interest in higher education was confirmed by the enquirers who enrolled and who reflected a great deal. It was clear that a lot of thought had gone into their enquiry, their course selection and their decision on whether or not this learning opportunity was appropriate to them. Previous research has shown that adult learners exhibit such "considered and developed reasons" for returning to Higher Education (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998). The interviewees' serious intent towards lifelong learning is supported in that 38% of those who had not enrolled at the University of Paisley were studying elsewhere.

Interestingly, whilst it had been assumed that all who enrolled would be current students at the time of the telephone interviews, there were seven students who had enrolled and started their studies but had since left their course. The reasons for this were explored. Two individuals said they had received advice prior to starting their course but would have:

“appreciated a more accurate picture of what was expected of them to succeed in their course”,

and another commented that it would have been better if she had known, “how deep it was going to be”,

whilst another considered that the information provided on the appropriate level for entry was incorrect and:

“ended up feeling bad when I came off the course”.

This again emphasised the importance of robust pre-entry educational guidance. The reasons they had left were partly due to perceived differences between information provided to them during the enquiry stage and their actual experience of the their course. Their input was relevant to the research findings in that, as stated by McGivney (1996):

“The magnitude of student loss in the early stages of a course highlights the importance of good pre-course contact, information and advice”.

Other research has shown that compatibility between student and course has an impact upon the likelihood that a student will complete (Yorke, 1997; Johnston, 1997a; Johnston 1997b, Ozga and Sukhnanndan,1998).

## **7.10 Summary**

The part-time individual's experience begins with the initial contact they make with the University. The majority of initial enquiries are made to the University Direct Freephone service. It is therefore important to liaise with their staff and provide continuous staff development concerning the range of available provision.

The information that enquirers can provide about 'what' they are interested in should be used by the University to meet market demands. Additionally the analyses of demographic profiles and gender of enquirers that the enquirers' database holds can inform useful research for the future.

Increasingly, enquirers are requesting detailed module information. An urgent priority for the University should be to address this issue and make this level of information available and easily accessible.

It is a major and complex step for an individual to decide to enrol with the university. The university is well resourced to advise individuals by having a team of Educational Guidance Advisors available during the day, in the evenings and on a Saturday morning. This use of this resource must be maximised. There is potential for an increase in the amount of pre-entry guidance provided. The University should be made aware of this and the Department of Continuing Education will be raising the awareness of the Education Guidance Advisor's role with respect to providing pre-entry guidance. The expectations of the students when they start the course should be realised. Education Guidance Advisors and Departmental Co-ordinators have an important role in providing information to the enquirer about module content, its level and the time commitment involved.

Information sessions are an important and economical means of providing this information. The success of the information sessions depends on the commitment from university staff to attend them in the evening, meeting the needs of the majority of part-time students.

People making enquiries about part-time provision are coming from diverse backgrounds with differing intentions, goals and needs. The amount of pre-entry information that is required varies according to their background and goals.

The Department of Continuing Education, with its team of Education Guidance Advisors is well placed to meet the needs of individuals.



# CHAPTER EIGHT

## 8.0 New Students' Experiences: Initial Days and First Semester

### Overview

This chapter outlines the result of the analysis of the experience new part-time students had in their first semester, 1998; the recommendations made based on the analysis; and the actions taken based upon the results. In order to evaluate the impact of the actions implemented, the questionnaire was distributed during semester one, 1999, to a further cohort of new part-time students, and the results of their experience were analysed. The results across the two student groups were compared. In particular the students' perceptions of available information and educational guidance were explored. This included three aspects of the learning context they experienced during the first few days. The results outlined in this section provide information on the students' perceptions about the information the University gives on dates and times, places and people, and whether the information is provided at an appropriate time to be useful. The students' reactions to needing or seeking information were also explored.

Of the 50 replies received in 1998 and 62 replies in 1999 there were two participants from each sample who chose to leave no details of their age.

The following table outlines the age and gender profile of the remaining 48 respondents in 1998/99 and 60 in 1999/00. This profile is a typical representative sample of the total population of new part-time students commencing their studies each year (Figure 4.2).

**Table 8.1 Age and gender profile of respondents**

Age	Female 1998	Male 1998	Female 1999	Male 1999	Total 1998	Total 1999
<20	0	0	1	1	0	2
20-29	7	4	12	9	11	21
30-39	8	12	9	13	20	22
40-49	8	3	4	3	11	7
50-59	0	4	1	1	4	2
60-69	0	2	1	1	2	2
>70	0	0	2	2	0	4
Total	23	25	30	30	48	60

## **8.1 Induction**

The transition to a new programme of study in a new environment is not easy for many students and it must therefore be made as efficient as possible (Ashworth and Harvey, 1994). However, whilst the institution manages the induction process and aims to meet the needs of students settling into their learning environment it was primarily aimed at full-time students.

In 1998/99 there was no induction available to part-time students. All students were welcome to attend the induction activities, during the day, at the start of semester. However, as the arrangements were primarily targeted to meet the needs of the full-time student it would have been unsuitable for many of the part-time evening students to participate. They would have had other domestic or work commitments. In the questionnaire, students were asked if they were aware of the availability of induction sessions.

### **8.1.1 Availability of Induction:1998/99**

Of the 50 students who responded in 1998, 20 knew that induction sessions were available.

*A recommendation was to ensure that procedures were implemented for session 1999/00 to ensure all part-time students received an invitation to attend an induction programme which was delivered at appropriate times to meet the student population's needs.*

### **8.1.2 Actions implemented to improve awareness of induction sessions.**

**1999/00**

The responsibility for induction of all new students in the University at the start of semester one, which is when the majority of the new students commence, was given to a University Induction Co-ordinator. This appointment was a six week secondment of an academic staff member. An induction arrangement for both full-time and part-time students was included within their remit. The Combined awards Course Leader and the Induction Co-ordinator to discuss the needs of part-time students and ensure effective communication channels and overall co-ordination of the delivery of the programme.

The importance of induction and advanced warning of dates was emphasised and provided to relevant staff and all new students. All prospective students were sent a letter of invitation and details of activities. In addition induction was highlighted with advance notice of the dates and times in the prospectus. Induction was explained simply as University terminology for a welcome and introduction to the University. When staff in the Department were in contact with students by telephone, at information sessions or in the office, they actively encouraged new students to attend this introductory session and promoted its availability and benefits.

Induction for all part-time students took place in the evenings at the start of each

semester and before the summer programme. There was input from Educational Guidance Advisors, Library Staff, Student Advisory Service, Centre for Teaching and Learning and Computing Staff. The Course Leader, Combined Awards maintained responsibility for providing an induction programme to new students starting their studies in semester 2 and the summer programme. The students were also provided with the Continuing Education Student Handbook, and the benefits of reading it were emphasised.

### **8.1.3 Induction awareness: 1999/00 compared with 1998/99**

Of the 62 students who responded to the questionnaire issued during semester 1, 1999, 58 knew about the induction sessions. Clearly the information provided to the students had increased the awareness of induction activities available to part-time students. The following Table compares the responses from the 1998 and 1999 student groups.

**Table 8.2: A comparison of the awareness of induction sessions**

	<b>1998 (N=50)</b>	<b>1999 (N=62)</b>
Aware of Induction Sessions	40%	94%

This evidence provides a clear indication that the students who matriculated in 1999 had an increased awareness of the introductory sessions over the students who matriculated at the start of 1998.

The induction sessions were extremely well attended with over 100 attending each evening. However, there was no evaluation of the students' perceptions of the use of the sessions to inform future activities. It appeared to be well received by those attending and it was agreed that the format seemed to be successful. It was reported that the resource, time and effort spent on raising the awareness and the successful implementation of induction to part-time students was beneficial.

#### **8.1.4 Induction: Future recommendations and actions for 2000/1**

The process of induction for all students is viewed as a high priority.

Student support services within the University are currently under review. A Guidance Policy Working Party is looking at how more effective and responsive support systems for all students can be developed. Within the review the process of induction has been viewed as a high priority.

*Recommendations have been made by the Guidance Policy Working Group to appoint an Induction Co-ordinator for the University. He or she would be based in the Centre for Teaching and Learning. The paper proposes that the remit of this post would apply to all students and would require the provision of a co-ordinated programme at the start of each semester including the summer programme. The recommendation includes that the Induction Co-ordinator would be responsible for both staff and student evaluation of Induction Programme events.*

## **8.2 Important dates and times**

Students received, by post, information providing details of the module(s) offered to them, the starting date and time, together with instructions for matriculation. They would normally receive no further correspondence from the University concerning the commencement of their course.

### **8.2.1 Dates and times: Session 1998/99**

Although 44 of the 50 students knew when their first classes were due to start, nine students cited specific problems in obtaining information on the times of their first classes. Three students had actually missed their first class because they did not know about changes made to class location or time.

The students were asked if they had found the information provided relating to dates

and times useful. There were six non-responses, 39 students found it useful and only five stated that they did not. Although the majority of the participants stated that the information provided was useful, some specific problems were again mentioned about the class times during the first week. Eleven individuals stated that the timetable at the start of their course was unclear or inaccurate. For example, one respondent stated:

“I was given the wrong timetable therefore missed the first class. The following week the class time changed from 9.00 am to 10.00 am. Therefore I missed that class also as no one knew where the class was”.

One individual was not told that her course had been changed from semester one to semester two and only found this out by telephoning the Department. A student attending the first of her Saturday classes found that the lecturer had been given a different start time to that of the students (9.00 am rather than 9.30 am). Another, attending a Saturday morning class, was told that the lecturer had not been informed about taking the class so the class was postponed for a week.

The principal difficulty regarding dates and times related to new students either receiving no information or being misinformed, or to a breakdown in communication channels when alterations were made. Three students asked for written confirmation about their first classes. One student stated that,

“After the offer of a place letter is sent, we need confirmation that the class will run and where”.

Although two participants said that they had been provided with sufficient information to plan ahead and book holidays from work during exam dates another asked that the University provide a full timetable including all holidays and the exam dates so that he could plan leave from work.

One of the major causes of dissatisfaction by students, irrespective of whether they

are full-time or part-time, arises from poor timetable arrangements (Ashworth and Harvey, 1994).

*Recommendations were to ensure that procedures were implemented to ensure students received:*

- *accurate timetable information;*
- *semester dates;*
- *when the first class actually started;*
- *exam diet dates.*

*This information must be made available to all part-time students for session 1999/00.*

### **8.2.2 Actions implemented to address issues related to dates and times.**

The University had previously been made aware of the difficulties arising when there were timetable clashes or last minute alterations to the evening on which a module was due to be delivered. Issues related to part-time students and timetables were previously reported by the Combined Awards Course Committee to Modular Programme Board. Students' complaints with respect to timetables had also been received by the University Registrar, the Principal and Course Leader. The senior management team was therefore already addressing this issue and as a result the University established guaranteed timetable slots. Consequently, if a module was advertised to be delivered on a certain day and time, provided there were sufficient numbers for the class to run, the module would be delivered at that time.

The students' offer letter emphasised that they would receive no further confirmation or information and that their first class would commence on the week of the first semester. Details of the class, the evening and time of delivery were provided in the offer letter. However, in addition to this information, they received their invitation to the Welcome and Introduction session to studying at the University prior to the start of their classes the following week.

Semester dates and exam diet dates and their importance were detailed in the prospectus and in the Continuing Education Student Handbook. They were also highlighted at the induction session. As soon as the exam timetable was confirmed it was also made available on all departmental notice boards and on the student Intranet. The students had the availability of this information highlighted to them and it was emphasised that they had a responsibility to utilise the various information resources. The Continuing Education's mid semester newsletter, which was posted to all part-time students, publicised important information such as examination or study skill workshop details.

### **8.2.3 Dates and times, session 1999/00 compared with 1998/9**

Of the 62 students who responded to the questionnaire there were four who would have appreciated more notice of dates, three who were not aware of the date of their first class and three who considered that due to lack of information they had missed their first class. One of those three had missed their first class due to a timetable change. Due to changes in staffing there was one timetable change made. This was a vast improvement on previous alterations made to timetables. There were several positive responses about timetable information providing evidence that "plenty of notice was given" as one student quoted. However there was one student who recommended that a letter providing the module start date and room number be sent to each individual student. Although this would indeed be ideal it would be difficult to implement this operation.

Table 8.3 provides a comparison of the responses made between the 1998 and 1999 students.



**Table 8.3: A Comparison of responses about dates and times**

Dates and Times	1998 students(N=50)	1999 students (N=62)
Knew date/time of first class	88%	95%
Given sufficient notice of dates	82%	94%
Missed important appointments	10%	5%
Information provided on dates/times was helpful	78%	92%

Although a chi-square test indicated there is not a statistically significant difference for each individual factor these results provide a clear indication of a distinct improvement across all four measures. This consistent trend indicates that the actions taken and information that was provided to the students improved their knowledge about important dates and times and was more useful than the information previously provided.

#### **8.2.4 Dates and times: Future recommendations and actions for 2000/1**

The actions taken were considered to be effective and it was recommended that the use of several methods of providing information be continued. The use of induction sessions, enrolment sessions, the Continuing Education student handbook and mid-semester newsletters, notice board and departmental web-site would all include important information on dates and times. This allows information to be disseminated periodically instead of all at once. The amount of information received was perceived to be an issue by some students who considered they received too much information at the one time and practice must continue to address the issue of 'information overload'.

### **8.3 Orientation**

Throughout the University there are signs giving directions to the various teaching blocks and key places within the University. In addition, there are maps available to assist individuals in finding locations. The students' perceptions were explored by

asking whether they had difficulty in finding their way about the University, and to name one particular place, if any, that they had difficulties in finding and to state how they actually found that location. They were further asked if the advice or information the University provided was helpful in locating key places and to make possible recommendations on the advice or information that could be provided in the future. (Appendix E, About You, Q2 (a-e)Places)

### 8.3.1 Orientation: Semester 1, 1998

The students were asked about their experiences of finding their way around the university campus. Table 8.4 summarises whether or not they had trouble in finding locations.

**Table 8.4: Difficulty with orientation**

Difficulty with Orientation	Students
Yes	34
No	16

(N=50)

Of the 50 students, 34 had difficulty in finding their way about the campus. One individual said:

“ Everywhere! it was just generally a maze”

and another student commented that:

“European travel was easier – and I’m 75!”

Several locations were specifically mentioned as being hard to locate during the students first few days.

The locations specifically cited as particularly difficult to find are detailed in Table 8.5

**Table 8.5: Location cited as “difficult to find”, 1998**

Location	Frequency cited
Library	6
Classrooms	11
Open access laboratories	3
Continuing Education Department	2
Student Advisory Service	2
Finance Department	1
Refectory	1

(N=26)

All the students were asked how they found the places they were looking for. Forty three of the 50 students responded easily to the question whilst seven respondents were unclear. Various sources of information were used to help them navigate around the campus. The following table summarises the methods used by the 43 students who provided a clear response.

**Table 8.6: Methods used to find locations, 1998**

Method Used	Students (N=43)
Asked staff	10
Asked another student	11
Used small map provided	9
Signage on walls	3
Combination of above	10

The students did appreciate that it took time to become familiar with the campus and 30 of them stated that the information provided was useful. However, 20 students

did feel that more could be done to make it easier. One individual said:

“the University can not take students by the hand but the maps are not done properly”

and two others pointed out that the maps were out of date.

*A recommendation for session 1999/00 was to ensure the University Maps were ‘up-to date’. This was important information for all new students and staff.*

Several commented that the signage to the new library was not up-to date.

*A recommendation for session 1999/00 was to ensure that there were signs and directions to the location of the new library.*

These particular measures are related to improving the experience for all campus users and are not particular to part-time students.

Two participants stated that they would have appreciated a tour of the campus. As part of the University’s recruitment activities school leavers are frequently brought in and provided with tours of the Campus. Full-time students have further opportunities to familiarise themselves with specific locations during the compulsory University Induction Programme in the first week of semester. Whilst this was implemented and considered necessary for full-time students the part-time students were not included and therefore did not benefit from a tour of the campus.

*A recommendation for session 1999/0 was to employ student guides to show part-time students how to locate their classes before the start of the course.*

### **8.3.2 Actions taken to address orientation issues**

The University map was revised and included in the Continuing Education Student Handbook that was provided to all new students.

Signage was addressed generally by the University, especially with respect to the library as it had changed location during 1998 but directions had not been updated.

Students were employed to help students to locate their classes and on each evening of the first week of semester and on the Saturday morning.

The induction session included a tour of the library and an interactive session in the Open Access IT laboratory.

The Continuing Education student handbook included specific information on key locations and information on how to access to them.

### **8.3.3 Orientation; semester 1, 1999/0 compared with 1998/9**

Of the 62 students 35 said they had difficulty finding their way around at the start of semester. Several locations were specifically mentioned as being hard to locate. In 1999/00 there were two additional locations mentioned, namely the Printing Department and notice boards. It is likely that these additional locations mentioned would have been as a result of extended opening hours at the start of semester of the Printing Department to meet the needs of the part-time evening students. Also it was emphasised to the students to make use of the notice boards as an information resource. This highlights the importance of evaluation of implemented actions to discover possible pitfalls and ensure effectiveness in measures taken.

Table 8.7 compares the responses made by both student groups as to whether they had difficulty in orientation.

**Table 8.7: Comparison of difficulty in finding location by students**

	1998 (N=50)	1999 (N=62)
Yes	68%	56%
No	32%	44%

The following Table 8.8 compares the locations specifically mentioned by the student groups and the frequency cited.

**Table 8.8: Comparison of locations cited as ‘difficult to find’ by students**

Location	Frequency cited	
	1998 (N=26)	1999 (N=27)
Library	6	4
Classrooms	11	11
Open Access Labs	3	1
Continuing Education Department	2	2
Student Advisory Service	2	2
Finance Department	1	2
Printing Department	0	3
Notice boards	0	2
Refectories	1	0

It appears that students did initially find classrooms difficult to find. This factor will not be unique to part-time students but exaggerated as they will take longer than full-time students do to become familiar with the University.

The students who enrolled in 1999 also recognised the need to familiarise themselves with the campus and, as with the 1998 students, that part of their difficulty related to them only attending classes on a part-time basis, in evenings or at weekends. Forty three of the 62 students stated that the information provided by the University helped them find locations. The table below provides a comparison whether the information provided by the University was helpful to the two student groups.

**Table 8.9: Comparison of whether information was useful to find locations**

	1998 (N=50)	1999 (N=62)
Yes	60%	69%
No	40%	31%

The results show only a slight improvement but importantly there are further recommendations that can be recognised and implemented to improve the situation. However, it is encouraging that in 1999/00 there was a decrease in the number of students who had experienced difficulty in orientation (Table 8.7) and additionally more students had found the information useful to find locations (Table 8.9).

There were several positive comments about the student guides who took groups of new students to their classes, however one student responded:

“A guided tour of the University would have helped as I still have difficulty in locating places other than my lecture rooms”

*Recommendations 2000/1:*

- *Recommendations for 2000/1 are to consider additional signage to places which students are being encouraged to use, e.g. printing department and Departmental Notice Boards;*
- *Recommendations are to provide tours of the Campus to part-time students at Information Sessions and at Induction.*

Irrespective of whether a student is full-time or part-time it will always take time to become familiar with finding key places in a large institution. Many of the recommendations to facilitate orientation will have a positive impact not only on part-time students but overall.

#### **8.4 Timing of Information Provision**

New students need a lot of general information and are provided with a variety of different sources as they start their studies. Their perception of whether this advice was available when they needed it was explored. The students were also asked for

their advice about providing useful information to future part-time students. (Appendix E, About You, Q3 (a-d)).

#### **8.4.1 Timing of information provision: Session 1998**

To ascertain if part-time students received information on their course from their peers, they were asked whether they knew other students at the University and if they were provided with information they needed from that source. Of the 50 students 18 reported that they did know other students, but not necessarily undertaking the same subjects as themselves. Of the 18, there were 10 who stated that they received information from other students, which they had not received from the University. Full-time students who are studying a prescribed course have consistency of peer support throughout their studies. Students who are studying on a part-time basis and selecting their modules subject by subject will not have the same consistency of student support as they progress through their studies with a changing student cohort.

The students were asked if the University had provided information when they needed it. There were three non-responses. Of the 47, 33 agreed that it was available when they needed it and 14 said that it was not. Of these 14 there were eight students who stated that they needed most information “at the very start” of their studies, for example on class times or locations. Five of the eight stated that they did not receive the information when they needed it and three participants said they did receive the information at the start.

*Recommendation:*

- *To ensure that appropriate information was provided to students at the most useful time;*
- *To consider the information students do receive and when it would be best provided.*



#### **8.4.2 Actions implemented on providing students with information at the right time**

A closing date for applicants was set and adhered to. Consequently all students were provided with the same introductory opportunities and information provision. Students who made late applications were provided with information relevant to the next semester.

The invitation to the welcome and introductory session was sent to all students along with their enrolment letter. The enrolment letter provided information on the module title, the time and day of delivery. It is not possible to provide classroom details at this stage, however, they are clearly displayed on the first night of the class.

The Continuing Education Student Handbook was provided, as far as was possible, to all students. It was made available to students at induction, enrolment and with the student guides who directed people to their classes. The information in it had been reviewed and updated.

The Continuing Education Newsletter was posted out to all students in week 7 of each semester providing them with further general information on events such as study skill and exam skill work shops and exam diet dates.

#### **8.4.3 Timing of Information Provision: session 1999/00 compared with session 1998/9**

Of the 62 students who responded 47 said that they received the information when they needed it. There were ten who felt that they were not provided with information at the most appropriate time and five who did not respond to this question.

A comparison of the responses between the two cohorts is provided in the following Table.

**Table 8.10: A comparison on the timing of information provision**

Response	Information Available when Needed	
	1998(N=50)	1999(N=62)
Yes	66%	76%

Although more students felt they received information at the appropriate time there were still a considerable number who clearly felt that they did not or for some reason did not answer the question. One student commented that they would have

“appreciated more advice on the structure of classes, assessments etc. What to expect. Probably best advised by class lecturer on the first night”.

There was a different theme to the responses to this question from the previous respondents in 1998/9. The above comment relating to the class, expectation of content and reference to the lecturer represents this emerging theme.

Another student stated that,

“the general information was OK at the start but the course was a real problem. The lecturer had no clue about anything – where photocopier was, how to open windows, when the exams were. There were no results out and nothing on the notice boards.”

This comment was referring to a part-time lecturer whose prime concern would be to teach.

Other students were very positive about the general information provided and stated that “they couldn’t fault it” or that “the Really Useful Book is really helpful when I need it”.

*Recommendations for 2000/1 would be to*

- *provide staff induction to all part-time lecturers;*
- *ensure that all lecturing staff involved in teaching the Combined Awards receive the Continuing Education Staff Handbook and that the contents are revised annually;*
- *Revise the Student Handbook to reflect the needs of the students based upon student and staff feedback.*

## **8.5 Educational guidance**

A team of Educational Guidance Advisors is based in the Department of Continuing Education. They provide pre-entry and ongoing guidance to individuals based on any prior credit, work experience and the individual's goals. Coherent programmes of study are tailor made to meet each individual's needs. Students can progress towards a University award or can select to do some modules for continuing personal and professional development. Modules can be selected on an annual basis or semester by semester and students can join the University at the beginning of each semester or in the summer programme. Educational Guidance Advisors are available Monday to Thursday, from 8.45am to 6.30pm, Friday 8.45 to 4.45pm and also on a Saturday morning. There is therefore educational guidance available by telephone, making an appointment or calling in to the department at times that should suit all individuals. Each student is allocated an Education Guidance Advisor. It is therefore important that students know that this resource is readily available and accessible and that there is a responsibility with each student to seek advice when necessary.

### **8.5.1 Educational Guidance: Session 1998**

The students were asked if they were aware of the source of guidance provided by the Department of Continuing Education. The table below summarises the responses.

**Table 8.11: Students who were aware of Education Guidance Advisors**

Aware of Education Guidance Advisor	Students (N=50)
Yes	23
No	27

Of the 50 students only 23 reported that they knew who their Education Guidance Advisor was. The remaining 27 did not know the identity of their Education Guidance Advisor.

*Rrecommendation for session 1999/0*

- *to identify procedures and opportunities to provide students with information indicating who their personal Education Guidance Advisor is.*

Of the 27 students who did not know who their Education Guidance Advisor was there were six who specifically highlighted that they would have appreciated receiving pre-entry education advice. For those students it was not a trivial issue that they did not know about the provision of educational guidance. One of these six found that they had started the wrong course after 4 four weeks and stated:

“Students who enrol postally, like me, do not appear to have any information about where to go, or university facilities”.

Three students in this group of six felt that they should have more pre-entry guidance specifically on the content of the modules they were considering. The remaining two students would have liked to speak to academic staff who could provide answers to the “specialist questions” they had on the subjects they wanted to study. Although education guidance advisors can not provide them with this subject specialist advice, it is often important that the student is provided with the opportunity to receive it. This is where the communication links between the education advisors and the departmental co-ordinators need to be effective and mechanisms implemented to

ensure the student receives the advice necessary.

*Recommendations for session 1999/0 were to:*

- *raise the awareness of the importance of pre-entry guidance with students, Education Guidance Advisors and Departmental Co-ordinators;*
- *identify procedures to encourage more effective pre-entry guidance particularly with respect to subject content.*
- *Postal enrolment of new students was NOT to be recommended.*

### **8.5.2 Actions Implemented to Raise Awareness of the Role of the Educational Guidance Advisor**

- At information sessions all Education Guidance Advisors wore badges with their name and job title. All Education Guidance Advisors were briefed to ensure that they discussed with the student how educational guidance is provided throughout their course of study and explain how their personal advisor would be allocated and who it would be.
- Departmental Co-ordinators and additional academic staff attended the information sessions to provide subject specific advice and details on individual modules.
- The information sessions were not all general. One was devoted to computing, one to business and one to introducing adults to higher education. There were additional ones encompassing all subject areas.
- The Continuing Education Student Handbook provided information to all part-time students about who their personal Educational Guidance Advisor was, the opening times of the office and the opportunity to make an appointment or simply call in for a discussion.
- This was also highlighted at induction and again when the students enrolled.

- There was no postal enrolment for new students.
- Information was made available on the student Intranet.

### 8.5.3 Educational Guidance: Session 1999 compared with 1998

Of the 62 students who were asked if they were aware of the source of guidance provided by the Department of Continuing Education 47 knew who their Educational Guidance Advisor was and 15 did not. The following table compares the responses between the two student groups.

**Table 8.12: A comparison of whether the student knew of their Education Guidance Advisor (EGA)**

<b>Knew of EGA</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>
	<b>N=52</b>	<b>N=60</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>24%</b>

There is clear evidence of a significant improvement in the number of students knowing who their Educational Guidance Advisor was. The resulting chi-square analysis indicates a statistically significant improvement (d.f.=1, chi-square = 9.41,  $p < 0.01$ ). However, due to the specific nature of the role of an Educational Guidance Advisor it is important that further action is taken to increase further the awareness and availability of this resource for session 20001/2.

*Recommendations, 2000/01*

- *A “who’s who” leaflet: this has been actioned and a leaflet prepared for students This can be made available at information sessions and enrolment.*
- *A bookmark to be provided to all students with names and contact numbers of Education Guidance Advisor– this can be given out at enrolment*
- *Semester newsletter to highlight importance and availability of EGA and their role.*
- *The role of the Education Guidance Advisor to be included in the staff handbook encouraging other staff to refer students to the Department.*

## **8.6 Guidance and support provision for part-time students**

The heterogeneity of part-time adult learners has implications for the level of guidance and support that may be required. It is often regarded as being more problematic in terms of the academic, support and financial advice they require. (Davies,1999). Whilst institutions may not always be able to alleviate difficulties, Cody (1991) points out that many institutions actively encourage non-traditional students to apply, yet relatively few attempt to modify existing structures to meet their needs. The quality of support and guidance services provided to ‘non-traditional’ students is emphasised by both McGivney (1996) and Hayes (1996). Furthermore it was a recommendation by Garrick (1997) that institutions review the needs of their part-time students. The University of Paisley does not differentiate in the support it provides to part-time students. Many institutions do. (Fregard et al,forthcoming). The student services offered by Student Advisory and the Centre for Learning and Teaching are available to all matriculated students. Student Advisory Services are available during the day, Monday to Friday. The majority of part-time students study in the evenings or on a Saturday morning. The Centre for Learning and Teaching will arrange evening workshops for study skills and individual appointments by request. Educational Guidance is provided to all full-time and part-time students enrolled with the Department of Continuing Education. The part-time students’ perceptions regarding guidance provided by the University

were explored.

### 8.6.1 Guidance and support: Session 1998

The participants were asked if they had sought guidance on a number of separate issues and if they knew who in the University to contact for provision of specific advice. They were also asked if they would approach that person for guidance or someone else for such advice.

The Table below outlines whether participants looked for advice on certain issues and whether they knew who to contact for guidance.

**Table 8.13 Seeking advice, 1998**

	Guidance Requested Students Sought Advice			Knew who to Contact		
	Yes	No	no resp.	Yes	No	No resp.
Module Selection	29	21		23	15	12
Finding Books	22	28		39	11	
Study Skills	18	41	1	15	25	10
Finance	7	43		12	22	16
Personal Issues	5	44	1	13	18	19
N=50						

A number of recommendations were made based on these results and in consultation with various departments, actions taken.

*Recommendations, 1998/9:*

- *Induction to address these points;*
- *Really useful book – input from appropriate support services;*
- *Information Sessions – finance and Student advisory present;*
- *Staff handbook, which would be provided to all staff involved with Combined Awards students – lecturing, support, Corporate Communications etc.;*
- *Providing brief information in the student newsletter.*



### 8.6.2 Actions implemented to raise awareness of the availability of student support services.

- At the information sessions, in addition to the Departmental Co-ordinators and Educational Guidance Advisors, members of staff were available from Student Advisory Services to advise and provide information on aspects such as careers, financial issues and special needs provision.
- Induction included sessions delivered by student advisory, educational guidance advisors and staff from the Centre for Learning and Teaching.
- The Continuing Education student handbook provided information of key people who provide student support and contact numbers.
- The Education Guidance Advisors reviewed how part-time students with special needs were dealt with and developed new procedures with the Special Needs Co-ordinator in the Student Advisory Services.

### 8.6.3 Guidance and Support: 1999/00

Table 8.14 illustrates the student responses to guidance that students requested and, irrespective of whether or not they sought advice, if they were aware of who they would contact for advice on certain issues.

**Table 8.14: Seeking advice: 1999/00**

Guidance Requested	Students who Sought Advice		Knew who to Contact		
	Yes	No	Yes	No	no resp
Module Selection	34	28	45	17	
Finding Books	31	31	34	28	
Study Skills	14	48	31	17	14
Finances	14	48	26	36	
Personal Issues	12	50	29	32	1

N=62

Table 8.15 shows a comparison of those students who sought advice in 1998/99 and 1999/00. It also indicates whether or not they felt they knew who they should contact for advice in certain key areas.

**Table 8.15: Seeking advice: A comparison of 1998/99 (N=50) with 1999/00 (N=62)**

Guidance Requested	Students Sought Advice		Knew Advisor	
	1998	1999	1998	1999
Module Selection	58%	55%	46%	73%
Finding Books	44%	50%	78%	55%
Study Skills	36%	23%	30%	50%
Finance	14%	23%	24%	42%
Personal Issues	10%	19%	26%	47%

More students knew who to ask for specific advice from in each factor with the exception of the library. This evidence still suggests that information about who students should seek advice from and who to contact still needs further consideration. It is interesting that one year on considerably more advice was sought by part-time students on financial and personal matters. One possible explanation could be that the presence of student advisory staff at both information sessions and induction has raised the awareness of these services to students and increased the use of this resource to part-time students. Alternatively, consideration could be given to exploring the reasons why more students require this information; particularly in the current climate and introduction of e.g. the part-time fee-waiver scheme. Whilst there were more individuals seeking advice on personal and financial matters there was a marked decrease in the number of students seeking advice on study skills. This is not entirely unexpected, as there was a study skills seminar provided at induction and a study skills' resource pack provided to all the students who attended. In addition there were well-publicised exam, study skills and essay writing workshops publicised to students and delivered in the evenings throughout the semester. The attendance at these evening seminars increased. It is probable that

these group seminars resulted in fewer individuals seeking personal advice on their study skill techniques.

There was a distinct increase in the number of students who knew whom to contact to make their module selections but a slight decrease in the number of students who sought educational guidance during the first semester. Students were encouraged at the pre-entry guidance interviews to make their module selections for both semester one and two, rather than semester by semester. Perhaps, the information and educational guidance that the students received at this stage has meant that they were better informed, earlier and consequently this has reduced the number of individuals seeking educational guidance during the semester.

In a study relating time management and part-time study (Blaxter and Tight, 1994) the existence of clear channels of communication between students, academic staff and administrative staff was also recognised to be of critical importance. For adult and part-time students, lack of time and using available time effectively are important and as far as possible, they require access to needed resources when they are at the institution. Bourner and Race (1990) indicate at the start of their student guide that:

“as a part-time student your time is precious; you need to use it as efficiently as you can. Your learning also needs to be “economic” – this is to do with getting maximum rewards for the energy that you put into your studies”.

Whilst part-time students are expected to pursue their studies in an effective, efficient and economic manner institutions must also deal efficiently and effectively with their students.

## **8.7 Summary**

It is crucial for new students to have robust information provided to them about important dates and times. Induction can play a vital role in introducing the student to the University Campus and provide information about accessing important locations and providing information on who to contact. Whilst the importance of the induction process has been recognised for full-time students it is of equal importance that part-time students are introduced and welcomed to the University. They do not spend the same amount of time at the University because of other commitments and therefore the process of familiarisation takes longer.

The Department of Continuing Education are aware of the amount of information that students receive when they start to study and the Education Guidance Advisors are well placed to appropriately time providing information to the students in a variety of ways. Information overload was a concern and consideration needs to be given in providing relevant information.

Students' guidance requirements change over time.

- During their first few days: class locations, timetable information, etc
- During their first semester: module routes, module selections for second semester, welfare advice, study skills and academic support.

It is important that part-time students know how to get this information if it is required.

Part-time students' motivations to study and expectations from module are very diverse. This has implications for the level of vocational, career, welfare, information and educational guidance they require.

Participation in part-time study is not only about gaining an academic qualification but having a positive student experience. The Department of Continuing Education is well placed to listen to the students' experiences and enhance provision for future part-time students.

# **CHAPTER NINE**

## **9.0 The Department of Continuing Education : The Part-time Students' Annual Feedback**

### **Overview**

As part of the University's Annual monitoring arrangements each Course Leader must produce an annual report for their programme. This is submitted to the Academic Standards committee and provides an opportunity to note any issues with respect to programme delivery, including programme recruitment, induction, progression and support of students. This chapter outlines the student feedback from session 1998/99. Some of the findings substantiate the findings arising from exploring the student experience by other methods used in this project.

A programme specific questionnaire (Appendix M) is therefore sent out to each part-time student at the end of semester two. These questionnaires were processed with an Optical Mark reader to cope with volume and speed. This analysis is included in Appendix M.

Students are also provided with the opportunity to name two things they like about their programme and to name two things they would suggest to improve their programme. There are a further two sections; in one they are asked to elaborate on any matter which has concerned them or give praise where it is due, and in the other they are invited to make any other comments. The Course Leader analyses those qualitative responses.

The 1998/9 part-time student results have been analysed both quantitatively using the Optical Mark reader and qualitatively by the Course Leader. Whilst the responses were received by part-time students enrolled within the Department of Continuing Education the previous sections investigating the part-time student experiences have been exploring only newly enrolled part-time students. This was attempting to provide some consistency in the nature of an already diverse student population and

who would not identify completing the questionnaires or participating in the interview schedules as part of their student experience. However, it was considered to be of interest to see if there was any commonality in the findings or further insight into the experiences and needs of the part-time student population by looking at the feedback from the programme questionnaires from session 1998/9. This could provide further confirmation of needed actions.

The student programme questionnaire seeks to discover how they feel their programme of study has been over the year. It is not module, semester or lecturer specific and answers are anonymous.

There were 251 respondents. Of those 251 there were 184 students who also completed the qualitative questions. There were some responses that were of particular interest with respect to consolidating the findings from the experiences of the new part-time students. One question asked the students about the appropriateness of the level at which they started their module. It was encouraging that for most students the modules were at an appropriate level with respect to their existing knowledge was encouraging. However for 16% only some of them or none of them were appropriate to the level of their existing knowledge. This was confirmed by the experience of some of the new students and also by some of the students who had been new but subsequently withdrew. Although the majority considered their entry level as appropriate it is an issue for the Educational Guidance Advisors to address, particularly at the pre-entry stage. Other findings within this research also indicated the importance of good pre-entry advice. Wherever possible students must be provided with guidance to start their studies at an appropriate level. In the qualitative responses there were only three specific mentions that related to concerns about the level of the module they were studying.

Another interesting response was with respect to the use of the library. In this area there was a notable difference in the level of use by the part-time students and the full-time students. The profile of responses indicated that 27% "rarely visited" the

library. It is possible that part-time students use facilities out with the University, or that since students are in employment that they buy or are provided with a book allowance by employers. Another additional factor is the number of students undertaking information technology and computing related courses where computing facilities rather than library facilities are used. Nine respondents specifically mentioned the computer access and six the library resource as being positive features about their course whilst a further five complimented the resources generally with two particularly citing their availability in the evenings and on Saturdays.

The responses to Question 8 which asked 'about induction were also interesting. A fairly high proportion (20%) opted not to answer and 21% found it of no value. The remaining 59% found it of some value or great value. This was indeed an area where strong recommendations were made for session 1999/00 and actions implemented which clearly improved the process of induction for part-time students. Furthermore, formal induction programmes are now the responsibility of a University Induction Co-ordinator for session 2000/1.

With respect to the findings from the experiences of the new part-time students other interesting responses were those from questions 12 and 13. Question 12 related to how easily lecturing staff could be contacted for advice and support. Whilst 64% found it to be "easy" or "relatively easy" there were 29% who experienced "great difficulty" (There were 7% who did not respond).

Whilst this question referred to the accessibility to the lecturing staff, question 13 specifically referred to whether the information they received from Education Guidance Advisors was helpful. Although 59% responded that it had indeed been either "very helpful" or "quite helpful" there was reason for concern that 30% "did not see one" and a small number (4%) who found that they were "unhelpful".

Another relevant 'cluster' emerging from the open questions in the student programme questionnaire was about communications, information and guidance.

There were six individuals who specifically mentioned wanting better access to Education Guidance Advisors, nine who specified needing more advice on module options and 12 who wanted clearer information generally about available University support and resources. Four mentioned that they would have appreciated access to study skills and seven who mentioned that they felt that the channels of communication between the Department of Continuing Education and other departments could be better and meant that the individuals were therefore left to find out the desired information.

On the other hand, there were 14 students' who specifically wrote about how approachable lecturing or Continuing Education staff were. It is apparent that they provide extremely efficient educational guidance to many individuals but there are many more who would benefit from their expertise. Given the role of the Education Guidance Advisor and the results from the new students' experiences of 1998/9 this information highlighted some recommendations and actions were taken.

Flexibility and the availability of part-time provision was specifically mentioned as a positive feature by a number of students in the open questions, however issues relating to problems they considered because of being part-time were mentioned. Timetabling, exam times to suit part-time students, access to print-shop and guidance facilities in the evenings and the availability of crèche facilities were all mentioned.

Considerable efforts were made for session 1999/00 to highlight to the students, who the Educational Guidance Advisors are, what their roles are, where and when they can be found. The results from the actions implemented for 1999/00 have produced encouraging results from the new students (Section 8). It is hoped that the results from the student programme questionnaires will reflect a similar trend because of the actions taken providing evidence of benefit to students enrolled with the Department of Continuing Education.

The student programme questionnaires are a way of eliciting feedback from students on the quality of provision. The responses provide information on whether the



facilities and systems that are provided are adequate and to what extent they meet the needs of the students.

However, there will be no feedback from students who have withdrawn.

The following chapter investigates students who have withdrawn from their studies.

# CHAPTER TEN

## 10.0 Non-completing part-time students

### Overview

Those involved in post-compulsory education are becomingly increasingly concerned that there are a high number of students leaving their courses prematurely and that withdrawal rates vary between institutions (McGivney, 1996). Student withdrawal rates have several implications for higher education. For example they are used as a university performance indicator by government which can impact on the enrolment levels and finances of individual institutions (Moore, 1995).

McGivney (1996) suggests that the higher education professionals' concern is therefore often at an institutional rather than an individual level. This area of exploration into the part-time students' experience at the University of Paisley explores the students' perceptions of their experiences when they leave their course. It refers to the reasons for their decision to withdraw and the quality of pre-exit guidance and information they receive.

The theoretical background to research in this area has been developed mainly in the United States of America. The principal model developed by Tinto (1975) suggests that the commitment and integration levels of students who withdraw may differ from those who complete their course (Moore, 1995). The validity of Tinto's model has been questioned due to difficulties in generalising it to other cultures, the lack of a clear and comprehensive definition of integration and other limitations (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998). Although Tinto has accepted that the model has limited use it is still the foremost model that has been proposed to date (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998).

Much of the research, which has been conducted on student withdrawal or non-completion, looks at particular higher education student groups or at other post-

compulsory educational sectors. For example a study by Ozga and Sukhnandan (1998) relates to withdrawal of traditional higher education students (entering from school) studying on a full-time basis, and research by Houghton (1997) investigates non-completion by part-time adult learners undertaking Further Education level courses. There are problems in comparing the results of such research as it is often based on samples using different criteria and measures, often based on university records which define student withdrawal in different ways (McGivney, 1996).

However, the issues raised within these and other studies undertaken on student withdrawal are of interest in this research.' McGivney (1996) conducted a study of student retention and non-completion, focussing specifically on the factors, which influence part-time adult students' decisions to withdraw from study. Institutional strategies that could reduce withdrawal, including effective support mechanisms, are considered. The importance of support and guidance for part-time student is emphasised again in a study by Hayes (1996). In both reports it is suggested that withdrawal may be a temporary strategic method used by adults to fit a course of study around other life commitments and that HE institutions should be sufficiently responsive to enable them to do so in a positive way (McGivney, 1996; Hayes, 1996).

A literature based survey on student withdrawal was produced by the University of Paisley's Student Advisory Service (Weir, 1999). One of the recommendations made relates to the difficulty in making any policy decisions based on research conducted on other institutions. It was suggested that an investigation take place within the University to determine the specific factors, which relate to student withdrawal in the University. This would facilitate implementation of appropriate actions to enhance student experience where withdrawal is appropriate and additionally reduce withdrawal rates (Weir, 1999). The following provides a preliminary investigation of these issues with a focus on the Continuing Education part-time student population who withdrew from their studies. The definition of a withdrawn student adopted in this study is 'an individual who has not chosen to complete the module to which he or she has enrolled'.

Of particular interest was the impact withdrawal had on individual students. The students' perceptions of their pre-exit experience is explored. The investigation looks at the reasons why 'new' part-time students decide to leave when evidence indicates that taking the steps to enrol may have already been a major decision for them (Section 7.9). Individuals who undertake to enrol make a large personal, emotional and financial investment (Hayes, 1996). This can be particularly the case with part-time students who perhaps have to overcome greater personal, time and financial constraints before applying (Cochrane, 1991; Blaxter and Tight, 1994; Hayes, 1996).

The focus of this exploration is specifically on the quality of support and information provided to former part-time students prior to withdrawal. It targets the reasons given by those students for their decision to leave and their attitudes to undertaking further higher education at the University of Paisley or elsewhere in the future. Factors relating to student withdrawal could include the quality of support and information provided to students at pre-entry, while studying at university and pre-exit (Moore, 1995, McGivney, 1996). Some of the issues surrounding part-time students and their knowledge of available support will be considered.

The data collection procedures are outlined in detail in section 3.8. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by telephone aimed at investigating three main issues. These were first, what the respondents' initial goals were and why they left, secondly, their perceptions of the support and information available to them before they left and thirdly, their current attitude to further studies.

In order to explore these issues the questions were focussed on:

- the respondents' motivation and reason for studying at the University;
- when they attended their classes and when they left the University;
- all of the reasons and the principal reason for leaving ;
- a comparison of their expectations and experience of higher education at the University of Paisley;
- whether they were aware that pre-exit support was available;

- their experience of pre-exit information and guidance;
- their current perceptions of and intentions with regard to returning to education.

## 10.1 Age and gender profile of students interviewed who withdrew

The table below illustrates the age and gender profile of the 60 respondents. Those interviewed had enrolled in modules across the wide range of provision, and had entered their studies at different levels.

**Table 10.1: Gender and age profile**

Age	Males	Females	Total
20-29	18	8	26
30-39	6	12	18
40-49	3	8	11
50-59	1	2	3
Over 60	2	0	2
Total	30	30	60

(N=60)

## 10.2 Reasons for selecting to study part-time at the University of Paisley

The interviewees who had all withdrawn were asked the main reason why they had selected to study at the University. This question was put to current newly enrolled students in a previous part of the research (Section 7.8). The group of 80 students who had enquired and subsequently enrolled cited four principal reasons. They were the location of the University (35%), the times that modules were delivered (29%) and the suitability of the modules on offer (29%). The other reasons mentioned were accreditation, personal and availability of facilities.

Similarly, 28 of the 60 (47%) of those who had withdrawn from their course stated that location was the main factor in selecting the University of Paisley. Twenty four

of the withdrawn students stated that they had made their choice based on the suitability of the modules on offer and six because of the accreditation of prior learning. Two students had made their choice for other reasons.

The location of a higher education institution has been shown to be important for part-time students who often have many commitments on their time (Hayes, 1996). The proximity of the university to students' homes or work places and the level of public transport provision affect the amount of time and money needed to travel to attend a course.

The weight given to flexible timetabling by current part-time students also reflects the pressures on their time (Blaxter and Tight, 1994). The second most frequently cited reason by withdrawn students was the suitability of courses. The range of courses offered has been shown in previous research to influence student choice when selecting a University (Moore, 1995).

Some mentioned the accreditation for prior learning, whereby students are awarded credit for previous relevant qualifications and this determines the student's level of study.

It is interesting that those students currently studying gave more weight to the time that modules were delivered whereas withdrawn students cited the module(s) available as the principal factor. McGivney (1996) states that interviewees' responses can be influenced by the factors currently most prominent for them. The importance they placed on their reasons for selecting to study at the University could be influenced by their more recent reasons for withdrawing.

### **10.3 Motivation**

The students were asked whether their motivation to study had been personal or career related and what their intended goal had been at the time of enrolling.

The table below summarises their responses.

**Table 10.2: Motivation to study and initial goal**

Motivation to Study N=60	Goal	
	One or two modules	Goal University Award
Career	32	17
Personal	20	11
Both	8	2
Total	60	30

The individuals studying for personal reasons were interested, for example, to learn enough of a language “to get by” or to do an information technology class in their retirement. Some of those who were studying for career-related purposes wanted to acquire specific knowledge or skills for their current job, to get promotion or to gain employment, e.g. one female had been informed that she could apply for a more senior post if she gained a qualification. One of those respondents who was motivated both personally and vocationally had missed the opportunity to do a degree when he was younger because of ill health. He felt that when his employer was prepared to give him financial support to study at the University it would be an ideal opportunity to gain a qualification.

The respondents’ reasons for choosing to study and their motivations or goals indicate that they had a serious intention to undertake a their studies. Although some may have felt daunted by the prospect of returning to formal education and by all the practical problems that would entail, they had all given it considerable thought and indicated that they were looking forward to their courses. This further confirms the findings presented in Chapter 7. Evidence from other research also indicates that adults are likely to have “considered and developed reasons for entering higher education” (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998).

Having explored the interviewees’ perceptions prior to starting their studies an investigation into their mode of attendance as part-time students was carried out to determine whether this influenced retention rates.

## 10.4 Mode of Attendance

Flexible timetabling is an important factor for adults when deciding which part-time course to undertake. Hayes (1996) stresses that classes have to take place at times that fit in with the rest of adults' lives. Most of the respondents did not appear to find this an issue and most stated that the class times were very suitable. Classes take place in the University during the day, evenings and on Saturday mornings. One individual found that, "Paisley lived up to its reputation for flexibility". The table below summarises when these 60 withdrawn students had attended their classes.

**Table 10.3: Mode of attendance of withdrawn student**

Time of Class	Number
	N=60
Day	6
Evening	44
Weekend	4
Combination	6

A possible disadvantage of flexible timetabling is that most part-time students attend their classes when the University is quiet and not all the facilities/resources are available. This may lead them to feel that they do not belong to the institution and it may adversely affect retention (Hayes, 1996). The University has many, but not all of its facilities available in the evening, however one interviewee's response highlights the importance of an academic community:

"I was totally stressed out. Studying during the day would have been better as I felt totally isolated - from the students, lecturer everything".

This problem may relate not only to the level of facilities which are available to part-time students when they attend their classes but also to the limited access to various



staff in the evening. Added to this there are the time constraints which can prevent them getting to know their peers. Students need to feel they are part of an academic community and the environment in which they learn can hinder this (McGivney, 1996). It is important that they are able to form relationships with other students and Hayes (1996) refers to the “positive power of student groups”.

Most existing research on withdrawal rates is based on data relating to full time programmatic courses attended by traditional students (school leavers) and indicates that the rates are highest during the first year of study (Moore, 1995; Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998). McGivney (1996) suggests that the reasons that students give for their withdrawal may differ between the early and later stages of their courses. Also Ozga and Sukhnandan (1998) suggest that most adult returnees are “forced into non-completion because of external circumstances” which are unrelated to their course.

Those withdrawn part-time students were therefore asked when and why they left the University.

### **10.5 When the part-time students withdrew**

Of the 60 there were 22 who stated that they left the course within the first four weeks. There were ten who withdrew between weeks five and eight and 28 in the final four weeks of semester one. If part-time students leave after only attending the first two classes they are entitled to have their module fees returned. Whilst it was somewhat surprising and of concern that there were so many who left near to completion of the module there is also an issue with the high number of students withdrawing at the start of the course.

### **10.6 Reasons for Withdrawal**

Individuals often give complex reasons for leaving courses, involving several related factors (Frank and Houghton, 1997). Their response may also reflect the most recent factor to influence their decisions and their wish to preserve their self-esteem

(McGivney, 1996). With this in mind, the interviewees were asked their main reason for withdrawing and all the reasons that influenced their decision. Of the 60 interviewed there were 26 who clearly stated that there was only one reason for their decision to withdraw whilst the remaining 34 gave one main factor and several contributing factors. Those 26 who gave one reason for leaving their course are categorised in Table 10.4.

**Table 10.4: The only reason stated for withdrawal**

<b>The Only Reason</b>	<b>Number</b> N=26
Unhappy with course	16
Work commitments	6
Personal Reasons	3
Financial	1

Although some respondents had several factors influencing their decision all interviewees cited a main reason for leaving their course and these are summarised in the table below.

**Table 10.5: The main reasons stated for withdrawal**

<b>Main Reason</b>	<b>Number</b>
Unhappy with course	28
Work commitments	14
Financial Reasons	6
Personal Reasons	6
Bereavement	2
Ill Health	4

When asked for all of the reasons why they had decided to withdraw, the number of interviewees who cited various factors are outlined in Table 10.6:

**Table 10.6: A variety of reasons stated for withdrawal**

<b>One of Reasons</b>	<b>frequency</b>
Unhappy with course	40
Work commitments	22
Personal reasons	14
Time commitment needed	14
Financial Reasons	12
Ill health	7
Bereavement	2

The above evidence indicates that 28 individuals left principally because they were unhappy with the module(s) or felt that the course was unsuitable for them. For 16 of those individuals that was the only reason for leaving. A total of 40 interviewees cited unhappiness with, or unsuitability of the module(s) they were undertaking as at least one of the factors that influenced their decision to leave the University. This was the most frequently mentioned reason for withdrawal.

The second most frequently cited reason by the interviewees related to their difficulties in keeping up with the course work due to work commitments or getting a new job. Fourteen individuals cited this as the main reason for their decision to withdraw and for six this was the only stated factor. A further eight stated that work-related difficulties were one of the factors influencing their decision.

Although no individual stated the time commitment involved in undertaking their course as their main reason for them withdrawing, 14 people did say that this contributed to their decision. Adult students often find it hard to juggle competing commitments which all make heavy demands on their time and effective time management is widely recognised as being a major issue for part-time adult students (Blaxter and Tight, 1994; Hayes, 1996).

It was interesting that six people left their part-time studies because of financial concerns. For one individual there was no other contributing factor influencing their

decision. All six withdrew in the first few weeks of semester and therefore no fees would have been refunded.

### **10.7 University based reasons for withdrawal**

Of the 28 individuals who stated that they left their course primarily because they were unhappy with it or had found it not suitable, 12 said that the level of the course was too high and 16 that the content was not what they had expected. Eighteen people in this group had made their selection based upon the information provided in the module catalogue whilst 10 had spoken with an Education Guidance Advisor.

There was a perception from those students who relied on the prospectus to make their module selection that some information given was unclear or misleading.

One person who enrolled on a first level module requiring no pre-requisites said, "I felt like the class dumbo. The lecturer didn't have a lot of time if you were not as able as the others".

### **10.8 Non-university based reasons for withdrawal**

Ten interviewees withdrew for personal reasons, including bereavement and ill-health. Eight of this group withdrew due to problems within their family, a husband having a new job so there were additional home pressures, a partner lost a job and a close family bereavement. The remaining two both commented on the difficulties of managing to study and coping with other commitments. Neither of those students felt that they received sufficient support in their classes to help them cope, and one commented that:

"if there had been someone there to help me in the class it would have kept me there... the classes were too big and overcrowded.

The interviewees' perceptions were also examined in terms of whether their experience of higher education at the University had met their expectations.

## **10.9 The student's expectations with respect to their experience**

A study by Moore (1995) indicates that the majority of withdrawn students' experiences of higher education did not match their expectations and the main issue had been that the courses they undertook failed to meet those expectations. However, although his study included students of all ages it was based only upon students studying full-time. Important provisos are that it is difficult to ascertain how realistic individuals' expectations may be and on what criteria they base those expectations (Moore, 1995). The interviewees were asked whether their experience of higher education at the University was close to their expectations. Thirty two replied that it had been, 24 stated that it was not and four were unsure.

Whilst half believed that their expectations had been met by the University the remainder said that their experience did not match their expectations or were unsure. Many referred to failed expectations regarding the content or level of the course they undertook. One individual felt more isolated from the other students than she had expected and one female was disappointed to find that the class she was attending contained only two other Continuing Education students and said that:

“they were just mixed up with other students”.

For any student who chooses to study during the day, this will happen. Perhaps consideration needs to be given to highlighting this to potential students. For those who do select to study in the evening or on Saturday mornings the classes will largely consist of Continuing Education adult students studying on a part-time basis. In particular this student had experienced difficulties when trying to complete coursework which involved group assessments as she could not meet up with her full-time peers during the day when they met to work on the assignments. As more students work and study full-time, group assessment is an issue for many students. However, as a quality issue, there is pressure to use all forms of assessment quite apart from the educational value that group assessments will be to both part-time and full-time students.

## 10.10 Students use of pre-exit guidance

The interviewees were asked whether they knew that a range of support and advice services were available to part-time students at the University. Twenty people said that they were aware of the services available although only five of them spoke to someone before leaving. There were 15 students in this group who did not speak to anyone before leaving. However, they clearly stated that they did not think it would have been appropriate or even necessary to speak with anyone and one individual said that he “already made (his) mind up to leave”.

Of the 40 interviewees who said that they did not know that a range of student support services exist, 12 had discussed leaving with their lecturer and six with both their lecturer and Education Guidance Advisor. Of the 28 individuals who did not discuss leaving 20 indicated that they had “just had enough” and did not consider seeking pre-exit guidance. The remaining eight had written to the University expressing their concerns about their learning experiences.

The students were asked if they were satisfied with the level of pre-exit support that they received from the University and Table 10.7 summarises their perceptions on pre-exit guidance.

**Table 10.7: Summary of perceptions on pre-exit guidance**

<b>Pre Exit Guidance</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>UNSURE</b>
Knew support services available	20	40	
Spoke to staff member about leaving	25	35	
Satisfied with pre-exit guidance	30	22	8

The interviewees were then asked about their current attitude to leaving and returning to education.

### **10.11 The student's attitude to withdrawing**

To attempt to identify whether the interviewees now regretted their decision to leave they were asked if they still thought their decision was correct. Forty two individuals agreed that it had been the right decision, although six qualified their response by saying that they had regretted having to leave but that they had no alternative in the circumstances. There were 16 people who now felt that their decision had been wrong and two people who were uncertain.

The 16 who felt that upon reflection they had not made the right decision are an interesting group. One female left due to stress and now feels "too embarrassed to go back". Four individuals had not managed to hand in coursework as they had been off for two or three consecutive weeks and felt that it would be impossible to catch up and one person talked about the inconvenience it would be to the lecturer and was worried about disrupting the class. Some felt that they had to leave because of family or work commitments but "things had settled down" and they regretted leaving.

The interviewees were asked if they were currently studying elsewhere and whether they would consider returning to the University to study. Of the 60 individuals interviewed 11 were studying elsewhere, one through the Open University and three at their local community centre. Those four people would not return to the University to study. There were six individuals studying at further education colleges and one studying a course base at their work and they would consider returning to study at the University. Of the 49 individuals who are not currently studying elsewhere, 31 stated that they would be prepared to return to study at the University in the future.

Although it is often expected that full-time students should actively seek support if it is needed (Houghton and Oglesby, 1996) there are varying levels of support provided by institutions to part-time students (Freegard et al, forthcoming 2000). However, this institution provides a full range of all support services to all its students and therefore it is important that part-time students know that support is available to them. Grayson et al (1998) identified possible barriers that prevent full-time students seeking advice and made suggestions that would facilitate those students facilitating access to sources of advice. An area for future research would be to determine whether similar barriers inhibit part-time students looking for advice and what factors influence and encourage them to look for advice when they need it.

## **10.12 Summary**

This research into the students who withdrew in semester one prior to completing their studies confirms that research into retention of part-time students is a complex, multifaceted process. Many students indicated an intention to return to studying at a more suitable stage in their life. In the process of lifelong learning this would be a successful outcome for a part-time student.

The location of the University was important to many of the students who had withdrawn. The population indicated a high level of motivation to study and had all given considerable thought to undertaking their studies. The majority of students who withdrew felt that their expectations had been met.

An investigation into withdrawal patterns may provide more information concerning part-time student retention.

Part-time students should be encouraged to speak to a member of staff before they make their decision to leave. For some withdrawing is a positive decision. Others may be left feeling bad about their decision. Education Guidance Advisors can encourage students to overcome possible barriers that may stop students from seeking help. Education Guidance Advisors are available to provide pre-entry and



ongoing educational guidance. They are available to provide pre-exit guidance, and students should be encouraged to discuss withdrawing with a member of staff.

Further research would be required to determine whether barriers inhibit part-time students seeking guidance prior to withdrawing and what factors influence them to look for advice when they need it.

Finally, whilst useful information is provided by these students and gives an insight into non-completion by part-time students there are a group of non-completing student who have not been accessed. This' group of students are those who do not tell us that they have withdrawn and simply 'drop-out'. This would be an interesting and important area for further research.

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

## 11.0 Conclusions

Whilst lifelong learning is being increasingly recognised as an important element in response to social inclusion problems remain in both lack of clarity in its definition and weak co-ordination of it as an effective government policy. However, the targets that it sets can be addressed by institutions and the University of Paisley has experienced an explosion in part-time mature student numbers by responding to its agenda. The University is clearly committed to providing access to part-time students. Since starting this research project there have been even further increases in the emphasis and awareness of lifelong learning and the contribution it can make in tackling the increasingly recognised problems of social exclusion.

The research was necessary to inform practice and thus needed to be rigorous. The variety of methods used in exploring the part-time student experience raised issues and allowed problems to be solved; procedures to be improved and create improvements that led to a more effective learning environment for the student. Re-evaluation identified other areas for improvement. The aim of the research was to provide a deeper understanding of the part-time student experience. The action research element of the project brought about practical improvement, innovation, change and development. Action research proved to develop reflective practice, linked practice and research and promoted decision making. Meeting the needs of the part-time student is an ongoing challenge.

The research design was complex. Specific issues in planning the research strategy had to be addressed. Sampling, validity, reliability ethics, planning the data collection and the data analysis and presentation were given full consideration. Additionally, the research plan had to be practicable, feasible and be able to be undertaken. The major constraint was time which provided a clear focus for setting priorities and data to be provided. The time-scale therefore effected the research

questions, the data collection instruments used, the people researched, and the number of foci to be covered within the time.

Semi-structured telephone interviews were used to explore the perceptions of both enquirers and non-completers. Although time consuming this was considered as a successful technique to make contact with individuals. Upon reflection the factors that contributed to an effective interview technique were being structured and clear, whilst being gentle and sensitive. Advantages were being able to steer the interviewee and remain focussed and being able to check reliability, consistency and validity by questioning. However, one must also recognise that there are possible sources of bias in interviews e.g. the attitude, opinion and expectations of the interviewer and also the subjectivity of respondents, their attitudes and opinions and perspectives can all contribute to bias.

The enquiry experience, the new students' experiences and the experiences of students who started to study who but did not complete were explored.

The majority of enquiries made by individuals interested in part-time study are to the University Direct Freephone number. Advertising was an important method of informing the public about learning opportunities however consideration is required to the content and timing of the advertising schedule.

Of clear importance to individuals was the actual location of the University. Ease of access either from home or from their work location was a key feature in making an enquiry to the University and whether or not to subsequently enrol. Flexibility of timetabling and credit accumulation and transfer were also attractive to potential students. The institution should therefore use this information and pay a great deal of attention to its local community, employees and employers. The University is in a position to promote learning opportunities and increase the desire for learning by these individuals. There is support available by Education Guidance Advisors towards discussing learning aspirations and increasing confidence of any individual

who is interested in becoming a learner. Certainly, it was apparent the decision of whether or not to become a student at the University was a complex process and although personal factors were involved the type of provision and effective pre-entry educational guidance were key factors.

Enquirers want information relating to the context within which they will learn, e.g. timetable, location and facilities. The prospectus was found to be useful although some found it too complex and yet insufficiently detailed regarding the modules of interest. The level of pre-entry educational guidance clearly varies according to their background and their goals.

Although the majority of adults appear to be involved in education with a clear goal there are some that have no instrumental end in view and they are involved because they want to be and it suits them. Such students should not be dismissed lightly as education can have as much value for them as those who study for explicit purpose. Becoming a student can become an important part of a person's identity. Both the observations from the participant observation and some of the student's responses to their initial goal indicated that their original intention altered. Individuals did return to different types and levels of study and as a result become committed to an alternative and significant learning route.

Ongoing institutional support in the form of educational guidance and learning support and advisory services can strengthen the development of the part-time learners' experiences. The indications from this research indicate that the provision of clear initial information, appropriate pre-entry educational guidance and clear channels of communication between University staff, enquirers and students are important mechanisms in realising the initial student's expectations and assist in overcoming initial barriers to learning.

A strong structure of support is available within the University of Paisley and it is important to continue to identify effective methods to manage the available resources effectively. The students' responses and views are valuable. It is their feedback

from their experiences that can improve student satisfaction in the future. Improving the level of the student's satisfaction will in turn enhance the University's reputation. Recommendation is clearly an important factor for generating enquiries. A key feature from the results was that many students did not know what resources were available. For the part-time student the process of engagement in learning can be both tentative and complex. Appropriate support and pre-entry educational guidance needs to be provided to assist in their decision of whether or not to become involved with the institution. Alongside this many students are uncertain of their learning abilities and would clearly benefit from the support available until they become comfortable and fully engaged as a part-time student. Once they are familiar with the University and their own learning processes they will become more independent learners. However, there were clearly many students who were not benefiting from the support resources available because they did not know about them. Some students who withdrew felt bad about themselves and their University experience. They would have appreciated support before leaving and may have stayed with appropriate help. This transition from an uncertain learner to a positive and committed learner is an area, particularly in light of the lifelong learning contribution to tackling social inclusion that would be of particular interest for future research. To focus on this transition with the part-time learners would be an exciting challenge for the future. Satisfaction also depends upon the appropriateness of the module for which they have applied and been offered.

The role of the Education Guidance Advisor is pivotal in assisting the student in achieving both a successful start and outcome. More work needs to be done to increase the major contribution that they can provide in facilitating part-time students' access to facilities, maintaining motivation and assisting students in their quest for knowledge and learning.

An important challenge for the future will be to address those students who withdraw but do not inform the institution. It is difficult to propose an intervention strategy because there is no knowledge of this target population. How can those 'at risk' students be identified early enough to offer pre-exit guidance? How widespread is

the need? Who in the institution should be addressing this problem, Student Advisory Services, Educational Guidance Advisors or Course Leaders?

In conclusion the students' response to quality is reflected in the perception of their experiences. This level of satisfaction will vary depending on the quality of services and functions, which are provided, and the level of their achievements, their personalities, motivations and ambitions. Satisfaction also depends upon the students' expectations. The location of the institution together with the arrangements made by the institution and the course teams are vital ingredients for enhancing the student experience.

# CHAPTER TWELVE

## 12.0 Recommendations

As this was an action research project many specific recommendations were made for implementing in 1998/99, actions were implemented and students perceptions re-evaluated in 1999/00. As this was a cyclical process further recommendations were then made for implementing in session 2000/01. All recommendations are clearly detailed in the body of the findings in the text boxes.

The key recommendations made based on the findings in 1998/99 for actions to be implemented during 2000/01 are also detailed below.

### **Recommendations arising from the evaluation of the individual's experiences 1999/00.**

The following recommendations have been made for consideration for actions to be implemented for session 2000/01

Consideration has been given to some of the recommendation and actions either agreed or already implemented. This is indicated within the following text.

Consideration has still to be given to some of the following recommendations and decisions on what action, if any should be appropriate.

### **Recommendations to improve the Enquirer's Experiences**

From the re-evaluation of the experience of the enquirers in September 1999 the following recommendations were made for consideration in September 2000.

- To consider methods to raise the awareness of the fee waiver scheme, particularly locally
  1. *A simple leaflet explaining eligibility has been prepared and included in every enquirer's information pack*

2. *Reference is made to the Government Fee Waiver Scheme for part-time learning opportunities in publicity material and newspaper adverts*

- Accurate module details available on the Internet allowing public access
- The module browser to be made available at information sessions so that module details can be printed as required

*This will be available at the Information Sessions in September 2000*

- The most popular modules to be identified by Educational Guidance Advisors and the descriptors of those modules to be readily available at Information Sessions

*This has been implemented by the Education Guidance Advisors*

- To encourage enquirers to contact Education Guidance Advisors who will provide them with important details about possible study options
  1. *Departmental Co-ordinators, Unidirect Staff and the 'front-line' clerical staff are actively highlighting this to all enquirers*
  2. *The availability and role of the Educational Guidance Advisors has been explained in publicity material*
- To continue to promote effectively the presence of Education Guidance Advisors and subject specialist staff at information sessions

*Subject specific Information Sessions are being advertised publicising part-time provision*

- To continuously review the management of Information Sessions to ensure efficiency and effectiveness
- Encourage enquirers to attend information sessions supported by both subject specialist and Education Guidance Advisors
- Actively promote the importance of pre-entry guidance and its easy accessibility

*Staff have been briefed to continuously address this at every available opportunity*

- To continue to review the prospectus and its contents

*Ongoing annual activity in conjunction with Corporate Communications*



- To provide a pro-forma to enquirers which is completed by Education Guidance Advisors, with an outline of the learning opportunities available to the individual

*Pro-forma prepared and new enquirers who discuss their opportunities receive their copy.*

*Procedures established for using the pro-forma effectively to facilitate effective educational guidance between academic staff and students*

- Carry out further research into the demographic and biographical profile of enquirers to the University
- Investigate why fewer females enrol following their initial enquiry

### **Recommendations to improve the new students' experience in the initial days and first semester**

- To appoint a University Induction Co-ordinator

*An Induction Co-ordinator has been appointed and is located in the Centre for Teaching and Learning. Responsibilities will include providing induction to all full and part-time entrants across the University's three sites, at the beginning of each semester and at the start of the summer school. Staff and student evaluation will take place*

- To continue to use several methods of providing information about important dates and times (e.g. at induction, student course hand book, mid semester newsletter, notice board and web site etc.)
- To consider the directions and signage to locations such as printing and the notice boards
- Further investigation into withdrawal pattern is needed
- Part-time students should be encouraged to speak with a member of staff before leaving
- Part-time students who need to withdraw should be aware that they are welcome to return to their studies

*A template of a 'friendly' letter has been prepared which can be used to inform students that we are sorry that they are leaving but that they are welcome to return at a more appropriate time*

- Identify a strategy to research 'drop-outs'. There are many students who do not inform us of their intention to withdraw and who simply leave. There non-

attendance is only identifiable in June when the exam panels are held and their results are recorded as an 'unauthorised non-attendance'.

### **Further general recommendations arising from this exploration of the part-time students' experiences**

- To continue to evaluate the students' experiences make recommendations and implement actions to enhance the part-time student experience.
- To disseminate the findings within the University and influence Institutional policies.
- To encourage University staff to become involved in the undertaking of research into various aspects of the part-time student experience
- To identify areas of good practice from the outcomes of the research and provide this feedback to Universities Association of Continuing Education.
- To liaise with access development and part-time development officers, who have recently been appointed through SHEFC widening participation grants, and build upon the work at a national level.
- To continue to use action research as a basis for the evidence that the educational community needs on which to base its judgement and actions.
- To pursue the areas identified for future research.

This research was carried out to explore the experience of the part-time students enrolled in the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Paisley. An increased understanding of their experience by doing this research has informed practice. An in-depth description has been provided about their perceptions and it is up to others to decide what is applicable and appropriate to their academic community.

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# **Appendix A**

## **Project Plan**

# Project Plan

<b>1997/98</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant Observation</li> <li>• Literature review(ongoing activity)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• synoptic paper presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• preparation of draft questionnaires</li> </ul>	
<b>Semester 1</b> Sept      Jan	<b>Semester 2</b> Feb      May	<b>Summer</b> June      Aug.	
<b>1998/99</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of the most popular time and mode of delivery</li> <li>• Questionnaire preparation and pilot</li> <li>• Investigation of enquirers experience</li> <li>• Investigation of new students' experiences</li> </ul>	<b>1998/99</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of results</li> <li>• Interviews with withdrawn students</li> <li>• Analysis</li> <li>• Focus Groups with EGAs</li> </ul>	<b>1998/99</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider all recommendations</li> <li>• Identify areas for action</li> <li>• Write 1st year report</li> </ul>	
<b>Semester 1</b> Sept      Jan	<b>Semester 2</b> Feb      May	<b>Summer</b> June      Aug.	
<b>1999/00</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeat process at the same times of year</li> <li>• Individual interviews with Departmental Coordinators</li> </ul>	<b>1999/00</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student profile analysis</li> <li>• Repeat process at the same times as last year</li> </ul>	<b>1999/00</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit final report</li> <li>• Recommendations and future actions 2000/1</li> </ul>	



# Appendix B

## Audit Trail



# **Appendix C**

## **University of Paisley: Ethical Guidelines**

# **SECTION II**

**Guidelines Relating to the  
Ethical Approval, Notification and  
Monitoring of Research  
Involving Human Subjects  
at the  
University of Paisley**

**BEST COPY**

**AVAILABLE**

TEXT IN ORIGINAL IS  
CLOSE TO THE EDGE OF  
THE PAGE

## General Guidelines for Seeking Ethical Approval

At the undergraduate level a large amount of research involving human subjects takes place. Because this is rarely 'invasive' the Research Ethics Committee has taken the decision that most research involving human subjects needs only Departmental ethical scrutiny. Therefore all Departments engaging in research involving human subjects should either set up a Departmental Ethics Committee, or provide a forum in which ethical issues may be discussed.

### RESEARCH REQUIRING UNIVERSITY ETHICAL APPROVAL

The University Ethics Committee will complement the work of Departmental Ethics Committees and groups by offering scrutiny in certain circumstances. These include the following which must have University Research Ethical Committee approval:

- **Clinical trials**

Research conducted by University of Paisley staff or students which involves invasive procedures must have University Ethics Committee Approval. Invasive procedures include the administration of drugs for research purposes.

- **Research involving children**

Research involving children which is part of a supervised methods course would not normally require University Ethics Committee approval. However, the Committee believes that departmental scrutiny of such research should be thorough.

All other research involving children requires University Ethics Committee approval. It is especially important that research using methods of behaviour modification or the manipulation of emotional states is submitted for consideration by the University Ethics Committee.

- **Research involving deception**

The Committee is of the view that there are few circumstances in which deception can be ethically justified. However, where the researcher thinks that deception can be justified he or she must submit the proposed study to the Committee.

- **Research involving subjects/patients drawn from hospitals or medical records.**

Research involving patients should also be submitted to the University Committee. In most cases researchers would need ethical committee approval from the local trust or health board as well. Exceptions include research which is part of supervised research methods courses.

## THE ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT IN ETHICAL SCRUTINY

Departments which have a forum rather than a properly constituted Ethics Committee may want to make greater use of the University Ethics Committee in relation to research, and this will be at their discretion.

Where a Department within the University has its own Human Research Ethics Committee, it is assumed that the Departmental Committee will deal with the majority of research proposals. It will only refer to the University Ethics Committee when in doubt about such proposals and then complete Form EC1 in the normal way. The Department will notify the University Ethics Committee of its own ethical scrutiny on Form EC2.

Where a research proposal must be sent to an external Research Ethics Committee for scrutiny, a copy of the proposal should be lodged with the University Ethics Committee. The University committee will examine the proposal and let the candidate know its decision. The committee recognises that the proposal to the external committee may have to be submitted before the University has time to consider it. Researchers must be aware that in such cases the University may not give approval, even if the external committee has done so. In such cases, which are expected to be rare, the researcher must not proceed with the research until the University committee is satisfied that its concerns have been addressed.

It is anticipated that in the majority of cases ethical scrutiny of research proposed by students or staff will be unproblematic. The University of Paisley Ethics Committee seeks to promote and operate a consistent and appropriate system where Departments and supervisors assume some of the responsibility for considering the ethical implications of their research.

In making an application to the Committee, a Head of Department or Supervisor should complete Form EC1. Questions relating to several key ethical principles have been incorporated into the form in order to demonstrate that they have been taken into account. It is recommended that a copy of the form, or a part thereof could be kept on file with the project proposal.

Form EC1 should be submitted to the Committee at least 2-3 weeks in advance of the next scheduled meeting. Scheduled meetings are expected to take place every semester. Where a form is being submitted to the Research Degrees Committee, the Ethics Committee would normally expect to deal with it in advance of the meeting of the Research Degrees Committee. Where a Head of Department or supervisor requires an urgent decision, a special request to this effect should be lodged with the Clerk to the Committee, and an ad hoc meeting of the Committee may then be set up.

Following its deliberations, the Committee will notify the Head of Department, or supervisor of its decision. Where ethical approval has been refused, a full explanation will be offered in writing. The Head of Department or supervisor is then free to make a further application, modified in line with the Committee's comments.

If in re-submitting, the applicant has not been able to respond to the Committee's points, then a written explanation will again be sent to the Head of Department or supervisor. Ethical approval will be refused unless the Committee's points are fully addressed. In other words, the research work cannot proceed until the Committee has granted ethical approval.

Departments may wish to apply to the University Ethics Committee in cases where internal agreement cannot be reached, or where the procedures are new and/or considered to be contentious. Where internal agreement has not been reached, all paperwork pertaining to the proposal should be submitted.

In addition to situations where agreement has not been reached, there may be other circumstances in which one member of a Department is in dispute over ethical decisions made within a Department. In such cases of dispute, the University Ethics Committee will act in arbitration if requested to do so.

Following its deliberations, the Committee will notify the Head of Department of its decision in respect of research. Where ethical approval is not granted, or in the case of an application referred through dispute, a full explanation will be offered in writing. The Head of Department or supervisor is then free to make a further application, modified in line with the Committee's comments.

The Committee will scrutinise applications for their scientific merit. However, it is expected that Departments will assume the main responsibility for this and a statement to this effect is required on the application form. If the Committee is not happy with an aspect of the proposal with regard to its scientific merit, then it will take this into account when considering its approval.

It should be noted that clinical trials conducted within the University are not covered for insurance purposes. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the individual researcher and/or the Department to negotiate insurance cover for clinical trials directly with the Vice-Principal.



# Guidelines for the Application to the University Ethics Committee

## Form ECI - Application for University Ethical Committee Approval

The first six questions are self-explanatory.

Questions 7-10 require a brief description of the aims, sample and procedures and is relatively straightforward. A study which is not properly designed will not yield useful findings. It is not ethical to subject people to potentially hazardous research where the findings are unlikely to be of any use.

Question 11 - Many social science studies are not suitable for 'power testing'. (Formulae have been developed to assist in selecting the sample size when it is important to limit estimation errors to a particular level. Many statistics books describe power testing.) Any study involving invasive procedures must, except in rare circumstances, include power analysis so as to only include the minimum number of subjects necessary to detect effects.

Question 12 - This question is straightforward.

Questions 13-15 - The committee must be informed of any invasive procedures and anything about a study which might potentially distress or psychologically damage a participant. In the case of drug trials or other research involving the potential for damage arrangements must be made to compensate subjects in the case of injury. The University cannot be expected to accept liability in the event of harm to research subjects.

Question 16 - *Justifiable* deception may form part of a research study. Examples would include making research subjects aware of the purpose of the study in such general terms that they are not aware of the precise topic of interest. It may also involve the offering of a placebo instead of a therapeutic drug. However, in the case of randomised controlled drug trials the potential participant must be informed that he or she might be in the placebo group; this is common practice in drug trials. Where a researcher plans to use justifiable deception, this must be explained and justified in the appropriate section on the application form.

Question 17 - Students often benefit from taking part in studies because they have an opportunity to observe an experiment or survey. However, the committee is especially interested in knowing about *clinically* therapeutic benefits.

**Question 18 - Confidentiality is important in research involving human subjects. The Committee requires detailed information of how the researcher intends to maintain confidentiality. Where necessary the Committee must be shown that the researcher understands the distinction between confidentiality and anonymity.**

**Questions 19-20 - It is most important that consent is 'informed'.**

**Questions 21-22- Consent to be valid must be voluntary. This means that pressure must not be put on people to take part in research. The committee is interested in knowing whether consent is obtained via an 'opt-in' or an 'opt-out' method, and what kinds of inducements are offered that might make consent less than voluntary.**

**Question 23 - Researchers often assume that people who agree to take part in research are competent to give consent. The committee needs to know how the researchers will ensure that this is the case.**

**Question 24 - Will the research take place in a hospital, a person's home, place of work, the university?**

**Question 25-26 - It is not uncommon for people to be paid to conduct studies, especially in the clinical field. In some cases this creates a conflict of interest. The Committee wishes to know about payments in order to judge whether or not the researcher might experience a conflict of interest in relation to duties of care to research subjects and desire for payment.**

**Questions 27 - If there are ethical considerations not addressed directly by the form this space should be used to raise those issues. Failure to do so may jeopardise approval.**



As outlined in the Introduction, some submissions to the University Ethics Committee will involve notification only. These include notification of the results of departmental scrutiny of research proposals involving human subjects from the following groups:

- Staff
- Research students
- Postgraduate students on taught courses
- Undergraduates conducting research for dissertations

### **Notification of Departmental Scrutiny of Research**

In the interests of offering a consistent approach across the University it is hoped that the Departmental scrutiny will adhere to the guidelines published by the University Ethics Committee and embodied within Form EC1.

The Departmental Ethics Committee is required to submit Form EC2. Departmental Ethics Committees are also required to keep the proposals considered for a period of one year, during which time the University Research Ethics Committee may audit proposals.

Form EC2 is a simple summary of the decisions which have been taken and it should be submitted to the Clerk of the University Ethics Committee in time for the scheduled meetings if there is a return to be made.

A sample form is to be found in Appendix 2.

### **Documentation on Departmental Ethical Scrutiny**

Many Departments will already have their own system for internal scrutiny or undergraduate project work and the University Ethics Committee would like to ensure that best practice is disseminated widely.

The University Research Ethics Committee will annually request information about departmental procedures for monitoring the ethics of research projects by staff and students. Any written documentation provided for students and staff should be sent to the Committee.

## **Appendix D**

**Telephone interview schedules: enquirers**

Telephone Questionnaire: INITIAL ENQUIRERS WHO DID COME TO PAISLEY

1. When did you make your initial enquiry at the University of Paisley?  
 \* Circle response

Month ..... Before / After / During / Don't Know\*  
 start of Semester

2. Why did you make an enquiry at Paisley?(main response)

- |                                |                          |  |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Saw an advert                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Recommended by a friend                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Location                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | One of several unis. contacted                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Timetable (flexible/part-time) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fee waiver scheme                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Accreditation scheme           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Direct Articulation Path<br>(from Associate College) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Flexible programmes            | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |                          |

Other: .....  
 .....  
 .....

3. How did you make your enquiry?

Post  E-Mail / Net  In person  Telephone

Other: .....

4. Who did you speak to? (if phone)

Didn't know  Hot Line (0800 no.)

Continuing Education Other .....

5. When you initially contacted Paisley what information were you looking for?

Didn't know  Course

Subject areas offered  Timetabling (flexible/part-time)

Accreditation information  Facilities

General information

Other: .....  
 .....

6. Did you manage to find out this information?

NO Why not? .....

YES At that point  Further phone call

By post: printed infon.  At an information session

Other: .....

7. How could your experience when enquiring at Paisley have been improved?

Contact could not answer my question  Was passed around

Other: .....

.....

.....

8. What was your goal when making your enquiry?

.....

.....

9. Were you interested in a Degree course or one/two modules?

Degree Course  One/two modules

10. Is your goal still the same? Yes / No \*

11. Did you get a prospectus? Yes / No / Don't Know\*

12. Was it useful? Yes / No \*

Comments: .....

.....

13. Did you come to an information session? Yes / No \*

14. Was it useful? Yes / No \*

15. Could these sessions be made more useful?

.....

.....

**DID COME**

**16. Why did you choose Paisley?**

Had the course I wanted

Was accepted

Personal reasons

Timetabling (flexible/part-time)

Accreditation scheme

Location

Facilities

Comments: .....

.....

.....

**Additional Information**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Telephone Questionnaire: INITIAL ENQUIRERS WHO DID NOT COME TO PAISLEY

1. When did you make your initial enquiry at the University of Paisley?  
 \* Circle response

Month ..... Before / After / During / Don't Know \*  
 start of Semester

2. Why did you make an enquiry at Paisley? (main response)

- |                                |                          |  |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Saw an advert                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Recommended by a friend                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Location                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | One of several unis. contacted                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Timetable (flexible/part-time) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Fee waiver scheme                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Accreditation scheme           | <input type="checkbox"/> | Direct Articulation Path<br>(from Associate College) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Flexible programmes            | <input type="checkbox"/> |  |                          |

Other: .....  
 .....  
 .....

3. How did you make your enquiry?

- Post  E-Mail / Net  In person  Telephone

Other: .....

4. Who did you speak to? (if phone)

- Don't know  Hot Line (0800 no.)

Continuing Education  Other .....

5. When you initially contacted Paisley what information were you looking for?

- Didn't know  Course

- Subject areas offered  Timetabling

- Accreditation information  Facilities

- General information

Other: .....  
 .....



DID NOT

6. Did you manage to find out this information?

NO Why not? .....

YES At that point  Further phone call   
By post: printed infon.  At an information session

Other: .....  
.....

7. How could your experience when enquiring at Paisley have been improved?

Contact could not answer my question  Was passed around

Other: .....  
.....  
.....

8. What were you hoping to achieve when making your enquiry?

.....  
.....

9. Were you interested in doing a Degree course or one/two modules?

Degree course  One/two modules

10. Did you get a prospectus? Yes / No / Don't know\*

11. Was it useful? Yes / No \*

Comments: .....  
.....

12. Did you come to an information session? Yes / No \*

13. Was it useful? Yes / No \*

14. Could these sessions be made more useful?

.....  
.....

DID NOT

15. Why didn't you choose Paisley?

Didn't have appropriate qualifications

Was not accepted

Didn't have the course I wanted

Personal reasons

Location

Facilities

Timetabling

Cost of Modules

Comments: .....  
.....

16. Are you currently doing another course?

Yes / No \*

17. Where?: ..... Degree?: .....

Additional Information

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## **Appendix E**

**Postal questionnaire: initial student experience**

November, 1999

Dear Student,

### **Support provided at the University of Paisley to Part-time Students**

As part of our drive to further improve our service to students we are asking you what it has been like to adjust to student life when you are part-time. We would be very grateful for your help in answering questions about starting at the University and the support you have received during your first semester. The questions follow on the next pages and are in two sections.

#### **SECTION 1: Your first few days**

Think back to your first few visits to the University of Paisley and what might have helped you cope. We have asked some specific questions and have provided space for you to tell us exactly what a student needs and whether this was provided in your case.

#### **SECTION 2: Your first semester**

Students have both formal and informal sources of support at University. Although you may be aware of who the University contact is, you may prefer to speak to a friend, outside agency or someone else to help you deal with obstacles to your learning. We are interested in both whether you have been able to identify the University contacts we provide and who you actually go to when seeking support - they may be different people. Your answers should reflect how you experience things at University.

We appreciate your time in completing these questions as any help you give will assist us in improving the service we provide to part-time students. Please return the completed form in the enclosed prepaid envelope as soon as you can.

If you have any queries about this form please contact:

Department of Continuing Education  
University of Paisley  
Paisley PA1 2BE

Telephone No.: 0141 848 3193  
E-mail: [conted@paisley.ac.uk](mailto:conted@paisley.ac.uk)

Many thanks for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Anne McGillivray  
Senior Education Guidance Advisor/Course Leader Combined Awards

/Encl.

**ABOUT YOU**

Please provide your name and matric number as this will help us to target support to part-time students more effectively in the future. Your responses will be treated confidentially.

Name: ..... Matric No: ..... / .....

**SECTION I: YOUR FIRST FEW DAYS at the University as a part-time student**

**1. DATES AND TIMES – your first few days**

*\* Circle your response*

- a. Did you know that you could attend open information sessions? Yes / No \*
- b. Did you know that you could attend induction sessions? Yes / No \*
- c. Did you know when your first classes were due to take place? Yes / No \*
- d. Were you given sufficient notice about important dates and times? Yes / No \*
- e. Did you miss any important appointments? Yes / No \*
- f. What did you miss? .....
- g. Was the advice or information the University provided about dates and times of appointments or open sessions (information sessions, enrolment, induction, classes, etc.) helpful? Yes / No \*
- h. What advice or information should the University have provided you with in respect of dates and times?  
.....  
.....  
.....

**2. PLACES – your first few days**

- a. Did you have difficulty in finding your way about the University? Yes / No \*
  - b. Name one place you had particular problems finding, if any.  
.....
  - c. How did you actually get there? *Please tick one option*
    - Asked a staff member  Asked someone passing
    - A map the University provided  A map located in the University
    - Other help
- Define what other help: .....

**2. PLACES – your first few days (continued)**

d. Was the advice or information the University provided to help you find important places helpful? Yes / No \*

e. What advice or information should the University have provided to help you find important places?  
.....  
.....  
.....

**3. PEOPLE – your first few days**

a. Did you know who your Education Guidance Adviser was? Yes / No \*

b. Did you know anyone else already studying at the University of Paisley or about to start at the same time as you? Yes / No \*

c. If so, did that person provide you with useful information or advice you had not received from the University? Yes / No \*

d. Was the advice or information the University provided to link you with the people you wanted or needed to contact helpful? Yes / No \*

e. What advice or information should the University have provided to link you with the people you wanted or needed to contact?  
.....  
.....  
.....



**SECTION 2: YOUR FIRST SEMESTER at the University as a part-time student**

**1. HAVE YOU SOUGHT ADVICE OR INFORMATION ON:**

a. Your choice of modules Yes / No \*

b. Your finances Yes / No \*

c. Personal issues which may affect your studies Yes / No \*

d. Finding books or journals Yes / No \*

e. How to write an essay Yes / No \*

f. How to study for exams Yes / No \*

**2. WHO CAN GIVE YOU ADVICE**

*For each of the following options:*

Can you say who is *EMPLOYED* by the University to give you advice on the following issues. If you do not know that is OK – just leave it blank as we want to know what your experience of our information service has been.

*And*

Who is the *ACTUAL* person you would go to see for advice on the following issues.

a. **Your choice of modules –**

*EMPLOYED* .....

*ACTUAL* .....

b. **Your finances –**

*EMPLOYED* .....

*ACTUAL* .....

c. **Personal issues which may affect your studies –**

*EMPLOYED* .....

*ACTUAL* .....

d. **Finding the books or journals you need –**

*EMPLOYED* .....

*ACTUAL* .....

e. **How to write an essay –**

*EMPLOYED* .....

*ACTUAL* .....

f. **How to study for exams –**

*EMPLOYED* .....

*ACTUAL* .....

**3. ADVICE AND INFORMATION GENERALLY**

a. Was the advice and information provided by the University available when you needed it?

Yes / No \*

b. If not, what information? .....

c. When did you need it? .....

d. What advice would you give us about providing information to part-time students (times, places, people, etc.)?

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.....

## **Appendix F**

**Telephone interview schedule: withdrawn students**



PRE-EXIT GUIDANCE: PHONE QUESTIONNAIRE

PERSONAL

GENDER: M / F

AGE: .....

EXPERIENCE AT PAISLEY

1. Why did you choose to study at Paisley?

Main

Reason (tick)

- Had the course I wanted  .....
- Personal reasons  .....
- Flexible timetabling  .....
- Location  .....
- Was accepted  .....
- Accreditation scheme  .....
- Facilities  .....
- Other  .....

.....

2. What was your goal when you started studying?

- Personal  Employment
- Other  .....

.....

.....

3. Were you interested in doing a degree or one/two modules?

- Degree  One/two modules

4. When did you attend classes?

Semester 1: Day / Evening / Weekend / Combination

Semester 2: Day / Evening / Weekend / Combination

5. What were your reasons for leaving Paisley?

Main

Reason (tick)

- Did not like University  .....
- Course unsuitable  .....
- Academic reasons  .....
- Academic failure/ left in bad standing  .....
- Exclusion  .....
- Transferred to another institution  .....
- To take up/change job  .....
- Financial reasons  .....
- Personal reasons  .....
- Health  .....
- Death  .....
- Other  .....

.....

6. Was your experience of higher education at Paisley close to your expectations? Yes / No

If not, in what way? .....



7. When did you leave your course? .....

**PRE-EXIT GUIDANCE**

8. Did you know that the University provide a range of support and advice services to students considering leaving their courses? Yes / No

9. Did you speak to any staff member about your concerns relating to your course prior to leaving? Yes / No

Who to? .....

10. Did that staff member suggest you speak to anyone else? Yes / No

11. Did you speak to anyone else about your concerns prior to leaving? Yes / No  
Who to? .....

12. Who provided you with most support then?  
.....

13. Were you satisfied with the level of support you received from the University prior to leaving? Yes / No  
If no,why? .....  
.....

14. Do you agree with statement "I think my decision to leave the University was correct"? Agree / Disagree

**CURRENTLY**

15. Are you studying now? Yes / No  
Where? .....

16. Do you intend to return to higher education in the future? Yes / No

17. If so, would you consider the University of Paisley again? Yes / No

18. What support or information should Paisley provide for people who may be considering leaving their course?  
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## **Appendix G**

**Interview schedule: Departmental co-ordinators**

1. How long have you been Department Co-ordinator for the Combined Awards students studying in your department?  
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2. What does your role as DC involve?

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.....  
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.....

3. Do you tend to see many part-time continuing education students on 1 or 2 occasions or the same few students frequently?

.....  
.....

4. How can part-time students contact you?

.....  
.....

5. Generally, what issues do part-time Cont. Educn. students come to you with?

- Module choice/course route .....
- Course content .....
- Contextual issues (timetable, computer labs, etc) .....
- Study related (essay skills, etc) .....
- Financial .....
- Personal .....
- Other .....

.....  
.....

6. Is there one issue which these students raise more often than any other?

.....  
.....

7. Do you refer students to other advice or information sources?

- |           |       |            |       |
|-----------|-------|------------|-------|
| Never     | ..... | Rarely     | ..... |
| Sometimes | ..... | Frequently | ..... |

8. If so, which sources?

.....  
.....

9. Are there any institutional procedures which you find make your role as DC more difficult? Y / N

What are they? .....

.....  
.....

10. Are there any other problems which you have identified? Y / N

What are they? .....

.....  
.....

11. Have you identified any procedures which particularly help you perform this role? Y / N

What are they? .....

.....  
.....

12. Can you suggest any procedural changes which you believe would make your role as DC more effective?

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# **Appendix H**

## **The role of the Departmental Co-ordinator**

# **ROLE OF CATS COORDINATOR**

## **Advisory Function**

Provision of Departmental or subject-specific information to students, applicants, EGAs on such issues as:

- prior credit and prerequisites
- possible duplication
- requirements for progression
- requirements for professional accreditation

Availability to students throughout induction and matriculation period; organisation of information availability

Availability to students to discuss issues relating to academic progress

Advice on module choices following examinations

## **Administrative Role**

Supplying module descriptors (updates), module information, timetable information to Continuing Education

Approving programmes for transfer students

Liaison with department/subject area re part-time provision

Liaison with department/subject area re ISU supervisors

Support at group advisory sessions and Open Days for subject-specific advice

Coordinate student/module information and attend Examination Panels

Attendance at Coordinators' Meetings, Combined Awards Course Committee Meetings (Departmental representatives), Student/Staff Liaison Committees as required

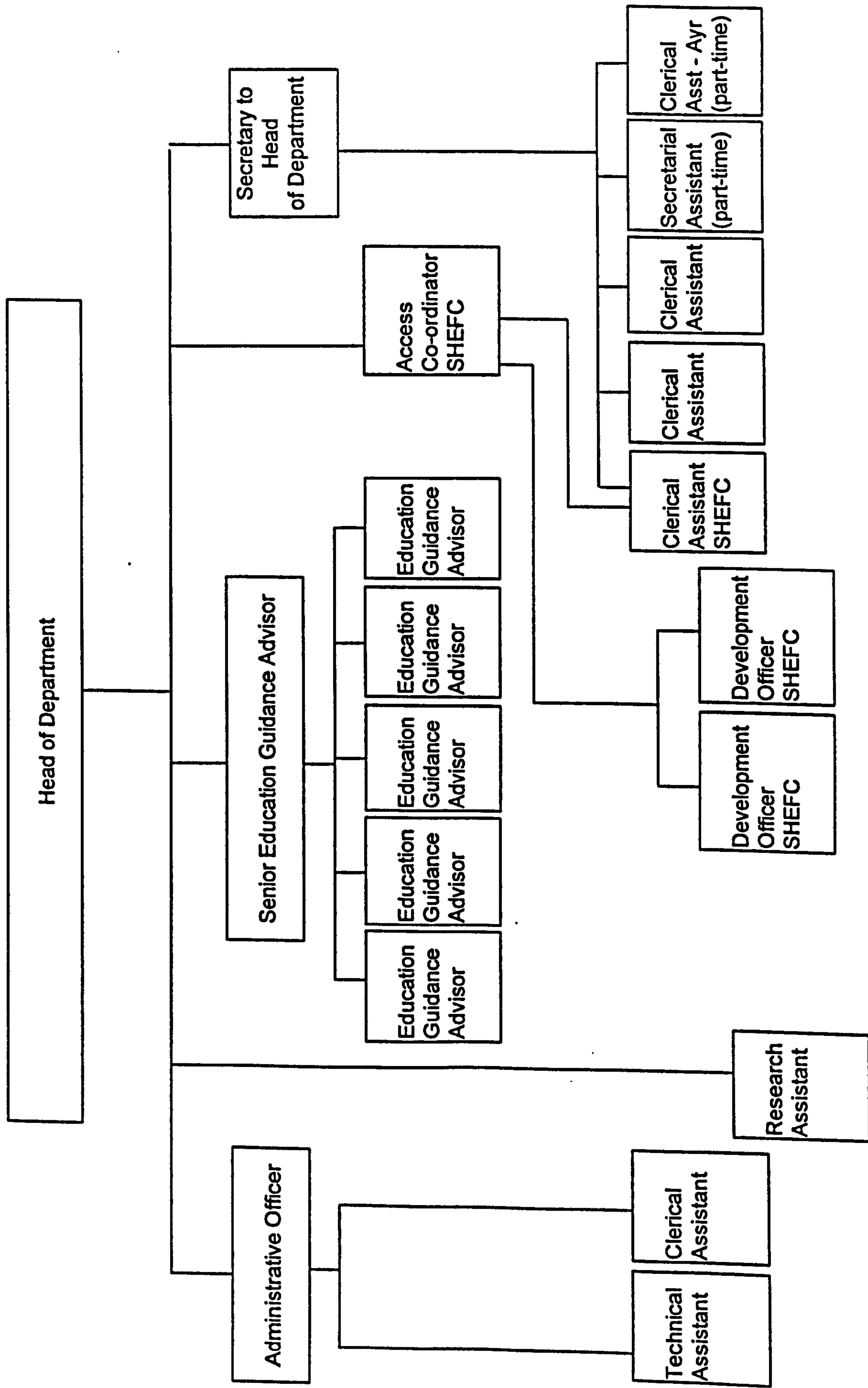
*In some departments the advisory function re admissions is formally administrative*



# **Appendix I**

## **Departmental structure**

# DEPARTMENT OF CONTINUING EDUCATION



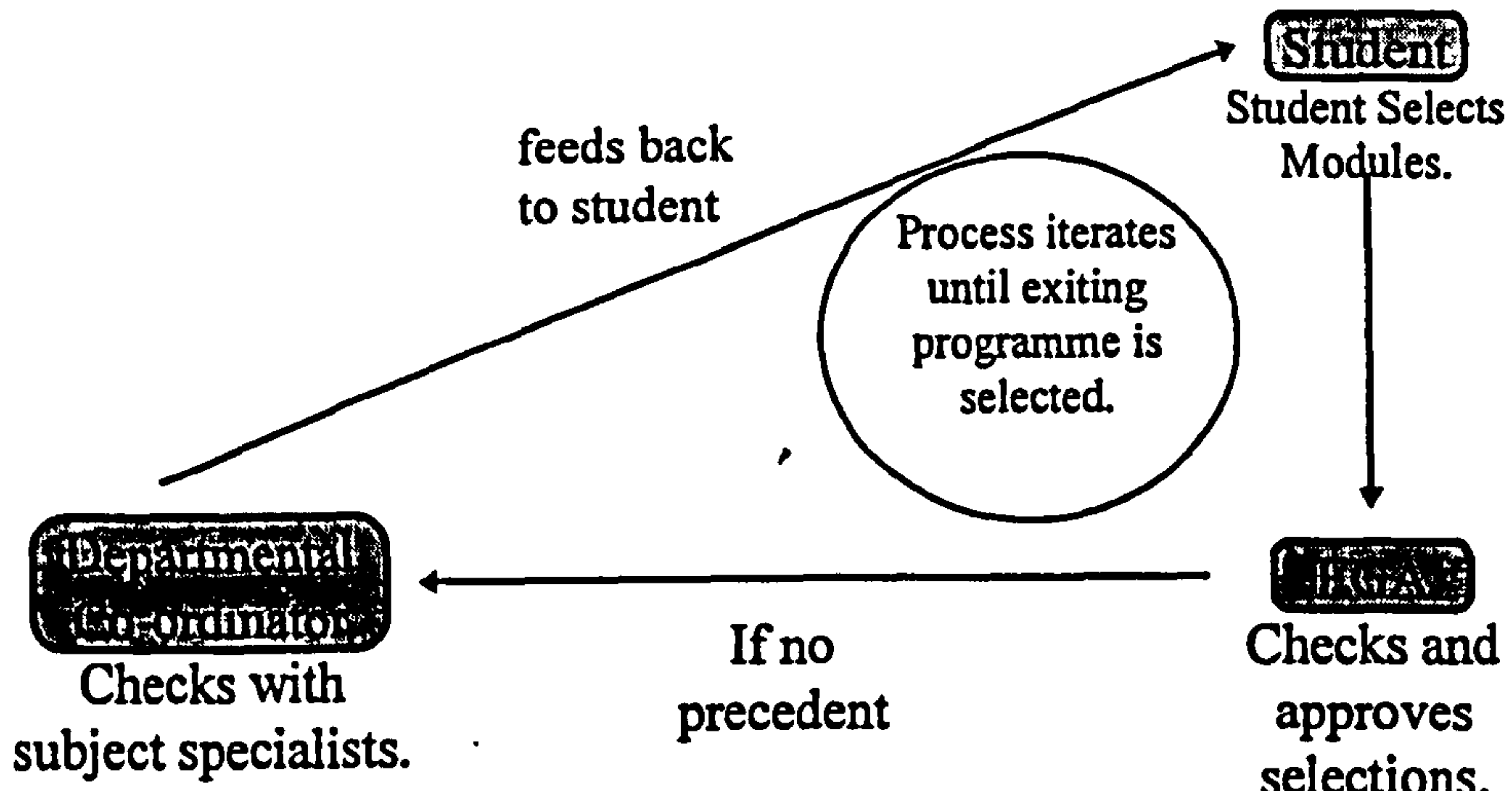
# Appendix J

## Programme approval procedures

# PROGRAMMES APPROVAL AND THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATION GUIDANCE ADVISOR

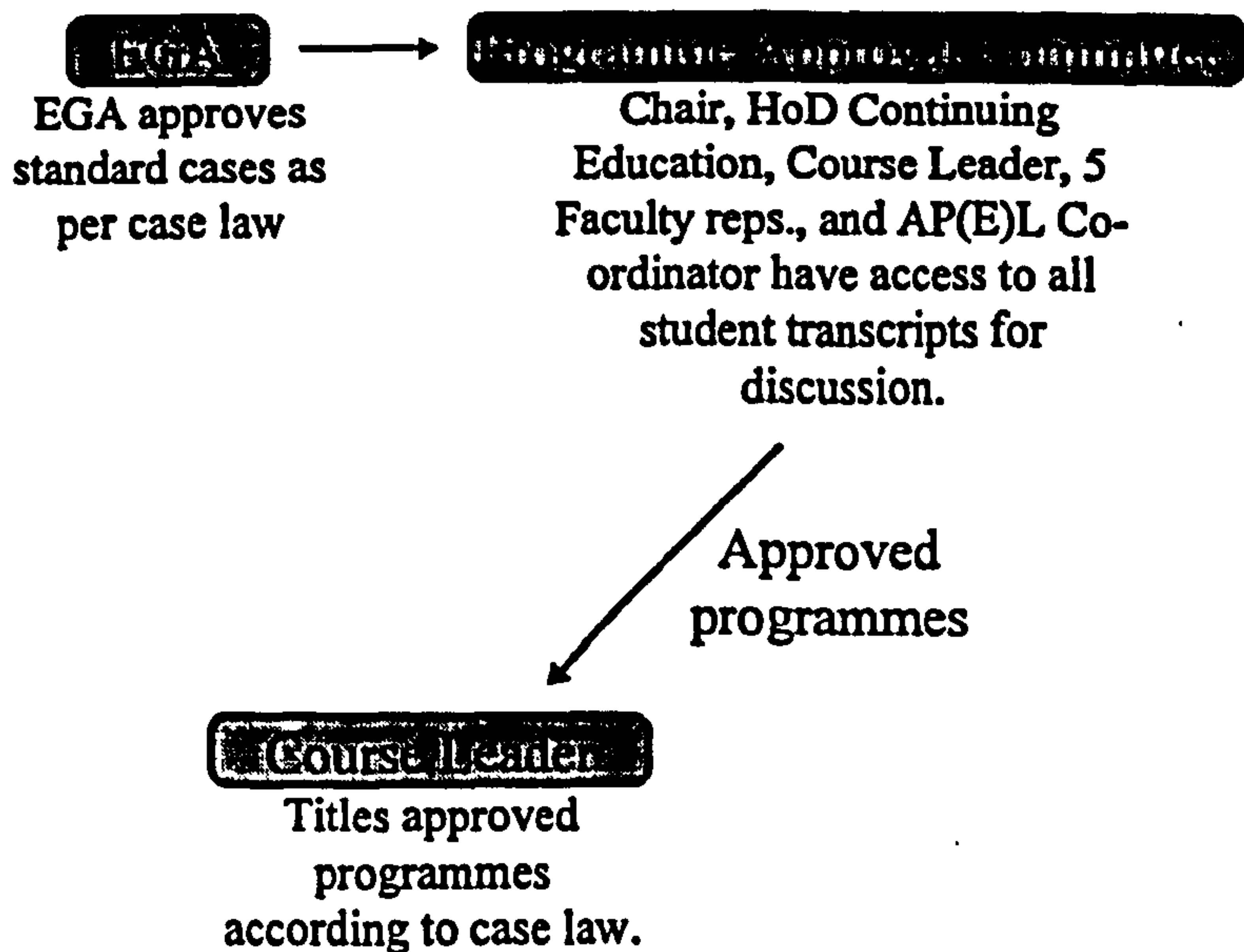
## Module Selection:

Module Results are moderated through individual Module Panels.



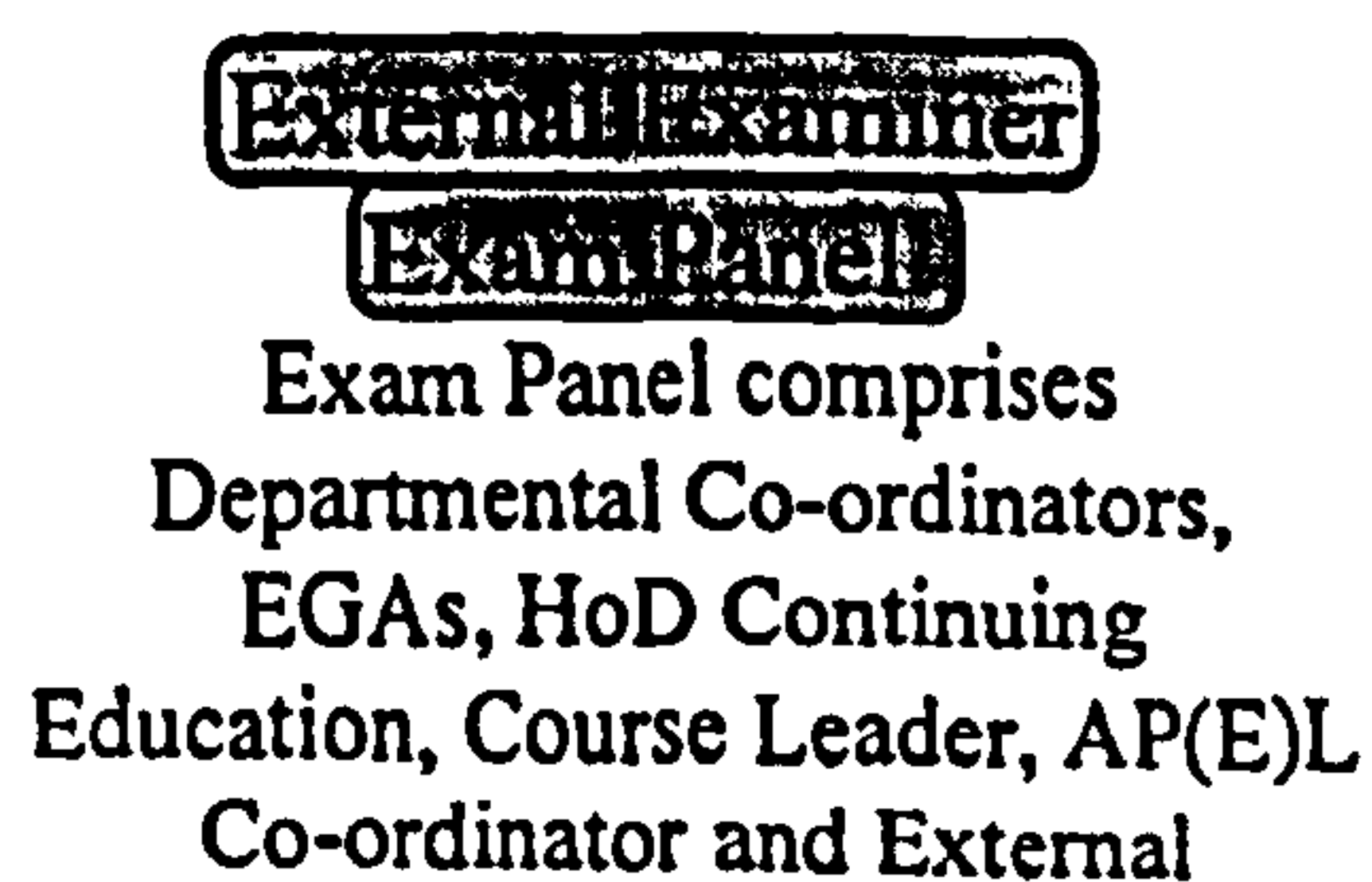
## Exiting Students:

All exiting programmes are overseen by the Programme Approval Committee. This is a sub-committee of the Modular Programmes Board.



## Exam Panel:

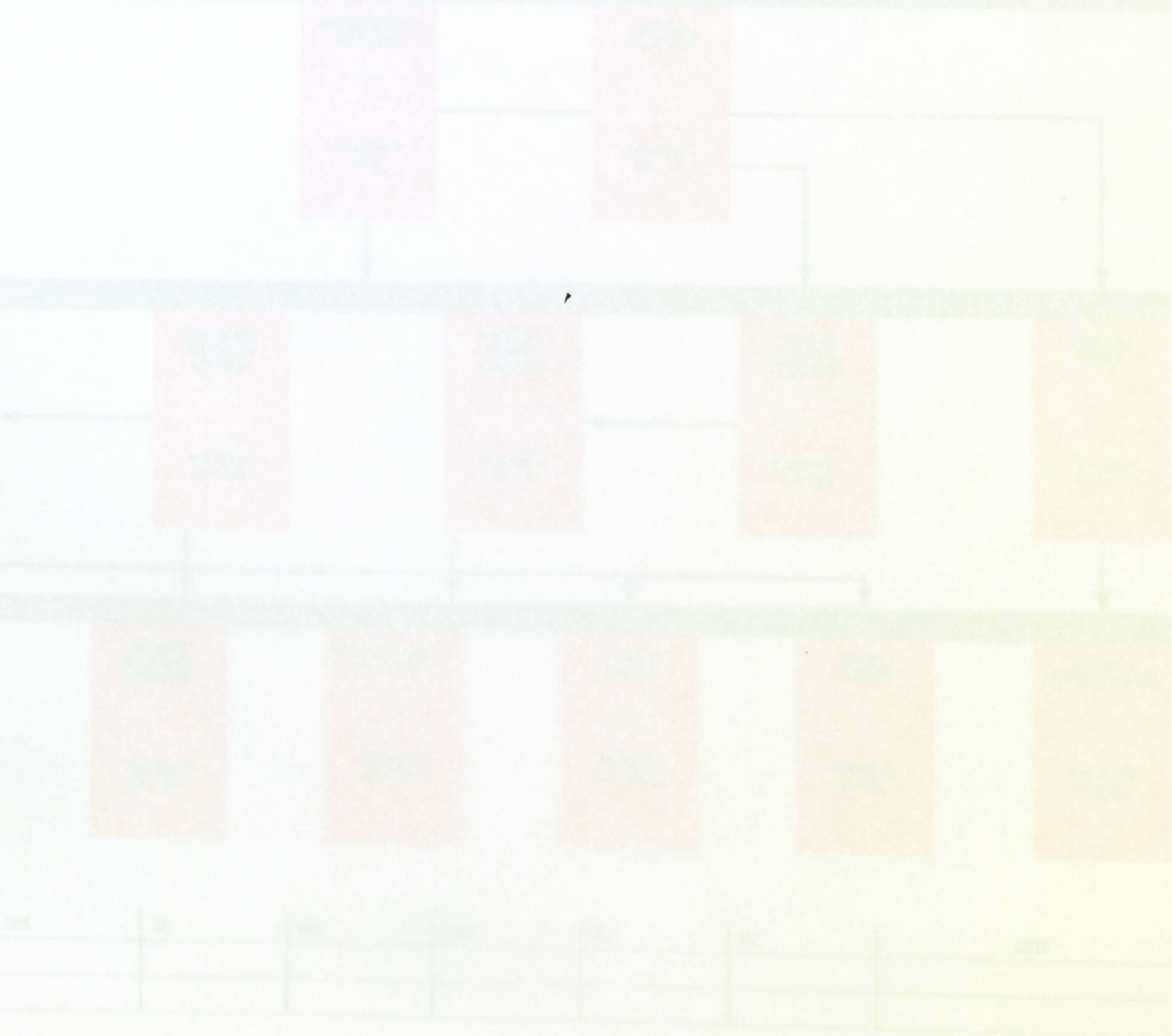
All exiting programmes are scrutinised by the Exam Panel, overseen by External Examiner.



# Appendix L

## ACCOUNTING

Module route diagram: sample



# MEDIA STUDIES

## INTRODUCTION TO MEDIA THEORY

**Module Code:** MSTD1001  
**Level 1** No pre-requisite  
**Assessment:** Coursework  
**Co-ordinator:** Alex Gilkinson, Faculty of Education  
**Ayr Campus:** Monday afternoons Semester 1

An introduction to the nature of media forms and to the key concepts of media studies, including underpinning theoretical frameworks. The changing nature of media production will be considered and students will take part in a practical production exercise.

## VIDEO PRODUCTION

**Module Code:** MSTD1004  
**Level 1** No pre-requisite  
**Assessment:** Coursework  
**Co-ordinator:** Marcus Bowman, Faculty of Education  
**Ayr Campus:** Monday mornings Semester 1

A practical introduction to the basic principles of video production. The module covers the various skills and crafts of video production and considers the practical applications of video as both a factual and a creative medium.

## BROADCAST MEDIA

**Module Code:** MSTD1005  
**Level 1** No pre-requisite  
**Assessment:** Coursework  
**Co-ordinator:** Marcus Bowman, Faculty of Education  
**Ayr Campus:** Wednesday afternoons Semester 2

Historical development of broadcast industries. Technological developments - recent and future. The roles of the BBC and independent companies. Study of different genres, production processes and audiences.

## HISTORY OF THE MEDIA

**Module Code:** MSTD1006  
**Level 1** No pre-requisite  
**Assessment:** Coursework and Examination  
**Co-ordinator:** Alex Gilkinson, Faculty of Education  
**Ayr Campus:** Monday afternoons Semester 2

Origins of the mass media. Newspapers and their development in the 20th century. Film industry - survey of development in the 20th century. New technology and the media in the late 20th century. Contemporary popular music.

## MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS

**Module Code:** MSTD1008  
**Level 1** No pre-requisite  
**Assessment:** Coursework  
**Co-ordinator:** Alex Gilkinson, Faculty of Education  
**Ayr Campus:** Thursday mornings Semester 2

Media representation will be discussed and analysed across a range of media - advertising, the press, film and television. Key areas such as gender, the family and minority groups will provide the focus.

## FILM ANALYSIS

**Module Code:** MSTD2002  
**Level 2** No pre-requisite  
**Assessment:** Coursework  
**Co-ordinator:** Alex Gilkinson, Faculty of Education  
**Ayr Campus:** Tuesday afternoons Semester 1

History of early cinema. Most of the content will be based on the development of Hollywood, the studio system and the star system, but the development of British, European and World cinema will also be considered. Technical developments will be explored and consideration will be given to different film genres through practical activities involving analysis.

## ADVERTISING MEDIA

**Module Code:** MSTD2003  
**Level 2** No pre-requisite  
**Assessment:** Continuous Assessment  
**Co-ordinator:** Anne Gifford, Faculty of Education  
**Ayr Campus:** Wednesday afternoons Semester 2

The work of advertising agencies will be explored. Different forms of advertising will be considered - radio, press, television, posters, etc.

## AUDIO PRODUCTION

**Module Code:** MSTD2004  
**Level 2** No pre-requisite  
**Assessment:** Coursework  
**Co-ordinator:** Marcus Bowman, Faculty of Education  
**Ayr Campus:** Various Days and Times (Negotiable)

The module will introduce students to the characteristics of the audio medium and provide practical experience of the applications of sound systems and audio production.

# SOCIAL SCIENCE

## BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

**Module Code:** PLTC1002  
**Level 1** No pre-requisite  
**Assessment:** Coursework and Examination  
**Co-ordinator:** Andrew Eccles, Applied Social Studies  
**Paisley Campus:** Wednesday evenings Semester 1

This module examines the nature of British politics and the British system of government by examining its key factors and institutions. It adopts an explicitly political science perspective by asking the central question at all times: where does power lie and how is it exercised?

## WHO GOVERNS? PARTIES, POLICIES & THE STATE

**Module Code:** PLTC2004  
**Level 2** Pre-requisite British Government and Politics  
**Assessment:** Coursework and Examination  
**Co-ordinator:** Andrew Eccles, Applied Social Studies  
**Paisley Campus:** Wednesday evenings Semester 2

This module builds on the knowledge and analytical approach developed in British Government and Politics to examine the dynamics of politics and policy making in greater depth. The focus will be on welfare policy in recent years and will highlight shifting public attitudes and the difficulties encountered by governments in achieving policy change.

## PSYCHOLOGY: BASIC PROCESSES

<b>Module Code:</b>	PSYC2001
<b>Level 2</b>	No pre-requisite
<b>Assessment:</b>	Coursework and Examination
<b>Co-ordinator:</b>	Mecca Chiesa, Applied Social Studies
<b>Paisley Campus:</b>	Thursday evenings Semester 1
<b>Ayr Campus:</b>	Thursday evenings Semester 1

In this module you will study the basic psychological processes of learning, perception and memory.

## INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

<b>Module Code:</b>	PSYC2002
<b>Level 2</b>	No pre-requisite
<b>Assessment:</b>	Coursework and Examination
<b>Co-ordinator:</b>	Sandy Hobbs, Applied Social Studies
<b>Paisley Campus:</b>	Thursday evening Semester 2
<b>Ayr Campus:</b>	Thursday evenings Semester 2

Personality and intelligence; theories and measurement. Attitudes, person perception and behaviour in groups.

## ALCOHOL, DRUGS & ADDICTION

<b>Module Code:</b>	NURS3005
<b>Level 3</b>	Pre-requisite minimum 210 SCOTCAT points or appropriate prior learning or experience
<b>Assessment:</b>	Coursework and Examination
<b>Co-ordinator:</b>	Ken Barrie, Applied Social Studies
<b>Paisley Campus:</b>	Tuesday evenings Semester 1
<b>Ayr Campus:</b>	Thursday evenings Semester 1

This module covers a wide perspective of alcohol/drug use encompassing biological, psychological and sociological factors. The interaction between the drug, the individual and the environment is examined, as is the link between HIV/AIDS and drug use.

## ALCOHOL & DRUGS: POLICY & PREVENTION

<b>Module Code:</b>	SPOL3007
<b>Level 3</b>	Pre-requisite minimum 210 SCOTCAT points or appropriate prior learning or experience
<b>Assessment:</b>	Coursework and Examination
<b>Co-ordinator:</b>	Ken Barrie, Applied Social Studies
<b>Paisley Campus:</b>	Tuesday evenings Semester 2
<b>Ayr Campus:</b>	Thursday evenings Semester 2

This module covers: alcohol/drug social policy models - alcohol/drug prevention models - policy and service links - HIV/AIDS, harm reduction - alcohol drugs and the law.

The delivery mode of the following two modules, Social Divisions A and B, is offered on a concentrated basis with both module A and B being offered in the same Semester. Individual coursework is set for each module including separate assessment and exams. Exams for both modules take place at the end of Semester 1.

## SOCIAL DIVISIONS A

<b>Module Code:</b>	SOCY3001
<b>Level 3</b>	Pre-requisite minimum 210 SCOTCAT points or appropriate prior learning or experience Co-requisite Social Divisions B
<b>Assessment:</b>	Coursework and Examination
<b>Co-ordinator:</b>	Charles Johnstone, Applied Social Studies
<b>Paisley Campus:</b>	Monday evenings Semester 1

This module is concerned with the major dimensions of social stratification in contemporary British Society: class, gender and ethnicity/race. The module begins by highlighting the key principles of sociological investigation. It seeks to highlight the usefulness of a variety of sociological perspectives, locating these in their historical context, while evaluating the applicability of such approaches in modern societies. Underlying these concerns is an emphasis on developing the students ability to understand and explain in a sociologically informed way. Further, the material presented is also used to encourage student to adopt a critical approach in their studies of contemporary social divisions.

## SOCIAL DIVISIONS B

<b>Module Code:</b>	SOCY3002
<b>Level 3</b>	Pre-requisite minimum 210 SCOTCAT points or appropriate prior learning or experience Co-requisite Social Divisions A
<b>Assessment:</b>	Coursework and Examination
<b>Co-ordinator:</b>	Charles Johnstone, Applied Social Studies
<b>Paisley Campus:</b>	Monday evenings Semester 1

This module is primarily concerned with changes in several areas of the contemporary social structure. It seeks to examine these by mobilising concepts of class, gender, ethnicity and consumption. A central question is the extent to which the social structure of modern Britain can be said to have been fundamentally restructured, with the emergence of new social cleavages and divisions. This is explored by examining two case studies: the underclass and consumption cleavages. Further, there is also a concern to explore the impact of social polarisation and social divisions in contemporary cities. Throughout this module there is a continuous emphasis on the usefulness of sociological approaches for our understanding of contemporary social divisions.

The delivery mode of the following two modules, The Sociology of Health and Illness A and B, is offered on a concentrated basis with both module A and B being offered in the same Semester. Individual coursework is set for each module including separate assessment and exams. Exams for both modules take place at the end of Semester 2

## THE SOCIOLOGY OF HEALTH AND ILLNESS A

<b>Module Code:</b>	SOCY3003
<b>Level 3</b>	Pre-requisite Social Divisions A & B Co-requisite The Sociology of Health and Illness B
<b>Assessment:</b>	Coursework and Examination
<b>Co-ordinator:</b>	Ian Weddle, Applied Social Studies
<b>Paisley Campus:</b>	Monday evenings Semester 2

This module provides an introduction to the sociology of health and illness and class stratification of health. This includes a critique of the medical model and bio-medical explanations of health inequalities, the professional/patient relationships within the NHS and the sociology of the body and of food.

# Appendix L

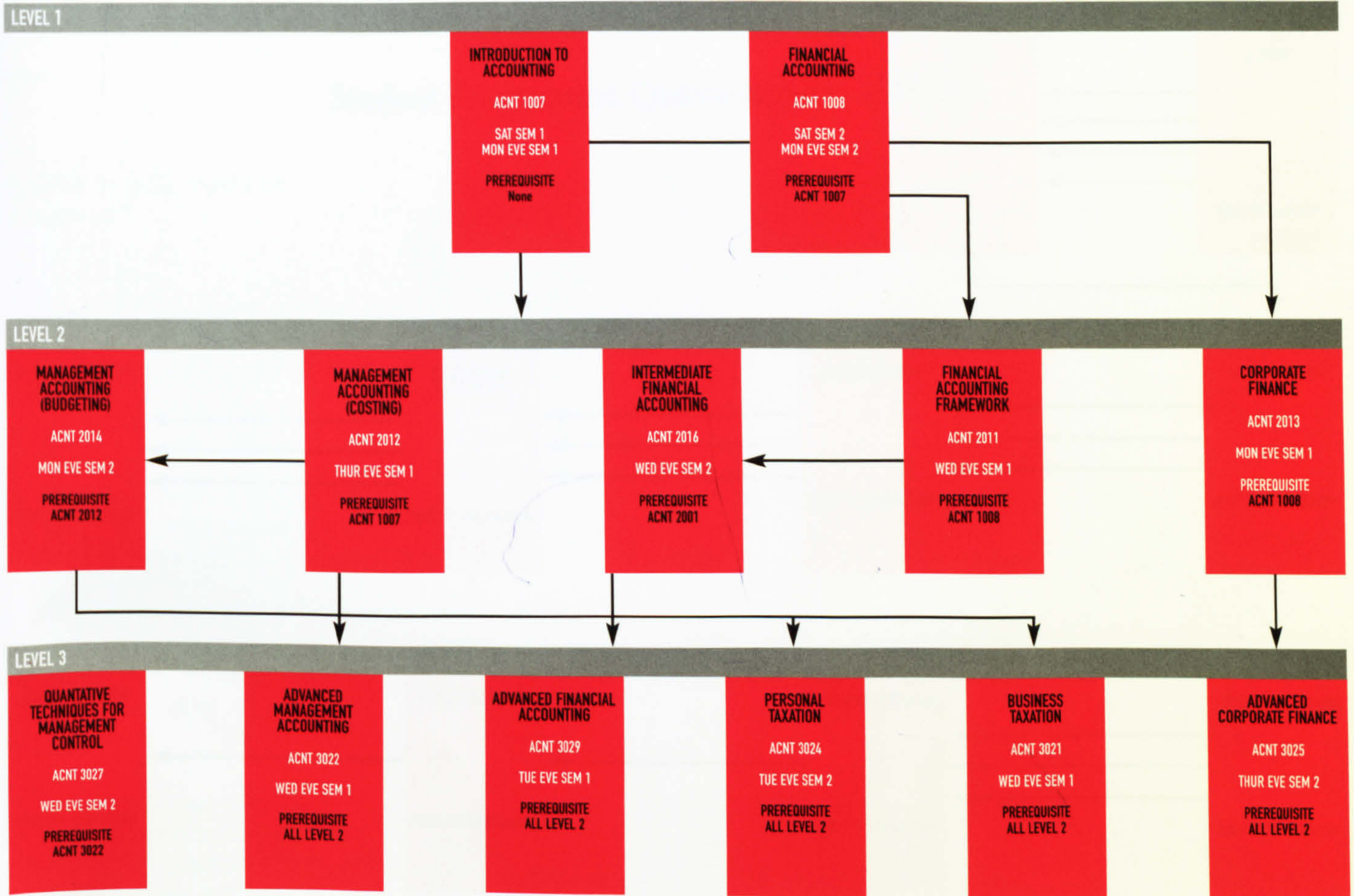
## ACCOUNTING

Module route diagram: sample





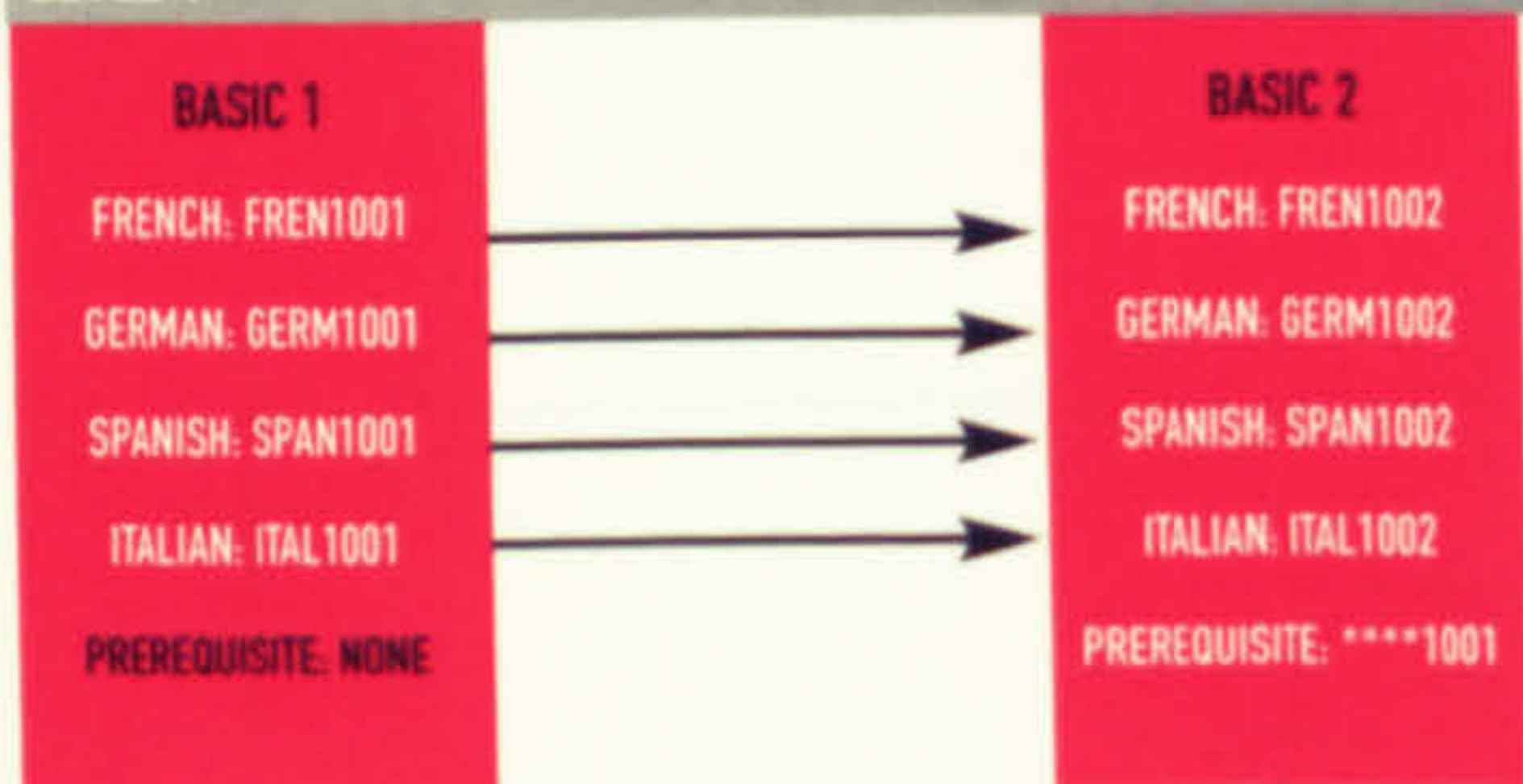
## ACCOUNTING



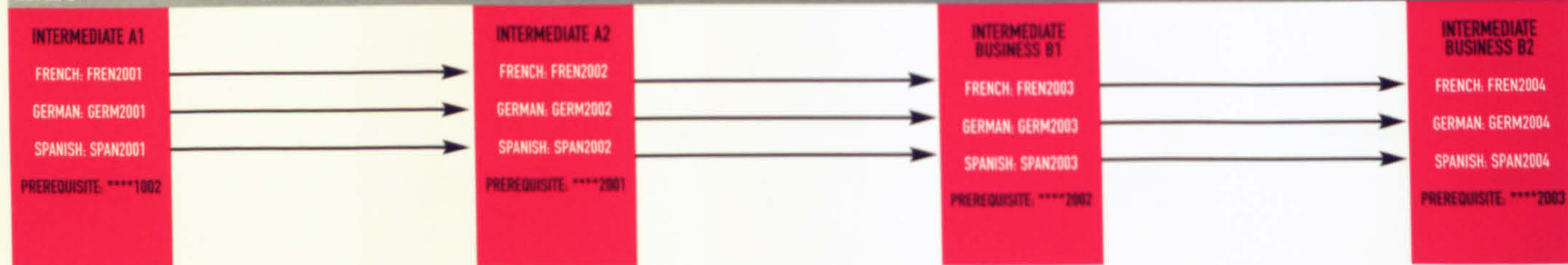
	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	NOTES
SEMESTER 1							
SEMESTER 2							

## LANGUAGES

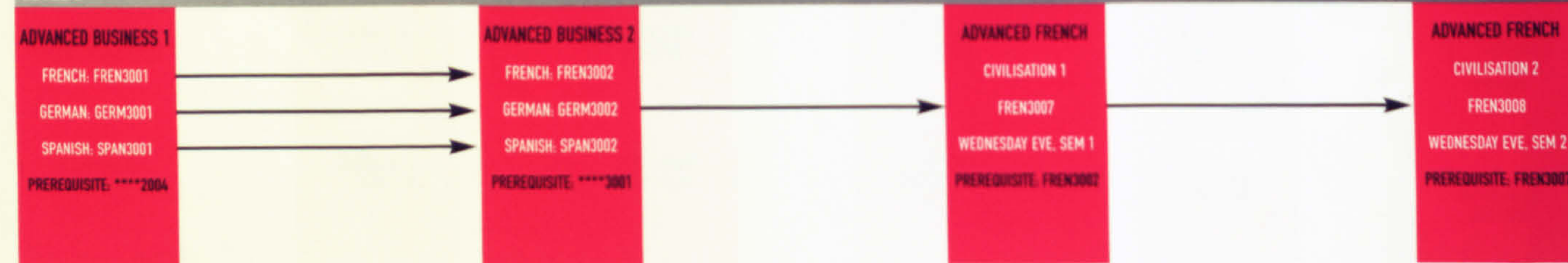
### LEVEL 1



### LEVEL 2



### LEVEL 3



	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	NOTES
SEMESTER 1							
SEMESTER 2							



Please complete the form by answering the various questions by marking boldly the appropriate boxes like this  . Do NOT tick, cross or ring boxes.

This questionnaire seeks to discover how you feel your programme of study has been over the last year. It is not module, semester or lecturer specific. Answers are anonymous. Please be as constructive as you can. Thanks for your time!

Sheet ID


(a) What is your mode of attendance?	Full time <input type="checkbox"/> Combined award <input type="checkbox"/> Part time - Day <input type="checkbox"/> p/t - Evening <input type="checkbox"/> p/t - Weekend <input type="checkbox"/>	Q9. Were the assessment procedures a fair test of your understanding of the material covered in your programme of study?	Not really <input type="checkbox"/> Quite fair <input type="checkbox"/> Very fair <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Which campus have you mainly been studying at?	Craigie <input type="checkbox"/> RAH / IRH <input type="checkbox"/> Paisley <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>	Q10. Did you think that the standard expected for assessed work was :	Low <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Q1. Were the aims & objectives of your programme clearly stated at the outset?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Q11. Did you receive feedback on your courseworks that helped you to identify strengths and weaknesses?	On all of them <input type="checkbox"/> Most times <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/>
Q2. If 'yes' to Q1. ; Have the modules enabled you to achieve these aims and objectives?	All did <input type="checkbox"/> Most did <input type="checkbox"/> Some did <input type="checkbox"/> None did <input type="checkbox"/>	Q12. If you required lecturing staff for guidance and support, could you typically contact them :	Easily <input type="checkbox"/> Quite easily <input type="checkbox"/> Some difficulty <input type="checkbox"/> Great difficulty <input type="checkbox"/>
Q3. Would you say that each module commenced at a level appropriate to your existing knowledge of the subject?	All of them <input type="checkbox"/> Most of them <input type="checkbox"/> Some of them <input type="checkbox"/> None of them <input type="checkbox"/>	Q13. Was the advice you received from an education guidance or personal advisor :	Very helpful <input type="checkbox"/> Quite helpful <input type="checkbox"/> Unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't see one <input type="checkbox"/>
Q4. Were you able to determine your timetable and class venues sufficiently in advance?	Always <input type="checkbox"/> Normally <input type="checkbox"/> Hardly ever <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Q14. How did you find the support staff ie. any non-lecturing, non-advising staff?	Very helpful <input type="checkbox"/> Quite helpful <input type="checkbox"/> Unhelpful <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Q5. Was the standard of teaching accommodation normally :	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Alright <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Dreadful <input type="checkbox"/>	Q15. Were you happy with the student consultation mechanisms such as the staff/student liaison committee?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Q6. How did you find the library resources in relation to the needs of your programme?	Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely visited <input type="checkbox"/>	Q16. Do you feel that your programme of study has developed your skills level?	A great deal <input type="checkbox"/> Quite a lot <input type="checkbox"/> Only a little <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/>
Q7. Did you find the overall workload on your programme of study :	Acceptable <input type="checkbox"/> Quite light <input type="checkbox"/> Very light <input type="checkbox"/> Rather high <input type="checkbox"/> Much too high <input type="checkbox"/>	(i) If you are a full time student, please indicate if you have a part-time job during semester time and how many hours you worked in an average week.	No part-time job <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, up to 4 hrs <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, 5 to 9 hrs <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, 10 - 19 hrs <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, 20 or more <input type="checkbox"/>
Q8. Did you find the induction period at the beginning of your session of :	Some value <input type="checkbox"/> Great value <input type="checkbox"/> No value <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	(ii) Do you have access to a computer outside of the University?	Easy access <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted " <input type="checkbox"/> No " <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

**PLEASE WRITE IN BLOCK CAPITALS ON THIS SIDE**

*Name two things you liked about your programme of study :*

1.

2.

*Name two things you would do to improve your programme :*

1.

2.

---

*In this section you are asked to elaborate on any programme matter which concerns you or to give praise where it is due :*

---

*Any other comments :*

---

*Thankyou for your time and trouble. Please return the questionnaire now. The results will be made available to your course leader as soon as possible.*

# STUDENT PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE PRESENTATION

## *Continuing Education Students*

This survey's aim is to gain an overall impression of the students' experience during each year of their programme of study at Paisley. The survey was conducted during semester two of academic session 1998/99. There are 251 respondents. This presentation is a crosstab against the students' attendance mode and should be read in conjunction with the questionnaire.

A

Attendance %rows	Q1. Aims stated			Q2. Aims achieved			Q3. Modules commence					
	Yes	No	Not answered	All did	Most did	Some did	Not answered	Most of them	Some of them	All of them	None of them	Not answered
p/t Day	85%	15%	0%	37%	42%	10%	12%	60%	18%	22%	0%	0%
Combined award	67%	31%	3%	25%	33%	8%	33%	39%	19%	36%	6%	0%
Evening	85%	13%	3%	41%	31%	11%	16%	43%	11%	45%	1%	0%
Weekend	100%	0%	0%	50%	25%	25%	0%	0%	0%	75%	0%	25%
Not answered	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	82%	16%	2%	38%	34%	11%	17%	46%	14%	38%	2%	0%

Attendance %rows	Q4. Timetable			Q5. Accommodation						
	Normally	Always	Hardly ever	Not answered	Good	Alright	Poor	Excellent	Dreadful	Not answered
p/t Day	43%	47%	10%	0%	53%	28%	8%	10%	0%	0%
Combined award	33%	53%	14%	0%	50%	36%	3%	11%	0%	0%
Evening	35%	59%	5%	1%	57%	19%	4%	17%	1%	1%
Weekend	25%	50%	0%	25%	50%	25%	0%	25%	0%	0%
Not answered	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	37%	55%	7%	1%	55%	24%	5%	15%	1%	0%

Attendance %rows	Q6. Library				Q7. Workload					
	Good	Acceptable	Rarely visited	Poor	Not answered	Acceptable	Quite light	Rather high	Not answered	Very light
p/t Day	37%	40%	15%	7%	2%	62%	8%	28%	2%	0%
Combined award	31%	33%	17%	17%	3%	61%	3%	36%	0%	0%
Evening ✓	28%	31%	35%	4%	3%	67%	2%	30%	0%	1%
Weekend ✓	25%	25%	0%	50%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Not answered	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	30%	33%	27%	8%	2%	65%	4%	30%	0%	1%

Attendance %rows	Q8. Induction				Q9. Procedures				Q10. Standard			
	No value	Great value	Some value	Not answered	Quite fair	Very fair	Not really	Not answered	High	Acceptable	Low	Not answered
p/t Day	22%	15%	42%	22%	70%	23%	5%	2%	20%	77%	0%	3%
Combined award	28%	3%	47%	22%	61%	28%	11%	0%	19%	81%	0%	0%
Evening	20%	7%	54%	19%	55%	39%	5%	1%	23%	75%	2%	0%
Weekend	0%	0%	75%	25%	25%	50%	25%	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Not answered	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Total	21%	8%	51%	20%	59%	33%	6%	1%	22%	76%	1%	1%

Attendance %rows	Q11. Feedback				Q12. Support				
	Most times	Rarely	Never	On all of them	Quite easily	Great difficulty	Easily	Some difficulty	Not answered
p/t Day	42%	12%	12%	7%	55%	5%	18%	17%	5%
Combined award	19%	28%	6%	8%	56%	8%	6%	28%	3%
Evening	26%	17%	11%	20%	43%	9%	20%	20%	8%
Weekend	25%	0%	25%	25%	50%	0%	0%	25%	25%
Not answered	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Total	29%	17%	11%	15%	47%	8%	17%	21%	7%

Attendance %rows	Q13. Advice				Q14. Support staff				Q15. Consultation			
	Quite helpful	Didn't see one	Very helpful	Not answered	Unhelpful	Quite helpful	Not answered	Very helpful	Unhelpful	Yes	Not answered	No
p/t Day	27%	38%	25%	8%	2%	48%	8%	43%	0%	47%	28%	25%
Combined award	58%	22%	11%	3%	6%	56%	11%	22%	11%	50%	28%	22%
Evening	39%	29%	22%	7%	3%	61%	13%	21%	5%	55%	33%	12%
Weekend	0%	25%	25%	25%	25%	50%	25%	0%	25%	25%	50%	25%
Not answered	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%
Total	38%	30%	21%	7%	4%	57%	12%	26%	5%	52%	31%	17%

Attendance %rows	Q16. Developing				(i) Job / hours				
	Quite a lot	Only a little	A great deal	Not at all	No job	Not answered	20+ hrs.	10 to 19 hrs.	Up to 4 hrs.
p/t Day	50%	18%	28%	2%	8%	2%	88%	3%	0%
Combined award	64%	14%	22%	0%	25%	0%	64%	0%	3%
Evening	61%	11%	27%	0%	1%	1%	99%	1%	0%
Weekend	50%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Not answered	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	59%	13%	27%	0%	6%	1%	91%	1%	0%

Attendance %rows	(ii) Computer				Total
	Restricted access	Not answered	Easy access	No access	
p/t Day	18%	7%	65%	10%	60
Combined award	19%	0%	69%	11%	36
Evening	12%	3%	79%	6%	150
Weekend	25%	0%	50%	25%	4
Not answered	0%	0%	0%	100%	1
Total	15%	3%	74%	8%	251

JK