

UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

JANET LOWE

Department of Education

Integrating learning with life: a study of higher  
education students in a further education college:  
2000-2003

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## **Abstract**

In Scotland, further education colleges provide 28% of all higher education; this includes over half of part-time undergraduate higher education. This provision has contributed to wider participation in higher education in Scotland by “non traditional” students and to progress towards a mass system of higher education within a learning society. This thesis is a case study of higher education students in a Scottish further education college. It explores the nature of the students’ experience and its relevance to institutional management and higher education policy. Evidence is drawn from the college’s records, from focus groups and from a questionnaire survey of whole year groups (full-time and part-time students) over three successive years. The theoretical focus is upon a new definition of lifelong learning as learning integrated with life, drawn from literature on motive, motivation, participation and retention. The research explores the students’ experiences of combining study with work and family life. The student experience is found to be heterogeneous, complex and distinct from the stereotype of a young full-time university student. Vocational motives predominate and there is evidence of a significant investment of meaning, expectation and purpose in the experience of higher education. The students’ ability to balance and integrate learning with life is a determining factor in the achievement of sustained participation. The quality of support networks both in college and in the students’ work and family lives are found to be more significant than personal or demographic characteristics. The case study contributes to current thinking about the professional role of college senior managers in creating a student-centred institutional culture that responds to the complexity of the students’ experience. A case is made for a review of the current inequity of financial support for full-time and part-time higher education students and of the marginal status of colleges in the development of higher education policy.

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## Glossary

<b>API</b>	<b>Age Participation Index (Great Britain).</b> Measures the number of home-domiciled young (under 21) initial entrants to full-time higher education, expressed as a proportion of the average 18-19 year old Great Britain population.
	<b>Age Participation Index (Scotland).</b> Measures the number of home-domiciled young (under 21) initial entrants to full-time higher education, expressed as a proportion of the population of 17 year olds in Scotland.
<b>ASC</b>	<b>Association of Scottish Colleges.</b> Membership organisation representing all further education colleges in Scotland and providing collective views on policy.
<b>CBI</b>	<b>Confederation of British Industry.</b> Independent representative body for British businesses.
<b>DES</b>	<b>Department of Education and Science (Westminster 1964 -1992)</b>
<b>DfES</b>	<b>Department for Education and Skills (Westminster 2001 - date)</b>
<b>DfEE</b>	<b>Department for Education and Employment (Westminster 1995 - 2001)</b>
<b>DHSS</b>	<b>Department of Health and Social Security (Westminster 1968 - 1988)</b>
<b>ESRC</b>	<b>Economic and Social Research Council.</b> Independent organisation, funded by government to support research and training in social issues.
<b>FE</b>	<b>Further education</b>
<b>FEC</b>	<b>Further education college</b>
<b>FT</b>	<b>Full-time</b>
<b>FTE</b>	<b>Full-time equivalent</b>
<b>HE</b>	<b>Higher education</b>
<b>HEI</b>	<b>Higher education institution</b>

<b>HEFCE</b>	<b>Higher Education Funding Council for England.</b>  Responsible to the DfES for the distribution of public money for teaching and research at higher education level to universities and colleges in England.
<b>HEIPR</b>	<b>Higher Education Participation Rate.</b>  An extension to the API to include part-time students and those that participate in higher education for the first time aged 21-30 that were not included in the API.
<b>HESA</b>	<b>Higher Education Statistics Agency.</b>
<b>HNC</b>	<b>Higher National Certificate.</b>  Higher education qualification awarded in Scotland by the Scottish Qualifications Authority and offered by colleges and some universities. In Scotland the HNC is equivalent to level 7 of the SCQF (see page 32).
<b>HND</b>	<b>Higher National Diploma.</b>  Higher education qualification awarded in Scotland by the Scottish Qualifications Authority and offered by colleges and some universities. In Scotland the HND is equivalent to level 8 of the SCQF (see page 32).
<b>ILA</b>	<b>Individual Learning Account.</b>  Scottish Executive scheme which provides grants of up to £200 per year towards the cost of study for eligible individuals.
<b>OU</b>	<b>Open University</b>
<b>PT</b>	<b>Part-time</b>
<b>SAAS</b>	<b>Student Awards Agency Scotland.</b>  Responsible to Scottish Ministers for dealing with financial support for eligible Scottish students in higher education throughout the United Kingdom, together with certain related roles in connection with student loans, hardship funds and educational endowments.



<b>SCQF</b>	<b>Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework.</b> Single, unifying, descriptive framework for mainstream Scottish qualifications which are located within the framework in terms of their level and credit value.
<b>SFC</b>	<b>Scottish Funding Councils.</b> Collective name for the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.
<b>SFEFC</b>	<b>Scottish Further Education Funding Council.</b> Responsible to the Scottish Executive for the distribution of public money for teaching and associated activities to Scottish further education colleges.
<b>SFEU</b>	<b>Scottish Further Education Unit.</b> Independent membership organisation, funded primarily by the Scottish Executive to provide staff development, curriculum development and associated services for Scottish further education colleges.
<b>SHEFC</b>	<b>Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.</b> Responsible to the Scottish Executive for the distribution of public money for teaching, research and associated activities to higher education institutions in Scotland.
<b>SLF</b>	<b>Scottish Leadership Foundation.</b> Independent membership organisation whose purpose is to develop and sustain leaders in the public services and to support the public services to develop leaders. Provides seminars, courses and developmental services to organisations and individuals.
<b>SQA</b>	<b>Scottish Qualifications Authority.</b> Statutory body responsible for the development, accreditation assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees in Scotland.

- SUfi**            **Scottish University for Industry.**
- Responsible to Scottish Ministers for the delivery of LearnDirect Scotland services including information and advisory services and a network of branded learning centres.
- SVQ**            **Scottish Vocational Qualification.**
- Occupationally specific qualifications based on competence specifications drawn up by national bodies led by employers.
- UHIMI**        **University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute.**
- WEA**            **Workers Educational Association.**
- Voluntary charitable body committed to widening participation in learning by adults from all backgrounds.

## **Introduction**

The Report of the Scottish Committee of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Garrick Report 1997) first highlighted the contribution of further education colleges to the provision of higher education in Scotland. This provision had expanded rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s such that by 2000-01 colleges provided 28% of all higher education in Scotland, including 61% of part-time undergraduate higher education. Higher education students in Scottish colleges are more likely than those in universities to be “non-traditional” in that they are more likely to be older, from less advantaged backgrounds, studying part-time and taking vocational “sub-degree” courses. This research presents a case study of the experience of higher education students in one Scottish further education college, set within the development of higher education policy and within the context of the system of higher education in a learning society.

Despite the apparent significance of higher education in further education colleges, it has not merited a comparable level of attention in the development of higher education policy in Scotland. The empirical work for this research commenced in 2000, nearly a decade after the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and its counterpart in Scotland had removed the binary line that divided the former polytechnics from the university sector and had removed further education colleges from the control of local authorities. This legislation had far reaching consequences for the continuing expansion of higher education and for the evolution of a mass system of higher education in the United Kingdom. In the following decade both the Westminster government and the devolved Scottish Executive placed lifelong learning and the creation of a learning society at the heart of their policies for economic growth, competitiveness and social justice. Some ten years after their incorporation in 1993, colleges in Scotland enjoy a relatively higher visibility than their counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom, due to the volume of higher education that they offer, but their provision of higher education remains separate

from the unified university sector and isolated from the development of mainstream higher education policy.

The dominant model of participation in higher education remains one of full-time entry to degree courses by young people immediately post-school. A traditional student is conceived as young, unencumbered by domestic responsibilities and experiencing a “student” lifestyle, characterised by independence, academic work and leisure, tempered by some part-time work to offset the impact of changes in policy on student finance. The experience of higher education students in colleges does not conform to this stereotype. The majority maintain an “adult” lifestyle, combining study with work, family and domestic responsibilities and community life. My research is founded on the proposition that successful participation in higher education for these students will depend, at least in part, on the feasibility of combining study with other aspects of their life; and that the quality of their experience of lifelong learning will depend on their ability to manage the many demands on their time. My investigation is based, therefore, on a new definition of lifelong learning as learning integrated with life, not simply learning throughout life, drawn from theoretical concepts of motive, motivation, flexibility, balance, retention and sustained participation.

Higher education in further education colleges has not yet attracted substantial research interest, particularly in respect of the student experience of participation. The empirical evidence presented in this research represents a unique and comprehensive investigation into the experience of higher education students in a further education college. The focus is not upon academic progress and completion of qualifications. The purpose of the work is to investigate students’ experience of participation in the context of their lives and its importance from the perspective of institutional management and lifelong learning policy. The importance now placed on lifelong learning and the learning society by policy makers suggests that researchers should seek an understanding of the different ways in which

educational participation may be linked to other aspects of life and of the need to make space for such activity (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 1997).

The work is a case study of higher education students in three successive years in Lauder College, a Scottish further education college. Selection of the whole year group is important in that it includes both full-time and part-time students in the same study, allowing official distinctions between full-time and part-time students to be compared with students' behaviour and experience. The case study includes a description of the demographic profile of the cohorts; an evaluation of their motives for learning; an in-depth study of how the students balance their learning, working lives and family lives; and an evaluation of how institutional and external (policy) factors influence their participation in learning integrated with life.

The research and the thesis are structured around three primary objectives. The first objective is to describe the personal characteristics and circumstances of the students; to understand their experience of integrating learning with life; and to consider the importance of this experience for the system of higher education in Scotland. The second objective is to understand how the students interact with the institution in which they are learning and to consider the implications of their experience for a learner-centred approach to institutional management and practice. The third objective is to investigate the students' attitudes to lifelong learning policy and, in particular, to test the proposition that the traditional official distinction between full-time and part-time study does not reflect the reality of the experience of these students.

Chapter 1 draws together a quantitative summary of patterns of participation in higher education in the United Kingdom and in Scotland and highlights the distinct and substantial contribution of higher education in further education colleges. Chapters 2 to 5 set the work within a broad theoretical context, related to the three primary objectives, by reviewing relevant literature on mass higher education and on concepts of a learning

society; on the development of lifelong learning policy in Scotland; on the professional role of college managers in creating institutional learning environments; and on motivation, participation and retention in higher education. Chapter 6 brings together the elements of the literature review and presents a model of progress towards a learning society, within which the research questions are located. Chapter 7 explains the methodology and methods of the case study approach.

Chapter 8 presents empirical findings about the demographic profile of the students, their experience of participating in higher education in a further education college and the ways in which their educational experience is integrated with other aspects of their lives. In Chapter 9 the empirical findings are discussed in relation to the three primary objectives and to the concepts derived from the literature review. The conclusions demonstrate how this evidence contributes to thinking about the nature and purpose of higher education in Scotland and raises questions about the future direction of higher education policy in Scotland.

This thesis also represents a case study in professional development on the part of a practising college principal. Colleges have experienced a turbulent decade of development as independent bodies post-incorporation in 1993 and, in particular, their principals and senior managers have confronted the challenge of new roles and responsibilities as professional managers. The research has provided an opportunity for personal reflection on how the experience of students informs management practice both in a very practical sense and in the longer term development of a learner-centred institutional ethos and culture.

## Lauder College

This thesis presents a case study of higher education students in Lauder College, one of 44 (as at July 2005) further education colleges in Scotland, located on the outskirts of Dunfermline, Fife, north of the Forth estuary and some 20 miles north of Edinburgh. Unlike most colleges in Scotland, which were established in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lauder College was founded in 1899 as a result of a campaign by George Lauder, a citizen of Dunfermline, and an endowment of funds by his nephew, Andrew Carnegie, who was born in Dunfermline. From 1899 until 1993, the College was governed by the local education authority: in 1993 it was incorporated as an independent body under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992. Since 1993 Lauder College has expanded geographically and, in 2005, has a main campus at Halbeath, Dunfermline, two secondary sites in Rosyth and Cowdenbeath and a network of over 20 learning centres across south east and central Scotland. This case study is of higher education students based at Halbeath and Rosyth.

The College has traditionally served the communities of West Fife by providing vocational education and training relevant to the local economy. During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the curriculum was, therefore, dominated by textiles, agriculture, mining, engineering and shipbuilding. The progressive decline of these industries has resulted in a diversification of the curriculum to include courses in construction, electronics, computing, care, business administration and more recently, management, tourism, hospitality, digital media, art, design and social sciences. The local catchment area includes Dunfermline and its relatively prosperous suburbs together with deprived former mining villages.

Courses are offered from level 1 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework for students with learning disabilities, to degrees at level 9. Higher education programmes (levels 7 to 9) primarily lead to the Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma

awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. There is also a small number of degree courses, offered in association with Napier University and Heriot Watt University. The College annually enrolls 11,000 students, the majority of whom study at non-advanced further education level. Since the mid 1980s, the College has developed its portfolio of higher education courses and annually enrolls 400-450 full-time and around 1,250 part-time higher education students. These students represent 20%-25% of its mainstream educational activity, which conforms to the average for all colleges in Scotland.

Further education colleges in Scotland receive grant funding from the Scottish Executive through the Scottish Further Education Funding Council, which distributes funds using a formula that relates grant to a volume measure of student activity. Fees for full-time students are paid by the Student Awards Agency Scotland (for higher education) and by the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (for further education). For part-time students, the College charges fees at its discretion to students or their employers. The College is free to offer full cost and commercial services and to enter into contracts for educational services with agencies such as the Scottish Prison Service.

Further education colleges vary in size, type of location, percentage of higher education activity, breadth of curriculum and dependency on government grant. Lauder College is of medium size, measured by volume of grant-funded student activity and is one of the largest measured by total volume of activity. The curriculum portfolio and the student profile, which is diverse both demographically and by mode of study, is typical of colleges in Scotland.



# CHAPTER 1

## Trends in Participation in Higher Education

- 1.1 Participation in higher education in the United Kingdom
- 1.2 Higher education in Scotland
- 1.3 Higher education in further education colleges in Scotland
- 1.4 Summary

## **1.1 Participation in higher education in the United Kingdom**

Higher education is usually defined in terms of level of study, above the Higher and Advanced Higher in Scotland and above the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A-level) in the rest of the United Kingdom. This definition is reinforced by distinctions drawn in respect of the requirement to pay tuition fees and of eligibility for grants and loans, which apply to courses leading to a degree or to a diploma or certificate of higher education. In the early 1960s only one in eighteen young people participated in higher education (Dearing 1997). By 2000-01, the Age Participation Index<sup>1</sup> published by the then Department for Education and Employment had risen to 33% for Great Britain (DfES 2004). The Westminster government has set a new target for the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate<sup>2</sup> of 50% participation by 2010 (DfES 2003). In this section I have drawn together a quantitative description of the patterns of participation that have contributed to this dramatic increase in participation for the United Kingdom. Later sections review participation in higher education in Scotland in more detail.

The Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Report) records that, in 1996, there were 176 higher education institutions, of which 115 were titled universities, plus “many” further education colleges offering higher education programmes (Dearing 1997). Dearing did not count the colleges, which suggests that their role in providing higher education may at that time have been perceived as less central than that of higher education institutions. Universities were classified as pre-1992 and post-1992, recognising the effect of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and its counterpart in Scotland, which gave former polytechnics the right to be designated as

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<sup>1</sup> The Age Participation Index (API) measured the number of home-domiciled young (under 21) initial entrants to full-time higher education expressed as a proportion of the average 18-19 year old Great Britain population (DfES 2004).

<sup>2</sup> The Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) is a new measure. It includes those studying part-time and those participating for the first time aged 21-30, not previously counted in the API. The HEIPR has been calculated as 41% for 1999-2000 and 44% (provisional) for 2002-03 (DfES 2004).

universities. Higher education was also offered by specialist higher education institutions, for example Colleges of Art and Academies of Music and Drama.

In 1996-97 there were over 1.6 million students studying at higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (Dearing 1997) broken down as shown in Table 1.

*Table 1*

**All students at higher education institutions (UK) 1996-1997**

First degree	61%
Other undergraduate <sup>1</sup>	18%
Postgraduate (taught)	14%
Postgraduate (research)	5%
Other (work-based and distance learning)	2%

*Source: Higher Education in a Learning Society: Dearing (1997 p18)*

In addition, the Dearing Report estimated that, in 1996-97, there were “in the region” of 200,000 higher education students in further education colleges. Dearing again chose neither to record an accurate count of these students nor to include them in analyses of participation. A possible explanation is that these students were perceived as less important because many were enrolled on part-time, vocational, “sub-degree” programmes. By 2000-01 the total number of higher education enrolments in higher education institutions stood at 1.86 million and there were 241,200 higher education enrolments in further education colleges (HESA 2002).

These levels of participation at the turn of the century represent sustained growth over 35 years. The Dearing Report (1997) records periods of rapid growth in the late 1960s and from 1988 to 1993 with a long pause through the 1970s and early 80s. Dearing also notes that, over Great Britain as a whole, postgraduate numbers had grown fastest, followed by numbers studying for a first degree, resulting in a shift in balance towards higher level study. This is illustrated in Table 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as not leading to a degree (e.g. Diploma of Higher Education or Higher National Diploma or equivalent).

Table 2

**UK higher education students (excluding Open University) by level of study**

	<b>1962-63</b>	<b>1979-80</b>	<b>1995-96</b>
Postgraduate	6%	12%	14%
First degree	32%	56%	60%
Other undergraduate <sup>1</sup>	62%	32%	26%

Source: *Higher Education in the Learning Society: Dearing (1997 p19)*

It is important to note that the balance of full-time and part-time study had not changed significantly over time. Part-time students represented 37% of all students in 1962 and still represented 35% in 1995. By 1995 Open University students made up a substantial proportion of all part-time students: the Open University appears, however, to have displaced other part-time provision, rather than offering an alternative to full-time study (Dearing 1997).

The Dearing Report also reviewed the changing demographic characteristics of higher education students over a thirty-year period and provided evidence of relative growth in participation by women and by mature students (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3

**UK higher education students (excluding Open University) by gender**

	<b>1962-63</b>	<b>1979-80</b>	<b>1995-96</b>
Female	26%	37%	51%
Male	74%	63%	49%

Source: *Higher Education in the Learning Society: Dearing (1997 p21)*

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as not leading to a degree (e.g. Diploma of Higher Education or Higher National Diploma or equivalent).

Table 4

**Entrants to higher education in Great Britain (including Open University)**

	1962-63 <sup>2</sup>	1978-79	1995-96
Young <sup>1</sup>	59%	52%	42%
Mature	41%	48%	58%

Source: *Higher Education in the Learning Society: Dearing (1997 p22)*

Dearing noted that people from ethnic minorities were more than proportionately represented whilst those from lower socio-economic groups were significantly under-represented, despite progress in the years preceding the inquiry, as shown in Table 5. Osborne, Cloonan, Morgan-Klein and Loots (2000), commenting on the data in Table 5, note that expansion was led by school leavers from social classes I and II and that, although absolute numbers of students from lower social classes had increased, they had lost ground proportionately. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are systematically less likely to enter degree education (Gayle, Berridge and Davies 2000; 2002).

Table 5

**Participation rates for Great Britain, by social class, 1991–96, calculated as the percentage of young people (under 21) entering higher education as a proportion of the average 18-19 year old GB population.**

Year	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96
Professional	55	71	73	78	79
Intermediate	36	39	42	45	45
Skilled Non-Manual	22	27	29	31	31
Skilled Manual	11	15	17	18	18
Poorly Skilled	12	14	16	17	17
Unskilled	6	9	11	11	12
<b>Total</b>	23	28	30	32	32

Source: *Higher Education in the Learning Society: Dearing (1997 p23)*.

<sup>1</sup> Young is defined as under age 21 on entry to an undergraduate programme and under age 25 on entry to a postgraduate programme.

<sup>2</sup> Full-time entrants only in 1962-63.

Patterns of provision vary across the different countries of the United Kingdom. In all four countries provision is concentrated in four broad types of institution: pre-1992 universities; post-1992 universities; specialist higher education colleges; and further education colleges providing higher education. The pattern of provision is compared and contrasted in Table 6.

*Table 6*

**Total higher education enrolments by type of institution (1994-95)**

	<b>Pre 1992 Universities</b>	<b>Post 1992 Universities</b>	<b>HE Colleges</b>	<b>FE Colleges</b>
England	39%	36%	13%	12%
Scotland	43%	20%	8%	29%
Wales	48%	18%	29%	5%
NI	81%	N/A	3%	16%

*Source: Higher Education in the Learning Society: Dearing (1997 pp249-250)*

Table 6 illustrates that further education colleges make a contribution to higher education in all parts of the United Kingdom. Historically this has taken two forms. Colleges are local providers of vocational higher education through non-degree or sub-degree courses and providers of qualification routes into higher education. These contributions have recently assumed a greater importance as a result of policy initiatives to extend participation, to increase demand and to place greater emphasis on vocational outcomes (Smith and Boccock 1999).

Table 6 highlights the distinctive pattern of provision in Scotland and the more substantial role of further education colleges, which appears to have contributed to a higher Age Participation Index in Scotland (Garrick 1997). This pattern may explain why, in the main Dearing Report, the role of further education colleges and of sub-degree qualifications was accorded a lower profile and why Dearing recommended that future expansion of higher education should be at sub-degree level, a recommendation that appears to have been implemented some six years later with the introduction of the first two-year

foundation degrees in England in 2003 (DfES 2003). The Westminster government now intends to achieve the new HEIPR of 50% principally by extending foundation degrees in England (DfES 2003). The figures in Table 6 may also explain why the Scottish Committee (Garrick 1997) did not make a similar recommendation that future expansion of higher education in Scotland should be at sub-degree level but confined itself to advocating extended articulation and progression routes between colleges and universities. The next sections review participation in higher education in Scotland and in further education colleges in more detail.

## 1.2 Higher education in Scotland

When Robbins reported in 1963, 4 universities, 13 central institutions and 7 teacher education colleges were delivering higher education programmes in Scotland. Further education colleges barely merited a mention (Garrick 1997). By 1996 there were 13 universities, 6 colleges of higher education, 3 colleges of education, the Open University and 46 further education colleges offering higher education in Scotland. Institutions were more recently categorised by the Scottish Executive in its consultation on the proposed merger of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and Scottish Further Education Funding Council (Scottish Executive 2004a) as:

- incorporated colleges (42)
- higher education institutions (11)
- ancient and chartered universities (9).

In the period between 1996 and 2004, Bell College and the University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute (UHIMI) have been designated as higher education institutions, whilst several specialist colleges and colleges of education have merged with universities.

Compared with the rest of Great Britain, Scotland has enjoyed higher levels of participation in higher education. In 1994-95 the API<sup>1</sup> for Scotland stood at 42% (32% for Great Britain) and by 2000-01 the API for Scotland was over 50% (33% for Great Britain) (Scottish Executive 2002).

There are differences in the profile of programmes offered by different categories of institutions, as shown in Table 7.

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Education Department and the Scottish Executive calculated the Age Participation Index (API) as the number of under 21 year olds who enter higher education measured as a percentage of the population of 17 year olds in Scotland.



Table 7

**All higher education students in Scotland by mode of study and institution type (1994-95)**

Type of Institution <sup>1</sup>	Undergraduate				Postgraduate		Total
	Sub-Degree	Degree	Total Undergraduate	Percent Part-time	Total Post graduate	Percent Part-time	
Ancient Universities	1,590	38,666	40,196	3	9,340	32	49,536
Old Universities	544	26,235	26,779	5	14,217	64	40,996
1992 Universities	7,266	29,794	37,060	21	4,303	48	41,363
Colleges of Education	510	3,045	3,563	9	3,727	74	7,290
Other Institutions	1,314	6,200	7,594	7	807	25	8,401
Open University	1,561	10,594	12,155	100	1,978	98	14,133
FE Colleges	52,642	1,564	54,206	56	752	83	54,958
Total	65,375	116,176	181,553	30	35,124	56	216,677

Source: *Higher Education in the Learning Society: Report of the Scottish Committee: Garrick (1997 p119)*

Ancient and old universities predominate in full-time undergraduate and in all postgraduate programmes, whereas a high proportion of part-time undergraduate students are in post-1992 universities and further education colleges. Further education colleges predominate in sub-degree qualifications. As might be expected from the distribution of programmes and modes of attendance, post-1992 universities and further education colleges recruit proportionately higher numbers of older students, as confirmed in Table 8.

<sup>1</sup> "Ancient" is defined as over 400 years old

"Old" is defined as founded before 1992

"1992" comprises universities created by the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992

"Other" institutions include Colleges of Higher Education (e.g. Queen Margaret College), Art Colleges and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

Table 8

**Age distribution of new full-time entrants to Scottish higher education by institution type (%) (1994-95)**

	17 and Under	18	19-20	21-25	25-45	Over 45	Total
Ancient Universities	25	32	27	15	8	9	23
Old Universities	12	15	12	14	7	5	12
1992 Universities	21	24	21	23	15	10	21
Colleges of Education	2	2	1	1	2	1	2
Other Institutions	4	5	7	4	3	2	5
FE Colleges	37	22	31	43	65	72	37
Total numbers	3,965	15,441	10,881	7,668	7,244	1,926	47,125

Source: *Higher Education in the Learning Society: Report of the Scottish Committee: Garrick (1997 p119)*

Change since the publication of the Dearing and Garrick Reports is illustrated in Table 9, Table 10, Table 11, Table 12, Table 13, Table 14, Table 15 and Table 16 which summarise information drawn from Scottish Executive statistics on higher education for the period 1994-95 to 2000-01 (Scottish Executive 2002). These tables have been compiled to illustrate overall trends in participation; relative trends in full-time and part-time study; and the role of further education colleges in providing higher education in Scotland.

By 2000-01, there were 262,913 students in higher education in Scotland of whom 63% were full-time and 37% part-time compared with 71% and 29% respectively in 1994-95 (Table 9). The rapid growth that began in the late 1980s (Dearing 1997) continued throughout the second half of the 1990s (Table 10). Full-time activity expanded between 1994-95 and 2000-01 by 15% and part-time by 64% (Table 10). It would appear that some shift had begun to occur in the direction of part-time study. There was growth at all levels of part-time study during the period 1994-95 to 2000-01 (Table 11) and there was particularly dramatic expansion in higher education institutions where part-time study grew by 96% in the period, compared with a growth of 35% in further education colleges (Table

10). If we separate out the postgraduate growth in higher education institutions (where over 99% of it takes place (Scottish Executive 2002)), it is evident that higher institutions experienced rapid growth in undergraduate part-time higher education albeit from a very low base. Their overall numbers of part-time students doubled but their undergraduate numbers increased by 142% (Table 12). This increase may, in part, be explained by the inclusion in published statistics of some continuing education students on credit-bearing courses starting in 1996-97, resulting from a re-classification of these students for statistical returns (Osborne et al 2000). Table 13 illustrates, however, a pattern of year-on-year growth for the whole period 1994-95 to 2000-01.

*Table 9*

**All students in higher education in Scotland by mode of attendance**

	1994-95		2000-01	
<b>FT</b>	144210	71%	165616	63%
<b>PT</b>	59152	29%	97297	37%
<b>Total</b>	203362	100%	262913	100%

*Table 10*

**Changes in participation in higher education in Scotland by mode of study and sector**

		1994-95	2000-01	% Change
<b>FT</b>	<b>HE institutions</b>	119950	134254	12
	<b>FE colleges</b>	24260	31362	29
	<b>Total</b>	144210	165610	15
<b>PT</b>	<b>HE institutions</b>	28412	55710	96
	<b>FE colleges</b>	30740	41587	35
	<b>Total</b>	59152	97297	64
<b>Total</b>	<b>HE institutions</b>	148362	189964	28
	<b>FE colleges</b>	55000	72949	32
	<b>Total</b>	203362	262913	29

Table 11

**Part-time students in higher education in Scotland by year and level of study**

	Postgraduate	Degree	Sub-degree
<b>1994-95</b>	17701	7207	34244
<b>2000-01</b>	29751	10599	56947
<b>% change</b>	68	47	66

Table 12

**Part-time students in higher education institutions by year and level of study**

	Postgraduate <sup>1</sup>	Undergraduate	Total
<b>1994-95</b>	17701	10711	28412
<b>2000-01</b>	29751 <sup>2</sup>	25959	55710
<b>% change</b>	68	142	96

Schuller, Raffe, Morgan-Klein and Clark (1999) expressed concern about the failure of the part-time mode to gain a greater share of overall higher education despite massive expansion in participation. They noted that, post-1988 (the point at which rapid expansion began), full-time participation expanded much faster than part-time participation. This concern may have been premature, given the changes in participation rates since their 1995-96 study was published. The apparent strategy of higher education institutions, perhaps in partial response to policy directives and financial incentives, to expand part-time higher education appears to have succeeded and the landscape has changed. The rate of growth has, however, slowed as dramatically as it began (Table 13) suggesting that the shift in balance towards part-time study may be a short-term phenomenon.

<sup>1</sup> Assumes all postgraduate study is in universities.

<sup>2</sup> The majority accounted for by growth in the number of overseas students.

Table 13

**Percentage increase, year-on-year, in the number of students in higher education in Scotland, by mode of attendance and sector**

	Total			FT			PT		
	HEIs	FECs	Total	HEIs	FECs	Total	HEIs	FECs	Total
<b>1994-95</b>	12.0	16.4	13.1	6.9	19.2	8.0	39.9	14.2	25.3
<b>1995-96</b>	4.1	8.8	5.4	0.3	4.5	1.0	20.2	12.2	16.0
<b>1996-97</b>	11.3	10.5	11.1	7.2	10.3	7.8	25.8	10.6	18.2
<b>1997-98</b>	3.8	4.5	4.0	2.7	6.4	3.4	7.1	3.1	5.2
<b>1998-99</b>	3.5	2.9	3.4	0.1	1.8	0.4	13.5	3.7	9.0
<b>1999-00</b>	1.4	1.3	1.3	-0.4	-1.6	-0.6	5.8	3.4	4.8
<b>2000-01</b>	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.6	5.1	2.3	0.8	-1.3	-0.2

Over the ten year period from 1989-2001, further education colleges consolidated and steadily increased their already significant share of the higher education market (Table 14, Table 15, Table 16). Their full-time share grew from 10% to 19% (Table 16) contributing to an increased overall share of 28%. By 2000-01, despite the growth in part-time undergraduate students in higher education institutions noted above, further education colleges still had a 61% share of the part-time undergraduate market (Table 15).

Table 14

**All students in higher education in Scotland by mode of attendance and type of institution (2000-01)**

	FT		PT		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
<b>HE institutions</b>	134254	81	55710	57	189964	72
<b>FE colleges</b>	31362	19	41587	43	72949	28
<b>Total</b>	165616	100	97297	100	262913	100

Table 15

**All students in higher education in Scotland by type of institution, mode of attendance and level of study (2000-01)**

	Total			FT			PT		
	Total	Pg	Ug	Total	Pg	Ug	Total	Pg	Ug
<b>HE Institutions</b>	72%	99%	66%	81%	100%	79%	57%	99%	39%
<b>FE Colleges</b>	28%	1%	34%	19%	0%	21%	43%	1%	61%

Table 16

**Percentage of all higher education students in further education colleges (1989-90 to 2000-01)**

	FT	PT	Total
1989-90	10	58	25
1990-91	10	58	24
1991-92	13	58	25
1992-93	13	59	26
1993-94	15	57	26
1994-95	17	52	27
1995-96	17	50	28
1996-97	18	47	28
1997-98	18	46	28
1998-99	19	44	28
1999-00	18	43	28
2000-01	19	43	28

There is no official published comparison of the levels of funding provided for the different types of higher education provision. The Association of Scottish Colleges (2004a), in a submission to the Scottish Parliament, calculated that the unit of recurrent funding (grant plus fee) provided by the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council for a full year, full-time higher education place differed between higher education institutions and further education colleges (Table 17).

Table 17

**Unit of recurrent funding for a full-year full-time place on a higher education course in Scotland: illustrative examples**

	1996-97		2003-04	
	HEI	FEC	HEI	FEC
<b>Engineering</b>	£5592	£3461	£7100	£3191
<b>Business Studies</b>	£3577	£2276	£4175	£2128

*Source: Association of Scottish Colleges: Briefing note for the Scottish Parliament: 2004*

The values in Table 17 are averaged over the whole duration of a course and would be likely to be contested by higher education institutions who could assert that the later years of an undergraduate course are more resource intensive than the earlier years. Nevertheless, these values provide some evidence that further education colleges have a capacity to offer higher education in a cost effective manner. The rapid expansion of part-

time provision in higher education institutions may, therefore, have been achieved at a relatively high cost to the public purse. The relative cost of different qualifications at different types of institutions may merit more formal, independent investigation if further expansion of provision is to be considered.

### **1.3 Higher education in further education colleges in Scotland**

Over the last 25 years further education colleges throughout the UK have gradually assumed a more pivotal role generally within the education landscape, gaining visibility and recognition through the Dearing, Garrick, Kennedy and Fryer Reports of 1997. Table 6 showed that further education colleges in Scotland play a greater role in higher education than their counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom. The plans of Education Ministers in England to expand two-year work-focused foundation degrees, with many of them delivered in further education colleges (DfES 2003), suggest that an analysis of comparative experience in Scotland is of value.

In Scotland, the first further education colleges were founded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the majority being established in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century by local authorities, who governed and managed them in accordance with local priorities for skills training, mainly at craft and technical levels (Gallacher 2003). A significant change occurred in 1993 when colleges were removed from local authority control under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 and incorporated as independent bodies. During and after a turbulent period of adjustment to independence colleges have, individually and collectively, established a stronger and more visible role within the framework of post-16 education and training in Scotland. This includes responding to the potential for growth in higher education provision (Gallacher 2003).

The Report of the Scottish Committee of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Garrick Report 1997) first highlighted, to the surprise of many, the volume of provision of higher education by further education colleges, which had undergone significant change in the period leading up to 1994-95 (the year of the statistics used by the Garrick Report). Garrick noted that, in Scotland, nearly 17% of full-time higher education provision, nearly 42% of part-time higher education provision and 25% of all higher education provision took place in further education colleges. Since the publication



of the Dearing and Garrick Reports, the statistics concerning participation in higher education continue to provide evidence of the substantial contribution of further education colleges to higher education provision (Table 10 and Tables 13-16). Between 1994-95 and 2000-01, participation in higher education programmes in colleges grew by 32% overall, with 29% growth in full-time participation and 35% growth in part-time participation (Table 10). The overall share had stabilised at 28% by the time of the publication of *“Life Through Learning, Learning Through Life”* by the Scottish Executive (2003c). It is more than double the contribution of the FE sector in England at 11% (DfES 2003) and results from sustained growth since the mid 1980s (Gallacher 2003). Given that the duration of study per student in further education colleges is shorter than in higher education institutions, the proportion of higher education entrants who enter higher education through further education colleges is even higher. In 2000-01, colleges had 28% of all higher education students: by comparison, 43% of all higher education entrants and 52% of all undergraduate entrants enrolled in a further education college (Scottish Executive 2002). One in three young entrants study for their higher education courses in a further education institution in Scotland, compared with one in twenty in England (HEFCE 2005).

There is a much greater likelihood that “non-traditional” higher education students (for example older people and those from lower socio-economic groups) are to be found in colleges. Statistical evidence prepared for the Garrick Committee showed that higher education students in further education colleges were more likely to be mature (defined by age), from less advantaged backgrounds (defined by grant/loan eligibility), to live locally and to hold non-standard entry qualifications. Raab (1998) and Gallacher (2003) confirmed that participation rates in higher education in further education colleges for those from the most disadvantaged areas were twice as high as those found in higher education institutions; and the report *“Young Participation in Higher Education”* (HEFCE 2005) provides evidence that disadvantaged constituencies in Scotland have low participation rates but these are nearly twice the very low rates found in similarly disadvantaged areas in England. The relatively high Scottish participation rates appear to

be a reflection of the greater importance in Scotland, especially for poor areas, of HNC and HND qualifications and higher education courses in further education colleges (HEFCE 2005). Further education colleges may be perceived as local, familiar institutions without the physical, academic and cultural barriers that are associated with universities and they are therefore more visible, accessible and attractive to traditionally under-represented groups in higher education (Osborne et al 2000; ASC 2003; Morgan-Klein 2003).

The primary role of further education colleges in Scotland is the provision of post-16 vocational programmes leading to awards of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (Osborne et al 2000). Total enrolments were 450,000 in 2002-03 and, of these, around 26% were at higher education level (ASC 2004b), mainly on Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes. Higher National courses have been a feature of Scotland's post-school education provision for almost 80 years (ASC 2004b): these programmes are distinctively vocational in nature, catering for a wide range of occupational areas from more traditional sectors such as engineering, computing and business studies, through to emerging sectors such as child care, sports coaching and e-commerce. The vocational portfolio is complemented by a smaller number of broader based and more academic programmes, for example in the social sciences. This is illustrated by Table 18, which lists the top ten HNC and HND programmes on the basis of entries for 2001.

Table 18

**Top 10 HNC and HND programmes on the basis of entries (2001)**

<b>HNC</b>		<b>HND</b>	
<b>Computing</b>	1,708	<b>Business Administration</b>	752
<b>Social Care</b>	1,318	<b>Computing: Support</b>	571
<b>Child Care and Education</b>	1,253	<b>Computing: Software Development</b>	528
<b>Business Administration</b>	999	<b>Accounting</b>	505
<b>Administration and Information Management</b>	988	<b>Social Sciences</b>	436
<b>Accounting</b>	796	<b>Administration and Information Management</b>	431
<b>Social Sciences</b>	534	<b>Beauty Therapy</b>	352
<b>Management</b>	341	<b>Sports Coaching with Sports Development</b>	321
<b>Engineering: Mechatronics</b>	336	<b>Travel with Tourism</b>	308
<b>Engineering: Electronics</b>	323	<b>Graphic Design</b>	255

Source: Scottish Qualifications Authority: 2002

The relative success of further education colleges in Scotland, compared with the rest of the United Kingdom, in expanding their provision of higher education programmes appears to be due to a combination of factors. The colleges, after their incorporation in 1993, expanded their student numbers in response to a funding formula introduced by the then Scottish Education and Industry Department that incentivised growth as a means of improving efficiency (McTavish 2003). Secondly, the HNC and HND were reformed and modernised in the late 1980s by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (then SCOTVEC), which succeeded in positioning these qualifications as broadly equivalent, respectively, to years 1 and 2 of degree level study, as well as confirming their validity as vocational qualifications in their own right. The Authority enabled colleges to work within a national system of validation and certification and to offer programmes that are independent of higher education institutions (Gallacher 2003). A third significant factor is that, in 1993-94, nearly half of all part-time higher education was provided by further education colleges compared with 4% in the pre-1992 universities, 18% in post-1992 universities and 21% by the Open University (Schuller et al 1999). Table 15 shows that, by 2000-01, despite increases in part-time provision by higher education institutions, further education colleges

still provided 43% of all part-time higher education and 61% of all part-time undergraduate higher education.

The status of Higher National awards is illustrated by reference to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) which is reproduced as Figure 1. The framework was created in the wake of the Garrick Report to bring together all Scottish mainstream qualifications into a single unified framework. The SCQF was launched in 2001 and aims to describe all qualifications in terms of their level and credit value, providing the basis for credit accumulation and transfer throughout all of Scotland's education and training provision (SCQF 2004).

Figure 1

### Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

SCQF level	SQA <sup>1</sup> National Units, courses and group awards	Higher education	SVQs <sup>2</sup>
Level 12		Doctorate	
Level 11		Masters	SVQ5
Level 10		Honours Degree Graduate Diploma/Certificate	
Level 9		Ordinary Degree Graduate Diploma/Certificate	
Level 8		Higher National Diploma/Diploma in Higher Education	SVQ4
Level 7	Advanced Higher	Higher National Certificate/Certificate in Higher Education	
Level 6	Higher		SVQ 3
Level 5	Intermediate 2 Credit Standard Grade		SVQ 2
Level 4	Intermediate 1 General Standard Grade		SVQ1
Level 3	Access 3 Foundation Standard Grade		
Level 2	Access 2		
Level 1	Access 1		

Source: Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education (2004)

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Qualifications Authority.

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Vocational Qualifications - these qualifications are generally specific to particular occupations.

The SCQF locates HNC and HND qualifications clearly within higher education which, with the exception of the Advanced Higher, commences at level 7. It provides a framework for progression and articulation between different levels of education and different providers of higher education (SFC 2004). This framework, despite its slow progress towards implementation, has already done much to consolidate and enhance the status of HNC and HND qualifications as part of the fabric of higher education in Scotland. Full implementation will extend the potential value of the HNC and HND as equivalent to the first and second years of a degree and enhance the eligibility of holders of these qualifications to progress to study for qualifications at level 8 or 9 of the framework. Progression is, at present, offered at the discretion of individual universities and, in practice, equivalence is not consistently recognised, especially by elite universities who are much less likely to accept articulating students (McLennan, Musselbrook and Dundas 2000; Osborne et al 2000; Gallacher 2003; Field 2004a). The SCQF will not confer any right of admission to courses or institutions but it is intended to contribute to a more consistent recognition of the level of attainment represented by units of study or by qualifications placed at specific levels within the framework.

Dearing (1997) noted the different status of sub-degree qualifications in England compared with the Scottish HNC and HND. In England the HND is a full-time two year course and the HNC is a part-time work-based equivalent. Dearing recommended an increase in full-time sub-degree provision in England and the adoption throughout the United Kingdom of the practice in Scotland of having recognised vocational qualifications equivalent respectively to one year of full-time study (HNC) and two years of full-time study (HND). The UK government has recently responded by deciding to introduce two-year foundation degrees in England validated by universities (DfES 2003). Foundation degrees are to be valued as a qualification in their own right as well as offering clear progression routes to degrees. The foundation degree is described in the *"The Future of Higher Education"* (DfES 2003) as a two-year, reputable and truly employer-focused higher education qualification, that offers specific job-related skills. This can be compared

with the Scottish Executive's statement in *"The Competitiveness of Higher Education"* (2004b) that Higher National awards have a distinct vocational focus and are well respected by employers as stand alone qualifications. It is, however, important to note that plans for Foundation Degrees in England concentrate on full-time courses (DfES 2003). The Scottish Higher National Certificate and Diploma, therefore, already fulfil for Scotland the role of the new English foundation degree and offer more varied and flexible modes of study (ASC 2004b).

## 1.4 Summary

In the second half of the 20th century, there has been sustained expansion in participation in higher education in the United Kingdom. Levels of participation are set to continue to rise to reach 50% of those aged 18-30 by 2010, driven partially by the introduction of foundation degrees in England. Increased participation rates have not yet been matched by a proportionately greater diversity in the socio-economic profile of the student body and, although there is evidence of a recent shift in the balance between full-time and part-time study in Scotland, the rate of change has slowed.

Scotland already enjoys a higher rate of participation in higher education due, in part, to the relative success of further education colleges in Scotland in expanding their contribution to higher education to 28% of total provision, 34% of total undergraduate provision, and 61% of part-time undergraduate provision in 2000-01. This success appears to be explained by the development of a distinctive vocational curriculum and a national system of qualifications independent of universities; by the availability of part-time modes of study in colleges; and by the local accessibility of colleges to traditionally under-represented groups of students. The potential of HNC and HND qualifications to offer articulation routes to degree level study now complements the traditional value of these awards, as qualifications in their own right, to vocationally orientated students and to employers.

At face value, higher education in Scottish further education colleges may represent a model of higher education that exemplifies the characteristics of lifelong learning within a learning society and that offers a cost effective solution to extending and widening participation. There has, however, been little research interest in the detailed empirical experience of this category of students or in the validity of their experience as a model of lifelong learning. One purpose of my research is to contribute to knowledge and

understanding of the experience of higher education students in a further education college in Scotland, as a model of lifelong learning.



# CHAPTER 2

## Higher Education in the Learning Society

- 2.1 Defining the learning society
- 2.2 The shift to mass higher education
- 2.3 Summary

## 2.1 Defining the learning society

Chapter 1 has described recent trends in participation in higher education in the United Kingdom. In this chapter I review theoretical perspectives on the learning society and on the changing nature and purpose of higher education following the period of expansion that was initiated by the Robbins Report (1963). The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing 1997) was the first major review of higher education since the Robbins Report and chose to adopt an interpretation of the concept of a learning society as the context for its work. I will, therefore, examine perspectives on the learning society, before reviewing Dearing's and others' thinking on higher education.

The idea of a learning society became very influential during the 1990s, having originated in the 1970s in the work of Husen (1974) and Schön (1971) (Ranson 1998). In both periods the idea of a learning society is conceived as a response to profound social and economic change.

“The problems facing educational planners..... are problems of social justice, of national economy and of preparation for a rapidly changing society where lifelong learning becomes imperative.” (Husen 1974 quoted in Ranson 1998 p7)

“The origins for the surge of interest in lifelong learning and the learning society lie in the constellation of technological, economic and cultural changes that surround and affect adults.” (Raggatt, Edwards and Small 1996 p1)

The learning society is, therefore, a complex and diverse concept. From the typologies that have been developed, it is possible to identify three main strands of discourse (Edwards 1997; Ranson 1998; Barnett 1998; Coffield 2000a). The first strand suggests

that, in a learning society, the development of human capital in the form of a skilled workforce is a necessary response to the demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge economy and contributes to the pursuit of economic competitiveness. The second strand construes learning as intrinsically worthwhile, contributing to quality of life and enabling citizens in a learning society to pursue their personal and social goals. The third approach is to view a learning society as one in which learning enables citizens to meet the challenges of change through active citizenship and through an enhanced democratic process that is conducive to social justice and inclusion.

Of these, the dominant discourse has been one of investment in education and training to equip workers with the necessary skills to meet the challenges of a post-industrial economic order. One characteristic of economic change is the decline of the manufacturing sector and the parallel rise of the service sector. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the British economy lost some 5 million jobs in manufacturing and gained some 8 million in services with the result that, by the late 1990s, more than 75% of all employees were in the service sector (Field 2000a; SFC 2004). It is, however, essential to differentiate the components of this now massive service sector. In an industrial society, services primarily provided ancillary help for production, for example through transportation and distribution. In a post-industrial society there are many categories of services including personal, business (banking and insurance), communication and media, health, education, research and government (Bell 1973). This diversification and proliferation of the service sector has led to the emergence of a professional and technical class, with greatest growth in occupations designated as skilled or professional and requiring education and qualifications (Bell 1973). Bell's analysis of post-industrial society as moving towards a centrality of theoretical knowledge as the source of innovation and towards the creation of a new "intellectual technology" underpins the now familiar notion of the knowledge economy. Knowledge is deemed to form the basis of national wealth in the same way that physical resources did in the past. In a knowledge economy wealth is generated by the exploitation of ideas and through creative thinking and networking,

leading to new products and services or to more innovative ways of reaching markets (Drucker 1993; Quah 1999). This idea is not without its critics, given evidence that the effect of the changing structure of the labour market is not necessarily wholly positive. Hutton (1995) argues that the United Kingdom exhibits a labour market structure of 30: 30: 40, with 30% of people being disadvantaged through long term employment or sporadic part-time work, 30% being in insecure, part-time, low paid employment with limited prospects, and only 40% occupying permanent full-time jobs with the opportunity to benefit from higher quality, creative, satisfying work. The rhetoric of high performance workplaces offering challenging knowledge-based work is not matched by surveys of the autonomy and control enjoyed by the average British worker (Ashton, Felstead and Green 2000; Keep 2003). The knowledge economy with its inherent pace of change and emphasis on technological developments appears to have created a context in which many individuals' lived experiences, as well as their perceptions of the labour market, are characterised by a mix of opportunity and uncertainty (Fuller 2001; Keep 2003).

The economic rationale for a learning society is predicated upon the assumption that, in a knowledge economy, economic success is directly related to the knowledge and skills of the labour force. Human capital theory amounts to the proposition that education and learning can be regarded as investments with future material payoffs (Ashton and Green 1996). This provides a theoretical base for individual demand for skills training and for corporate and societal aggregate demand for more education and learning. The assumption that there is a direct relationship is, however, contested. The Confederation of British Industry harbours no doubts about the importance of investment in human capital.

“The UK faces a global economic challenge. Its future prosperity depends on the skills and abilities of its people. Only by learning throughout life can individuals maintain their employability and organisations their competitive advantage.” (CBI 1991 p32)

Ball (1991) similarly suggests that most nations recognise that the quality of the education and training of the workforce is the single most important characteristic in determining economic competitiveness. He suggests that “evidence is accumulating of the strong links between education and success both for companies such as Ford, Rover and Marks and Spencer and for the individual” (Ball 1991 p5). Hughes and Tight (1995) present an opposing view, suggesting that the learning society is a myth that serves only to provide an ideological rationale which can be used to manipulate employees into compliance with skills training to benefit the vested interests of their employers who are, themselves, victims of the same myth. The empirical evidence is inconclusive. At the level of the individual, there is extensive evidence of personal rates of return from advanced level qualifications (Mayhew, Deer and Dua 2004). At the level of the organisation, training can be shown to be positively related to productivity but less easily to profitability. At industry and at national level the evidence of a causal link, as opposed to a correlation, between training and economic growth is thin (Ashton and Green 1996; Mayhew et al 2004).

Tight (1998b) finds the dominance of the human capital perspective on the learning society to be depressing as it implies obligatory participation by conscript learners: he argues that other, less utilitarian, perspectives should also be recognised. A second discourse presents learning as intrinsically worthwhile, contributing to quality of life for individuals as part of life for people of all ages. This conception is reflected in the adult education movement and in what Field (2000a) refers to as the “silent explosion” of participation in learning, both collectively through bodies such as the WEA and through individual participation in activities as diverse as extra-mural provision in universities and sports clubs. Edwards (1997) similarly develops the idea of a learning society as offering open learning networks that people use on a self-directed basis to satisfy their own needs according to their own notions. Both Field and Edwards recognise the value of informal lifelong learning not only as a form of leisure activity but as a deeper manifestation of the struggle of ordinary people to respond to a complex world where traditional family and

social structures no longer offer stability and meaning for individuals. This links to the third approach to the learning society which is variously developed through themes of social capital, social justice and a learning democracy. As a complementary theme to human capital, the notion of social capital is defined in terms of networks, norms and trust. A learning society thus enables citizens to develop family, community and social networks and relationships and such networks allow people to be more effective in achieving individual and common objectives through information-sharing, informal learning, mutual support and social cohesion (Schuller 1998; 2000; Schuller and Field 1998; Field 2003). In a democratic conception of a learning society, both formal and informal learning and the development of social capital open up life chances and contribute to social justice by enabling people to participate in society both economically and through citizenship. The state, in this version of a learning society, has an obligation to support and encourage learning to enable people to make informed choices and to fulfil their shared responsibility for the common wealth (Ranson 1998). Ranson cites Citizens' Juries, Citizens' Panels and Deliberative Opinion Polls as examples of democratic learning.

Coffield (1997), in his role as co-ordinator of the ESRC Learning Society project, attempted to amalgamate the three strands into one all encompassing definition of a learning society.

"A learning society would be one in which all citizens acquire a high quality general education, appropriate vocational training and a job (or series of jobs) worthy of a human being while continuing to participate in education and training throughout their lives. A learning society would combine excellence with equity and would equip all its citizens with the knowledge, understanding and skills to ensure national economic prosperity and much more besides. The attraction of the term 'the learning society' lies in the implicit promise not only of economic development but of regeneration of our whole public sphere. Citizens of a learning society would, by means of

their continuing education and training, be able to engage in critical dialogue and action to improve the quality of life for the whole community and to ensure social integration as well as economic success.” (Coffield 1997 p450)

Defining the learning society in this idealistic way makes clear the scale of the task facing all of the stakeholders and participants in lifelong learning in general and in higher education in particular.

Dearing (1997) adopted the notion of the learning society as the context for his review of the changing role and contribution of higher education at a time of intense interest in participation and in funding. In his summary of the context for higher education, Dearing refers to a new economic order, to global competition and technological change and to the changing world of work, adopting a primarily economic definition of a learning society, tempered with references to citizenship and the transmission of culture. The next section considers this and other theoretical perspectives on higher education.

## **2.2 The shift to mass higher education**

Watson and Taylor (1998) argued that it has become fashionable to describe the development of higher education system in the United Kingdom as a progressive shift from an elite to a mass system (Ainley 1994; Daniel 1992a; Scott 1995; Barnett 1997; Mayhew et al 2004; Coffield and Williamson 1997; Smith and Bocock 1999). Expansion of participation in higher education, described in section 1.1, has been attributed to the creation of new universities in the post-Robbins era and to the ending of the binary divide between the former polytechnics and the universities in 1992 (Mayhew et al 2004). This expansion in participation resulted in the currency of the term “mass” higher education, often with reference to Trow’s (1989) typology of elite, mass and universal systems based on age participation indices of 15%, 15-40% and over 40% respectively. Using this measure, the United Kingdom has achieved mass participation in higher education. Mass access has not, however, necessarily resulted in a mass system. Those who question the genuine arrival of mass higher education in the United Kingdom point to a continuing elite culture perpetuated by a hierarchy of institutions; to a continuing class basis of participation; and to the primacy of full-time degree education for young people immediately post-school as the dominant model of participation (Scott 1995; Daniel 1992a; Trow 1998; Watson and Taylor 1998; Smith and Bocock 1999).

Because growth has not been evenly distributed across different types of institutions, expansion has yet to produce the culture change normally associated with a shift to a mass system (Scott 1995). The older universities have chosen to grow more slowly and to preserve elite, selective practices. The former polytechnics have grown more rapidly and have aggressively sought to attract increased numbers of students (Pratt 1999). This has perpetuated a hierarchy of institutions, confirmed by the apparent determination of the former polytechnics to develop the gravitas that accompanies independent academic status and thus to aspire to join the elite group (Daniel 1992a; Douglas 2004). A mass system requires a diversity of institutions but also a recognition of the value of diversity



and the development of policies that reflect and encourage diversity (Tight 1996b; Trow 1998).

The fuelling of expansion in higher education by middle class students has been illustrated in section 1.1. The proportion of entrants from working class families has remained inexorably the same (Watson and Taylor 1998; Leathwood and O'Connell 2003) and may be, in part, explained by a failure on the part of institutions, individually and collectively, to create qualifications and progression routes that are compatible with the expectations and aspirations of those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Smith and Bocock 1999). The political imperative to pursue social justice through widening participation in higher education has tended to see the solution as one of persuading under-represented groups to enter a traditional system offering established qualifications. This approach may fail to take account of the complex pattern of individual and social factors that influence whether young people will enter higher education (Gayle et al 2000). It may also have obscured a more fundamental consideration of whether the system, structure and culture of institutions are compatible with aspirations for mass participation (Archer, Hutchings and Ross 2003). For mature, working class people, the idea of a student lifestyle with a combination of independence, academic work and leisure is unthinkable and alien (Reay, Ball and David 2003; Tett 2004).

The concept of a mass higher education system is similarly at odds with the dominance of a traditional full-time higher education experience for young people and the marginalisation of other modes of participation. The core of a mass higher education system must surely be a combination of opportunities for full-time and part-time study that enable people to engage in academic activity throughout their lives and one which is funded in a way that encourages institutions to treat all types of students even-handedly (Daniel 1993). An apparent lack of enthusiasm for part-time undergraduate study remains a feature of the British system, as will be discussed more fully in section 5.3.

Mass access to higher education and its implications for the system of institutions and for the widening of participation has stimulated consideration of what and whom higher education is for. This discourse reflects the different strands of the concept of a learning society and tends to crystallise as a tension between the liberal and vocational purposes of higher education (Marks 1999); or between “academicism” and “operational competence” (Barnett 1997); or between “old values” and “usefulness” (Rice 2004).

The Robbins Report (1963) identified four major purposes for higher education: instruction in skills; promotion of general powers of the mind; advancement of learning; and transmission of a common culture. Although the Dearing Inquiry was commissioned primarily to create a platform for the political resolution of the funding crisis that had been brought about by the expansion of higher education, the Committee did apply itself to its full remit to review the purpose, shape, nature, size and funding of higher education and how it should develop to meet the needs of the United Kingdom in the next 20 years. The Dearing Report (1997) shifts the focus towards an economic, human capital justification for higher education whilst retaining, to some extent, liberal and democratic strands (Barnett 1998). The Report (p72) states that the purpose of higher education is to inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities so that they can grow intellectually, are well-equipped for work, can contribute effectively to society and achieve personal fulfilment; to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy; and to play a major part in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society.

The dominance of the economic rationale for a learning society has prompted a defence of higher education as intrinsically valuable in its own right as part of a civilised society (Marks 1999; Rice 2004). Rice argues for a re-establishment of the central purpose of higher education to stimulate thought and capacity to reason and to prepare students for citizenship in a changing world. One difficulty, however, with the distinction between liberal and vocational orientations is that such a distinction tends to imply value judgements. The survival of a hierarchy of institutions reinforces the supremacy of a

traditional academic experience for the few whilst the majority engage in lower status vocational courses in the former polytechnics and in colleges. This value-laden distinction may be irrelevant and counter-productive in a learning society in which diverse experiences of higher education should all offer the scope for the development of vocational, personal and social competences and the capability to live in a world of uncertainty and to contribute to it (Ainley 1994). It has been suggested that progress towards a learning society is less dependent upon curriculum content and more dependent upon radical pedagogical change away from knowledge transmission and towards learning as a self-directed, active, conscious process. Strain and Field (1997) suggest that radical change in the structures and processes of learning is at the heart of the notion of a learning society.

I now turn specifically to perspectives on the role of colleges in the development of mass higher education within a learning society. Smith and Bocock (1999) suggest that there is a tension between two models of mass higher education. One is a minimalist model, designed to accommodate increased participation within a largely unchanged university system, with colleges acting as a kind of safety valve, absorbing new constituencies of students on the margin. Under a second more radical mass system, colleges would be regarded as different from universities but would be respected and acknowledged as providers of distinctive and valued higher education qualifications, which articulate effectively with higher level programmes. The system in the United Kingdom currently approximates most closely to the first of these models, primarily because of the pre-eminence of the full-time degree as a model of higher education and because of the autonomous, self-determining status of universities, which have not historically functioned as part of a system of higher education. In the absence of a strategy for systematic change, colleges have themselves established a stake in higher education, particularly in Scotland, through expansion and through curriculum policy initiatives such as the SCQF. In Chapter 3, I will present evidence of a lack of explicit policy support for progress towards the latter of the models advanced by Smith and Bocock (1999).

As noted in section 1.3, the traditional historical role of colleges has always been to provide distinctive vocational qualifications, primarily for those in work or those aspiring to technical or craft level employment. In Scotland, the Garrick Report (1997) drew attention to the newer secondary role of HNC and HND qualifications, which is to create articulation routes into the later years of degree level study. Garrick (1997) recommended that colleges and higher education institutions should actively collaborate to enhance articulation routes, chiming with the growing emphasis on wider participation in higher education that was to be adopted by the devolved Scottish administration (Scottish Executive 1999b). By 2003, the Scottish Executive had made an explicit commitment to maximise progression opportunities for those holding HNC or HND qualifications (Scottish Executive 2003c).

In reality there is no common definition of the term “articulation”, which is used to denote progression from specific HND programmes into the third year of degree programmes as well as to describe progression from college to university in more general terms. There is no evidence of the demand for progression from HNC/D to degree level of study nor of rates of progression (Gallacher 2003): evidence is not recorded or published consistently by the Scottish Executive nor by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. McLennan et al (2000) suggest that there are still many difficulties associated with articulation that may derive from institutional access policies, structure and content of curricula, approaches to teaching and learning, methods of assessment and the overall culture and ethos of higher education institutions. These difficulties appear to be less acute in post-1992 institutions which demonstrate higher percentages of entrants for whom the HNC/D is the highest entry qualification (Scottish Executive 2002).

It would be difficult to dispute the value of providing progression opportunities for students by enhancing valid articulation routes across sectoral boundaries. It is equally important not to allow analyses of the success and validity of articulation routes from full-time HNC/D qualifications to degrees to become the criteria by which the quality of the

contribution of further education colleges to higher education is judged (Field 2004a). The traditional, vocational qualification outcome may retain its attraction for students and employers alike. Equally, the predominance of part-time higher education in colleges may require more complex and non-linear patterns of progression that are compatible with Daniel's (1993) proposition that a mass higher education system must be based upon a continuum of programmes for full-time and part-time study that enables people to take advantage of academic programmes flexibly throughout their lives.

The importance of valuing sub-degree higher education qualifications provided by colleges is underlined by labour market research (Mason 2000). Some employers find that graduate job applicants lack practical work experience and commercial understanding. These concerns reflect a continuing demand for technical and vocational skills that are most easily acquired by intermediate level (HNC/D) education undertaken part-time whilst working. Mason argues that the current divide between colleges and universities creates a false choice for young people many of whom are swayed by the established credibility of a degree qualification and see an intermediate qualification as a second choice or fall back option. Not surprisingly, the financial return on HNC/D qualifications is lower than the return on degrees (Conlon 2002). However Conlon calculates raw returns and does not take account of the time taken to complete the qualifications, nor of the financial benefits of working whilst studying part-time, of receiving employer support for fees and of avoiding the debt associated with full-time study. In a well-developed mixed economy of institutions and qualifications a part-time, work-based intermediate qualification could be attractive both to employers and students both in its own right and as a recognised route to a part-time, work-based degree qualification. If adult learning is to reach effectively the majority of the population, then a new value must be placed on the work-based route (Field 2000a). A more polemic approach would be to suggest that a continuing obsession with expanding full-time participation in higher education by young people is a "myopic oversell" of the relevance of a degree in the current and future job market (Wolf 2002).

It seems to be accepted that, post 1992, the British university system is now a unified, if plural and hierarchical, system, held together by the backbone of the first degree and common funding arrangements (Scott 1995; Parry 2003). Although political rhetoric may support diversity, funding policy incentivises homogeneity and the unified system is therefore informally stratified, rather than diverse (Pratt 1999). A new “binary line”, however, divides universities from further education colleges, despite the higher policy profile of their role in England in delivering the new vocational foundation degrees, and despite their success in Scotland in contributing to a higher participation index. “*The Future of Higher Education*” (DfES 2003) avoids setting a clear goal of mission differentiation within the higher education sector although this appears to be the desired outcome. The role of colleges is particularly ambiguous (Douglass 2004). It could be argued that the final evolution to a mass system of higher education requires the full incorporation of colleges within the overall structure of institutions and a recognition of the value of their qualifications and awards within more differentiated system that might be more compatible with Coffield's (1997) ideal of a learning society. At present, the Westminster government's approach to diversity within the higher education sector is one of institutional self-determination within a common framework rather than political direction (Taylor 2003). The policies of the Scottish Executive, which are tending to diverge from those of the Department for Education and Skills, will be reviewed in more detail in Chapter 3.

### **2.3 Summary**

Since the 1970s, the development of different concepts of a learning society has contributed to an active consideration of the role and purpose of education in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The dominant discourse is one of response to the changing nature of the economy through enhancing the knowledge and skills of citizens, complemented by an acknowledgement of the personal, social and democratic dimensions of a learning society. In the higher education sector the perceived shift from an elite to a mass system in terms of volume of participation has stimulated discussion of the particular role of higher education in a learning society. The Dearing Report's economic perspective has been criticised as an inadequate and utilitarian response to the complexity of the purpose of higher education and there has been a defence of the liberal and democratic role of universities in particular.

Daniel (1993) proposed that progress towards a mass system of higher education presented five challenges: encouraging institutional diversity; expanding part-time study; integrating full-time and part-time programmes; introducing a funding methodology based on student credit points; and developing staff in institutions. Edwards (1997) presents the discourses in relation to widening participation as being similarly but more broadly related to institutional change, system change and political change. A consideration of the still marginalised status of mature students, part-time students, non-degree students and non-university students suggests that the United Kingdom has not yet effected a full transition from an elite to a mass system of higher education, if judged against Daniel's (1993) criteria. Colleges are not yet recognised as different but equally valued contributors to a diversified but coherent system of higher education and the expectations and experience of their students, many of whom are part-time, are not well understood. An objective of my research is to investigate how students in a Scottish further education college experience higher education and to consider the relevance of their experience to the evolution of a system of mass higher education in a learning society, now and in the future.

# CHAPTER 3

## Lifelong Learning Policy and Higher Education

- 3.1 Review of lifelong learning policy in Scotland: 1996-2004
- 3.2 Critical perspectives on policy implementation
- 3.3 Policy on student finance
- 3.4 Summary



### 3.1 Review of lifelong learning policy in Scotland: 1996-2004

"Public policy is whatever governments choose to do or not to do" (Dye 1978 p3). Hill (1993) defines policy as the creation of political ideology and political priorities and the conversion of these into social change through governmental activity including legislation, regulation and resource allocation. Hill (1993) usefully distinguishes between policy formulation and policy implementation, recognising that these two stages are distinct but inter-related. Both are necessary if political stances are to be converted into processes that impact upon social groups and individuals. Hill (1993) also emphasises the interactive role of implementation in contributing to policy development because of the inter-relation between new policy and existing practice and the complexity of the implementation process, which involves a plethora of governmental and non-governmental agencies, organisations and individuals. In this chapter I review lifelong learning policy during the period 1996-2004 and evaluate the progress of policy development and implementation in Scotland in relation to higher education.

In the late 1990s, the educational policy environment was characterised by a new explicit acceptance of the importance of moving towards lifelong learning and a learning society. *"The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain"* (DfEE 1998b) reflected and built upon the Kennedy (1997) and Fryer (1997) Reports, both of which advocated widening access to and participation in lifelong learning. The Westminster government's response to the Dearing Report, entitled *"Higher Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"* (DfEE 1998a) accepted wholeheartedly that the modernisation of higher and further education systems would contribute to economic prosperity and social cohesion. In Scotland, the Secretary of State for Scotland similarly published a Green Paper on Lifelong Learning *"Opportunity Scotland"* (Scottish Office 1998b) and a ministerial response to the Garrick Report, also entitled *"Higher Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"* (Scottish Office 1998a).

Each of these reports is predicated on an acceptance of the relevance of learning to the political, economic, industrial, social and technological changes which the reports expect will affect the United Kingdom, within a global environment and a knowledge economy. Each accepts unquestioningly that lifelong learning and a learning society will contribute to economic success, social justice, competitiveness, prosperity, sustained employment and quality of life (Tight 1998a). The rhetoric is not, however, converted into a strategic approach to implement the vision of a learning society. Instead, there is an assumption that the emergence of a learning society is inevitable and that it therefore represents a context in which specific, mainly vocational, lifelong learning initiatives should be pursued (Tight 1998a).

From 1999, policy on lifelong learning in Scotland evolved through the work of the Scottish Parliament which assumed full devolved responsibility for education in Scotland in 1999. The Scottish Executive's (1999b) first programme for government "*Making it Work Together*" included commitments to provide training for skills that match jobs for the future, to widen access to further and higher education, to create a culture of lifelong learning and to increase adult participation in education and training. This was followed by the second programme for government, "*Working Together for Scotland*" (Scottish Executive 2001) which aimed for a "learning, working, connected Scotland". These broad statements of intent were supported by a plethora of measures to create new bodies charged with implementing aspects of the policy, including the establishment of a Minister and a government department for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning; the Scottish University for Industry and Learndirect Scotland, which were tasked with stimulating demand for lifelong learning; the Scottish Further Education Funding Council; Future Skills Scotland, which was tasked with generating labour market information; Careers Scotland, a new "all-age" careers guidance service; and an infrastructure to lead the implementation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

The launch or reorganisation of so many agencies created an impression of activity and progress. The emphasis is, however, clearly on creating new demand for adult lifelong learning. There does not appear to be a strategic intent to change the existing systems of post-16 education nor a recognition of the political and institutional implications of shifting from a traditional model of full-time post-16 education for young people to an accessible model of lifelong learning for people of all ages.

In higher education, the main driver of policy change continued to be the vexed question of student fees, which were introduced throughout the United Kingdom in 1999 (DfEE 1998a). The new Scottish Executive set up the Independent (Cubie) Committee of Inquiry into Student Finance, resulting in the publication of *"Fairness for the Future"* (Cubie 1999) and *"Scotland the Learning Nation"* (Scottish Executive 2000). The abolition of the up-front payment of tuition fees in Scotland was clearly a major policy change. It was not, however, accompanied by evidence of intent to move away from the dominant model of tertiary education as full-time and primarily designed for young people. The Cubie Committee was given the brief: "to conduct a comprehensive review of tuition fees and financial support for students normally resident in Scotland participating, part-time or full-time (my emphasis), in further and higher education courses anywhere in the UK" (Cubie 1999 pvii). Despite this brief, the Committee applied most of its efforts to its primary challenge and offered the Scottish Parliament an alternative to fees for full-time higher education. Only nine of its 52 recommendations are directed at non-full-time modes of study and, of these, one simply advocates the promotion of best practice in employee training, two refer to Individual Learning Accounts, and two refer to postgraduate study. This outcome does not sit well with the Committee's statements that "part-time study should be encouraged in the modern learning environment" (Cubie 1999 p50) and that "for part-time students ... the support system should encourage, not discourage, learning" (Cubie 1999 p77). It also does not sit well with the Committee's findings that the uptake of part-time study opportunities continues to increase.

Interestingly, although the Cubie Report failed to question the traditional distinction between full-time and part-time study, or to make any significant recommendations that would support alternatives to traditional full-time study, it did recognise the findings of a growing body of research on the extent to which so-called full-time students work part-time. The Committee took the view that part-time work is a necessary evil for those who are debt averse or who wish to raise their levels of disposable income, and made recommendations aimed at limiting its negative impact on study. The Committee's views (and the research on which they are based) assume that students work part-time to avoid loan debt and to enhance their levels of disposable income. There is an unstated but clear assumption that the students are maintaining a traditional "student" lifestyle of study and leisure not an "adult" lifestyle. The incidence of students working whilst studying will be considered further in section 5.2.

The period 2002-04 saw an attempt by the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive to develop a more strategic approach to setting policy in lifelong learning through the Scottish Parliament's Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee's Inquiry into Lifelong Learning (2002), the Scottish Executive's Strategy for Lifelong Learning, "*Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life*" (2003c), and the Scottish Executive's Higher Education Review (2003b: 2004b). The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee (2002) adopted an inclusive approach to lifelong learning, taking as its field of inquiry: higher education; further education; vocational learning; and community/voluntary education. The Committee set out as the aim of a national lifelong learning strategy (p15):

"to create a culture where everyone has the desire and opportunity to continuously develop their knowledge and skills, thus enhancing their quality of life and the well being of society".

The Committee's Report (2002) advocates two radical policy changes that challenge the dominant model of full-time post-16 education: extended "entitlements" (p18) to lifelong

learning; and the equalisation of fee support for full-time and part-time learners (p56). The Committee comments (p56) that “the system is still skewed towards learners in full-time higher education”.

It is of note that the first serious challenge to the dominant model of tertiary education comes from a parliamentary committee that does not have the power and burden of policy implementation. The Scottish Executive’s (2003a) less radical response is to make a commitment to conduct a review of the funding of learners but to give no clear signal of significant change. The Executive understands “that there is no simple difference between full-time and part-time learning” (p7) but maintains its policy of “special support” rather than equality for part-time learners. The Executive’s own document, “*Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life*” (2003c) reverts to a familiar pattern of rhetoric about lifelong learning combined with a series of tactical initiatives including Individual Learning Accounts, Personal Learning Plans and a plethora of reviews and awareness-raising campaigns. The more radical approach of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee is diluted.

The Scottish Executive’s Higher Education Review has been conducted in three phases. Phase 1 was a review of the funding and operation of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. Phase 2 resulted in the publication of “*A Framework for Higher Education in Scotland*” (Scottish Executive 2003b), billed as a statement of policy priorities for ten years. Two of the six key themes are “lifelong learning” and “widening access” and there are actions listed for institutions including: helping people develop throughout their lives; meeting the needs of learners through course content and institutional policy; and demonstrating creativity and flexibility in helping people from non-educational backgrounds to access higher education. Phase 3 of the Higher Education Review entitled “*The Competitiveness of Higher Education in Scotland*” (Scottish Executive 2004b) specifically sets out to gather evidence on Scotland’s strengths and weaknesses, in relation to the proposed introduction of top-up fees in England. The Phase 2 and

Phase 3 documents accept and rehearse the familiar rhetoric of higher education as a contribution to lifelong learning. Both make brief passing references to part-time higher education and to mature entrants. Both acknowledge the role of further education colleges in providing a proportion of the total higher education in Scotland. However these documents do not accord learners in colleges the attention they merit in terms of their numbers, or in terms of their fit with policy objectives. Indeed the Phase 3 document recognises that the contribution made by further education colleges amounts to between 20% or 37% depending on which measure is adopted but goes on to state that “all four sub-groups chose to focus their analysis on higher education provided in HEIs” (Scottish Executive 2004b p15). The only explanation given for the exclusion of higher education in further education colleges from mainstream policy on higher education is that comparable data was not easily available.

At the same time as the publication of Phase 3 of the Higher Education Review, the Enterprise and Culture Committee undertook an inquiry into the potential impact of top-up fees in England on Scottish institutions. “*Scottish Solutions*” (Scottish Parliament 2003) presents more radical views than those of the Executive. The Committee (2003 p2) makes two recommendations that appear to recognise that there is more to higher education than entry of young people to full-time degree programmes in universities.

Recommendation 5 reads:

“The much lower levels of support for part-time students, including mature part-time students, create a barrier to improving the education and skills of people of all ages. The Committee recommends that the Executive should address this situation.”

Recommendation 6 reads:

“The Committee is of the view that in making available any additional resources for higher education in Scotland there should not be a presumption that these will be allocated solely to the university sector and that the strategic importance of the further education sector should also be addressed”.

The Scottish Executive (2004a) has confirmed its intention to proceed towards a merger of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Further Education Funding Council. At time of writing the Scottish Executive has not given a clear indication of any likely future policy change, following the merger of the councils, in the respective distribution of resources to the higher and further education sectors or of any change in the respective priority to be accorded to full-time and part-time students.

### **3.2 Critical perspectives on policy implementation**

The policy developments reviewed in section 3.1 provide evidence that the Scottish Executive views lifelong learning and progress towards a learning society as important contributions to its policy goals of economic competitiveness and social justice. Policy statements in respect of higher education reflect the three strands evident in the review of theoretical perspectives on a learning society.

“Knowledge transfer through teaching and from research gives higher education a crucial role in developing skills and knowledge for a smart, successful Scotland”. (Scottish Executive 2003b p4 of Summary)

“Investment in knowledge and skills brings direct economic returns to individuals and collective economic returns to society”. (Scottish Executive 2003c p7)

“Lifelong learning policy in Scotland is about personal fulfilment and enterprise; employability and adaptability; active citizenship and social inclusion”. (Scottish Executive 2003c p7)

“Higher education has a key role to play in closing the opportunity gap and achieving a socially just Scotland”. (Scottish Executive 2003b p4 of Summary)

On balance, however, Ministers in the Scottish Executive appear to echo the views of Ministers in Westminster who have adopted a clear stand on the instrumental purposes of higher education and its central role in the development of the knowledge economy and in maintaining Britain’s competitive position (Blackstone 2001). Former Minister of Education Charles Clarke went so far as to say that “universities exist to enable the British economy



and society to deal with the challenges posed by the increasingly rapid process of global change” (quoted in Mayhew et al 2004).

Section 3.1 provides evidence that there has been no shortage of activity on the part of politicians in the field of lifelong learning in Scotland. In the six years since devolution, there have been two parliamentary inquiries (Scottish Parliament 2002; 2003); publication of two major documents on, respectively, enterprise and lifelong learning (Scottish Executive 2003c; 2003d); a review of higher education (Scottish Executive 2003b; 2004b); and the Cubie Committee’s Report (1999) on student finance. The impression gained is one of almost frantic effort to bring about change by willing it to happen and by a patchwork of loosely related initiatives (Coffield 2002). Belief in the importance and inevitability of a learning society has detracted from a clear definition of the nature of the required change and the sheer quantum of policy activity has masked a lack of clarity about how change is to be brought about. Implementation of policy, as noted earlier, requires interaction amongst government, institutions and individuals. This is particularly true of policy implementation in higher education, where institutions and individuals may be less receptive to direct intervention by government. Field (2000a) notes that government intervention in lifelong learning tends to be most active in the area of vocational training, which is more amenable to incentives and measurable outputs. The creation of so many new bodies during the late 1990s is perhaps further evidence of the difficulty experienced by policy makers in achieving effective engagement with existing institutions and individuals.

The aspirations of the Scottish Executive to bring about social inclusion and social justice through policies in higher education are based on the principle that a learning society will offer equality of access to learning to all citizens and that all citizens will perceive learning as valuable and relevant. This aspect of policy asserts that specific interventions will be required to rectify the imbalance in participation rates in higher education amongst those from different socio-economic groups. The social inclusion agenda has resulted in a raft

of initiatives under the heading of “widening access and participation”, directed by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SHEFC 2000). It is at present too early to evaluate whether these initiatives will contribute to the primary objective of equality in participation rates across socio-economic groups. Recent evidence published by HEFCE (2005) suggests that young people from disadvantaged postcodes still have a disproportionately lower chance of entering higher education. However it is interesting to note that the majority of the projects that are receiving funding are designed to encourage and enable “disadvantaged” people to join the existing system through “marketing” and “awareness raising” (SHEFC 2002). There is, as yet, little evidence of any intention to discover whether modifications to the system would have a better chance of achieving the primary objective. This “integrationist” model obscures the character of participation and the diverse and complex quality of the student experience (Morgan-Klein 2000).

Policy makers are well aware that a significant proportion of the adult population does not participate in post-school learning and has little intention of doing so (Tight 1996a; Scottish Enterprise 1998). Despite this evidence, policy statements do not appear to recognise that increasing participation in higher education from amongst “under-represented” groups will mean giving a greater priority to part-time accessible higher education for mature students. Higher education policy offers little evidence of any planned departure from a predominant educational model of full-time schooling until the age of 16-18 followed immediately by full-time higher education to degree level. Marks (1999) notes that, despite the fact that “school leavers” are now the minority group in higher education (confirmed in Table 8), educational policy remains geared towards attracting their custom. Most policy documents make passing reference to part-time modes of study, to the needs of mature learners and to alternatives to degrees but there is no central policy interest in shifting the balance away from the dominant model. The primary objective seems to be to increase the universality of this model rather than to

value alternatives that might be more compatible with policy rhetoric, but more potentially difficult to bring about.

The policy commitment to widen access and participation, whilst appearing to challenge the status quo, continues to be based on a construction of a “normal” student as young, well-qualified, middle-class, unencumbered by domestic responsibilities, self-confident and ambitious. This is reinforced by the classification of others as “non-traditional”. Wider access is conceived as reconstructing the personality and aspirations of “non-traditional” individuals who are pathologised as being deficient (Leathwood and O’Connell 2003) in ability, educational background, aspiration and ambition. Wider access is not conceived as diversifying the traditional system and traditional university cultures that have so far failed to attract or value them (Tett 2004). The Fryer (1997) and Kennedy (1997) Reports, commissioned to inform policy development, tend to confirm this negative orientation by identifying and, in effect, blaming all of the categories of non-participants and placing upon them the responsibility for changing their attitude and investing in their learning futures. Tight (1998a) suggests that the apparently compulsory nature of lifelong learning policies is unlikely to prove attractive to those at whom the policies are aimed unless there is more common ground established between policy-makers, providers and participants. Attempting to sell the benefits of education to reluctant learners is unlikely to be effective if it does not go hand in hand with efforts to tackle structural barriers such as finance and child care (Keep 1997).

It has already been noted that “new” students in Scotland tend to be found in post-1992 universities and further education colleges (Osborne et al 2000). Post-1992 universities and further education colleges are perceived as offering “non-traditional”, vocational alternatives to established degree programmes that may be accorded the same lower status as the students who choose to study them (Taylor 2003; Archer et al 2003). This is further evidence of the underlying problem of failure to achieve consensus on the complex and differing purposes of higher education and the relative roles of the diverse institutions

that provide higher education. Full implementation of lifelong learning policy may require a departure from classifying institutions, students and learning experiences as “traditional” or “non-traditional”, towards a more differentiated and less value-laden approach that is more congruent with an integrated qualifications framework. The planned merger of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (Scottish Executive 2004a) offers an opportunity to move in this direction in Scotland. England may, through the introduction of top-up fees, move in the opposite direction towards an even more hierarchical system (Taylor 2003).

Turning to the role of higher education in preparing citizens for the modern knowledge economy, it has been suggested that the relationship between a skilled, qualified workforce and a productive economy is excessively emphasised by politicians for ideological reasons without proper foundation (Hughes and Tight 1995). In section 2.1 I have suggested that the contention that productivity and economic performance are related to skills and learning is contested and that evidence is thin. It is perhaps unlikely that conclusive evidence of the nature of the relationship between skills and economic success will ever be generated. The more pressing difficulty is that Dearing’s (1997) idealistic vision of a “compact” amongst government, society, employers and students about respective benefits from and contributions to higher education has not been achieved. Politicians appear to accept the importance of encouraging employed people to improve their skills but have not created a financial environment that is conducive to part-time study, as will be shown in section 3.3. Institutions, for their part, vary in their acceptance of an economic role. Ancient universities tend to be defensive about their responsibilities to the economy, exemplified by Rice (2004) who argues that universities have a wide range of roles of which supporting the economy is not the most important, except in an indirect sense. The reservation seems to be that a vocational role in workforce development or continuing professional development is an unwelcome step towards utilitarianism and incompatible with the role of universities as guardians of abstract knowledge. Scottish universities, on the other hand, claim a tradition of links with

the commercial world (Kerevan 2003) and the newer universities claim to specialise in vocational subjects as diverse as nursing and computer games. There is, however no consensus or even visible debate between government and institutions about the relative importance of full-time traditional higher education for young people; vocational part-time opportunities for adults in work; and liberal, life-enhancing learning for people of all ages. Colleges explicitly provide vocational higher education that aims to enhance students' ability to secure and sustain paid work. Colleges have interpreted this vocational role as preparing people to contribute to an economic sector not to perform a specific job and there is a strong focus on core employability skills and attributes as well as technical skills. These liberal and academic strands have underpinned the recent success of colleges in offering higher education up to and including degree level (Halliday 2003). That they do so with apparent success, with direct relevance to the economy and in a manner that is accessible to part-time and mature students presents a model of lifelong learning that is compatible with policy statements. Despite the apparent reluctance of policy makers to recognise the importance or even existence of higher education in further education colleges, it may exemplify a model of policy implementation in which institutions and individuals are voluntarily responsive to the policy agenda in ways that merit greater attention.

### **3.3 Policy on student finance**

The preceding sections have suggested that higher education is still primarily conceived as full-time activity. Not surprisingly, this has been reflected historically in the mechanisms for fees, grants and, more recently, loans (Ford, Bosworth and Wilson 1995). Prior to the 1980s full-time higher education students, particularly those without dependants, enjoyed relative freedom from debt and financial uncertainty. Tuition was free and most students were eligible for means-tested maintenance grants that could be supplemented by welfare benefits and employment during vacations (McCarthy and Humphrey 1995). Term-time employment was relatively rare and the worst financial problems encountered by students derived from unpaid parental contributions to maintenance grants (Sorensen and Winn 1993). Since the 1980s, however, a seemingly relentless series of policy changes has altered the arrangements for student financial support, creating over time major change for the worse in the financial position of full-time undergraduates (Callender 2001). During the 1980s, student eligibility for welfare benefits such as housing benefit and unemployment benefit ceased, whilst grant levels were not automatically updated in line with inflation (DHSS 1985; DES 1988; Cremieux and Johnes 1993). During the 1990s, student loans were introduced to replace, progressively, maintenance grants (DES 1988). From 1999 students were required to make a contribution to the cost of tuition, for which additional loan finance was available (DfEE 1998a). These changes had a disproportionately adverse effect on mature students who had already lost eligibility for extra grant allowances (Tuckett 1996) and on students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who suffered disproportionately adverse effects when grants and parental contributions were replaced with loans (Callender 2001).

From 2000, arrangements in Scotland began to diverge from those in the rest of the United Kingdom. Upfront payment of fees was abolished by the first Scottish Parliament in favour of a Graduate Endowment, payable after completion of a degree, except by those who complete a Higher National Certificate or Diploma and do not progress to

complete a degree (Scottish Executive 2000). The Parliament also re-introduced means-tested grants to assist with the maintenance costs of full-time students from low income households and mature students, as illustrated in Table 19.

Despite the beneficial impact of the abolition of up-front fees in Scotland, debt is now a fact of life for most full-time students throughout the United Kingdom and those who are debt averse take various measures to reduce their exposure, including boosting their income by working whilst studying. This is discussed in detail in section 5.2. For the typical young student without dependants, there may be a straightforward balance to be struck between standard of living, future debt burdens and willingness to take employment whilst studying. For the increasing number of mature students with family and financial responsibilities, a much reduced standard of living may not be feasible, whilst family responsibilities themselves limit the time available for work. Achieving a balance is more difficult and the potential for conflict and difficulty is evident.

Table 19 summarises student eligibility for financial support for higher education in Scotland. This makes it abundantly clear that financial support continues to be directed primarily towards full-time students. Part-time students from households in receipt of benefits are eligible to have their fees waived provided that they abide by regulations in respect of availability for work. For those in employment, the whole financial responsibility for study rests with themselves as individuals or with their employers. It is difficult to reconcile this apparent discrimination against part-time students with the policy and principles of lifelong learning. This discrimination may be even more difficult to justify given, as will be discussed later, the growing incidence of full-time students who work.

Table 19

**Eligibility for Financial Support**

	Young FT	Mature FT	Employed PT	In receipt of benefit PT
<b>Fees</b>	✓	✓	X	✓
<b>Full Student Loan<sup>1</sup></b>	✓	✓	X <sup>6</sup>	X <sup>6</sup>
<b>Young Student Bursary<sup>3</sup></b>	✓	X	X	X
<b>Mature Student Bursary<sup>4</sup></b>	X	✓	X	X
<b>Special Grants<sup>5</sup></b>	✓	✓	X	X
<b>Discretionary Funds<sup>6</sup></b>	✓	✓	X	✓

Source: Scottish Executive 2005: [www.fundingforlearners.co.uk](http://www.fundingforlearners.co.uk)

Daniel (1992a; 1993) suggests that mass higher education requires the system of student fees and student support to be reformed to be fairer to all participants. He proposes a means tested approach giving most help where it is most needed, but extending eligibility to all students whether full-time or part-time. Neither the Scottish Executive (2000) nor the Westminster government (DfES 2003) has given any indication of intention to move in this direction.

In summary, the Labour government of 1997 intended changes in student financial support policies to fund widening participation in higher education. The money raised through tuition fees (or the Graduate Endowment in Scotland) and saved by the abolition of grants was designated for this expansion. Callender (2001), however, shows that low-income students now pay relatively more than students from better off families towards

<sup>1</sup> Maximum of £4,000 per year (2003-04).

<sup>2</sup> Non-repayable means-tested grant of up to £3,050 paid instead of part of the student loan (2003-04).

<sup>3</sup> Non-repayable discretionary grant to assist with specific expenses.

<sup>4</sup> For example for lone parents.

<sup>5</sup> For example for childcare, travel, materials.

<sup>6</sup> Some part-time students are eligible for modest income-assessed loans.



the cost of their higher education (compared with their respective positions before the introduction of loans and fees). The most disadvantaged students now experience greater financial risk in entering higher education and are more likely to be more debt averse because of parental or prior experience (Hesketh 1999; Callender 2001). Their loss of state assistance has funded the expansion of higher education across all classes at the expense of increasing participation by those whom the Labour government wished to see benefiting from higher education. It now seems unlikely that, under Labour, the requirement for students to contribute to the cost of tuition will change, given the intended introduction of top up fees in England (DfES 2003). Equity of financial support for part-time higher education might, therefore, be one way to address the barriers to participation experienced by those in poorer circumstances who are debt averse and who therefore may prefer to finance their higher education by working whilst studying.

In 1998 the then Scottish Office introduced a fee waiver scheme to assist part-time students who are unemployed or from low-income backgrounds to participate in higher education (SHEFC 1998). On the basis of a small scale study of recipients of fee waivers, Knox and Turner (2001) conclude that the scheme offers a realistic option of working towards degree level awards through part-time study to adults who would otherwise be financially deterred from participation, through family circumstances or debt aversion. By definition, since the fee waivers are means tested, many of the recipients in the study came from social classes currently under-represented in higher education. The fee waiver scheme does not, in itself, represent an equitable alternative to full-time study but its initial reception does suggest that such a model may contribute to wider access and participation, given the regressive nature of the financial regime for full-time study.

### **3.4 Summary**

The new millennium is characterised by a turbulent and fast changing social and economic environment in which citizens experience both opportunity and uncertainty. In Scotland as in the rest of the United Kingdom, lifelong learning policy is considered to be one key element that will enable the nation to position itself successfully within a global knowledge economy whilst also promoting a just society with equality of opportunity for all citizens. The Westminster and Scottish educational policy environments are dominated by a desire to progress towards a learning society, pervasive lifelong learning and wider access to and participation in learning and, in particular, in higher education.

In Scotland, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive have given high priority to educational policy development and to a relentless series of inquiries into lifelong learning and higher education. The impact of policy has tended to be found in the implementation of a plethora of initiatives and infrastructural changes that are not clearly attributable to a strategic plan for change. In particular, there has been a perceived reluctance, in any policy on higher education, to depart from an emphasis on the dominant model of full-time university education for young people immediately post-school. The incompatibility of the dominance of this model with the rhetoric of lifelong learning as a means of investing in the skills of people at all stages of life has not been explicitly recognised. Parliamentary Committees have shown some interest in the growing demand for part-time higher education and in the role of further education colleges in providing access to different forms of higher education but this interest is yet to result in any significant policy change. Policy on student financial support, in particular, has failed to address the challenge of offering equity to part-time students or of encouraging mature students or those from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate. In the policy statements referred to in section 3.1 there is some recognition that there will be growth in part-time higher education: examples include the announcement in 1998 by Brian Wilson MP, the then Scottish Minister for Education and Industry of fee waivers for part-time students in higher

education institutions from low income backgrounds, funds for part-time undergraduate course development and funded places for part-time study. "*Scotland the Learning Nation*" (Scottish Executive 2000) introduced limited loans for part-time students in higher education from 2000-2001. The Scottish Executive has not, however, chosen to make systematic progress towards genuine equality of financial support for part-time learners with full-time learners. This apparent lack of congruence between the focus of policy and the implications of demographic change in lifelong learning is difficult to reconcile.

The concept of policy development and implementation being achieved through a positive interaction amongst government policy, institutional practice and student choice is compelling. Scottish higher education is, however, some way from achieving such a "compact" (Dearing 1997). On one hand, there is evidence of disagreement about the economic role of higher education in universities. On the other hand there is a lack of recognition of the actual and potential value of part-time vocational higher education delivered in colleges. Winn (2002) notes that the expansion of higher education has had far reaching consequences for the student experience. Future development of policy should therefore ideally be founded on a better understanding of the attitudes and expectations of the new "non-traditional" students, many of whom are found in further education colleges. Coffield (1997) similarly suggests that progress towards a learning society requires to be underpinned by a better understanding of the determinants of participation in lifelong learning and of the effectiveness of policies on education, training and the economy. My research investigates the experience of participation in higher education of a specific group of students who have, to date, been overlooked by policy makers who have little knowledge of their experience. An objective of my research is to discover whether empirical evidence about their experience raises questions about the direction of policy development.

# CHAPTER 4

## Colleges as Institutions: Issues of Management and Professionalism

- 4.1 The public sector policy context
- 4.2 Devolution of authority to colleges as institutions
- 4.3 A new definition of professionalism in college management
- 4.4 Summary

#### **4.1 The public sector policy context**

Social policy up to the 1980s was primarily concerned with the nature of the services and benefits to be provided and with generating and distributing the resources needed to support growth and expansion in social security, education and health care (Hill 1993). During this period, further education was largely ignored by national policy. It evolved throughout the 20th century as a local service, funded and governed by local authorities, providing technical and vocational training for working class students (Gallacher 2003). This changed in the 1980s with the election of a Thatcher government with a new ideology which questioned the rationale for public services and the role of the state in the provision of those services. The provision of public services began to be seen, ideologically, as a financial "burden" on the economy (Newman and Clarke 1994).

This ideology was translated into policy objectives to reduce the cost of public services and to enhance their quality through improving responsiveness to need and demand. The first stages of this reform involved full privatisation of the industrial sectors of the public services; the creation of quasi-markets through the market-testing and contracting out of services or components of services; and an emphasis on measuring efficiency and value for money (Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald and Pettigrew 1996). The second phase, led by the Major government of the early 1990s, brought a more human face to the reform process through the elevation of the "customer", through charters and standards for the quality of service provided to service users (Pollitt 1993). To date the Blair government and the Scottish Executive are retaining the same emphasis on economy, efficiency and customer/user primacy with a new focus on transparency, accountability and standards of conduct in the governance of the public services (Scottish Executive 1999a).

One of the principal policy implementation drivers for this process of reform has been a shift in focus to the organisation or institution as the key locus for the delivery of the service, rather than the local authority, government agency or individual professional.

This has, in turn, led to an emphasis on institutional management as the focus for policy development and implementation.

“The great insight that Thatcherism took from economic discourse was the value of targeting reform at institutional level. This recognises that social action is constituted in, as well as constrained by, distinctive practices of organising..... [and] ..... these practices are manipulable. Strategically pulling levers for change reshapes the institutional context within which the work of educating proceeds” (Seddon quoted in Simkins 1999 p268).

Simkins continues:

"There would seem to be one central continuity in the policies of the present and previous governments, namely the central responsibility given to the individual institution, school or college, in the process of improvement. Such a focus is not inevitable: the local education system and individual teacher are alternative focuses which received greater attention in the past. Now, however, the centrality of the institution is apparently unchallenged in the policy area. It is this, perhaps more than any other development, which explains the 'rise and rise' of education management as a field over the past 10 years" (Simkins 1999 p269).

The implementation of this new relationship between centralised policy formulation and localised policy implementation at institutional level has had a profound impact on the way in which colleges are governed and managed and on the roles and responsibilities of principals and senior managers. In the following sections I will reflect upon the process of change; upon its implications for the professional management of colleges in the future; and on its ultimate relevance to this case study of the experience of students in a Scottish college.

#### **4.2 Devolution of authority to colleges as institutions**

For further education colleges, the Self Governing Schools etc (Scotland) Act 1989 began the process of devolution of authority from local authorities themselves to institutional level. New College Councils were established, of which at least half the members were employers, giving them, as the consumers of vocational education and training, a major role in the planning and running of colleges. Local authorities were required to implement schemes of delegation giving the new College Councils new powers relating to management and financial control. The impact of this legislation was muted by the fact that, in practice, local authorities restricted delegation to functionally specific tasks, retaining a benign culture of governance. College principals faced the difficult task of managing without the real power to manage, particularly in relation to lecturing staff who continued to perceive themselves as members of the wider teaching profession employed by the local authority with terms and conditions of service negotiated nationally.

Full incorporation in April 1993 under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 was accomplished in a remarkably short time, having been announced "for consultation" only in May 1991 in "*Access and Opportunity - A Strategy for Education and Training*" (Scottish Office 1991). The government's intention was threefold: to continue to remove education and training from the control of local authorities (primarily for political reasons); to reduce expenditure on further education by creating corporations modelled on best private sector practice; and to create a market in which colleges would compete to provide contracted services. Colleges were, almost overnight, given full financial independence, together with full powers to own assets, employ staff, enter into contracts, and determine the supply of services. College Councils were replaced by Boards of Management whose members were appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland. With incorporation went a second change which was just as significant. The 1992 Act transferred the statutory duty to provide adequate further education from local authorities to the Secretary of State for Scotland and therefore to Scottish Office civil servants. This

new funding relationship was key to the government securing the full benefits of devolution of responsibility to institutional level. Funding levers could be applied directly from the centre to institutions and management had both the power and the obligation to respond directly.

The period following incorporation was characterised by a punishing drive towards efficiency, through incentivising colleges to compete for resources and to secure funds from a variety of sources by finding new markets (Gallacher 2003). The methodology that the Scottish Office devised for allocating resources rewarded above average growth in levels of student activity during a period when the amount available for distribution was being reduced in real terms. Colleges competed aggressively for above average growth, consigning those who achieved average or below average growth to cuts or "efficiency gains" (McTavish 2003). The Scottish Office Departmental Report for 1997-98 recorded that the Department's objective for the sector was: "to maintain a cost-effective further education sector by increasing the output of students with non-advanced further education qualifications" (quoted in a National Audit Office Report 1998). In this new institutional context, senior managers could not continue to regard themselves as professional teachers or professional public servants. In particular they lost professional commonality with lecturing staff who labelled them pejoratively as "management". In a case study of an English college post-incorporation, Randle and Brady (1997) contrast a "professional paradigm" with a "managerial paradigm" attributing the former to lecturers and the latter to the college's senior management. They cite (p127) a case study which identified a similar dichotomy between a "pervasive market ideology, implemented by senior managers who seemed to embrace a managerialist culture" as contrasted with lecturers who had "a competing democratic ideology underpinned by a commitment to a student-centred pedagogic culture".

Ainley and Bailey (1997) paint a more complex picture. In a case study of two English colleges, they interviewed managers, lecturing staff and students. Both principals



demonstrated an understanding of the kind of transformational change needed to create a stable future. Ainley and Bailey (1997 p37) comment: "Principals and their SMTs hoped that, by astute management, they could reconcile running the corporate college more efficiently and the values of the service ethic they and their staffs espoused." One principal is quoted as saying:

"My mission is largely based on those old public sector values of equity, justice, identifying and seeking to meet the community's needs. I have just done my analysis for the next three years ... and I know that half a million is going to have to come out of our expenditure over the next three years."

Ainley and Bailey 1997 p38)

Ainley and Bailey found, however, the same growing chasm between management and lecturing staff. Despite widespread restructurings designed to create flatter, less bureaucratic organisations borrowing from private sector models, management was perceived as detached from the workforce, as a new and distinct occupational group. Lecturing staff in the study were unable or unwilling to recognise the benefits achieved for students under incorporation in terms of new opportunities, accessibility and flexibility. They perceived incorporation wholly as an attack on the service and on themselves as a profession. Interestingly, Ainley and Bailey's study confirms that, from the students' perspective, many benefits had indeed been realised.

The policy of the incoming Labour government in 1997 and the Scottish Executive in 1999 towards the public sector in general and to education in particular reflected both continuity and change. There was continuity in respect of control of public expenditure and expectation of value for money. To this was added a new emphasis on partnership within the public service as a whole and on ethical standards in public life (Scottish Executive 1999a). Under these administrations, the further education sector has gained greater visibility and influence in respect of the provision of non-advanced further education and

has been awarded the opportunity to make a contribution to the policy agenda in respect of lifelong learning, skills training and social inclusion within a deregulated market for training provision. There is now an expectation that institutions will provide high quality, flexible, student-responsive and community-responsive services (Scottish Executive 2003c). Colleges are now explicitly encouraged to collaborate with each other to improve services and to secure greater value for money, rather than to compete. Many colleges, however, have learned to compete successfully in new markets for higher education and for commercial contracts which add significant value to the work of the institution. This trend towards mixed economy provision is likely to continue.

Following incorporation there was significant turnover of staff in senior management positions in colleges. Ainley and Bailey (1997) report that, by 1997, in England and Wales only one third of principals who were in post in 1993 were still in their offices. By 2004, in Scotland, I confirm from personal experience that less than 25% of principals have over 10 years service. This means that the majority of those now in post have chosen to operate in the new context rather than having change imposed upon them, and can begin to define their professionalism within this new context. Ten years after the upheaval of incorporation, college senior managers are beginning, collectively, to reflect on their role within a modernised public sector so that they can engage actively with policy implementation as professionals rather than simply reacting to its impact. The initial phase of emphasis on the narrow, practical, managerial aspects of incorporation is complete and there is scope for a shift towards a broader focus on the role of colleges as providers of a service and therefore towards a broader sense of professionalism.

### **4.3 A new definition of professionalism in college management**

Is college management a profession in its own right? In terms of "trait" criteria as set out by Freidson (1994) the answer is no. Freidson argues that the two basic elements of professional work are a commitment to practising a body of knowledge and skill of special value and a fiduciary relationship with clients. Esland, quoted in Nixon, Martin, McKeown and Ranson (1997), similarly summarises the traditional characteristics of professionals as altruism, confidentiality in dealing with clients, ownership of codes of practice and registration with a professional body. He adds that professional activity is based on specialist knowledge, acquired over a long period of education, to which access is restricted by the profession. These traditional criteria are unhelpful to newer occupational groups in that they are based on self-definition by the established professions. In particular, they presuppose a client/professional relationship which managers, by definition, engage in only indirectly. Many other emerging professions in the science, engineering and technology fields are similarly challenging this specific criterion and seeking to define professionalism in more inclusive ways.

A second traditional approach is that of professionalisation which considers the circumstances in which claims for professional status are made. Johnson (1972 p31) describes this as "the expansion of professionalism as a result of the growth of occupational group-consciousness". Johnson describes the historical sequence of events through which professionalising occupations pass, including the establishment of a training school, the founding of a professional association, action to secure protection by law and adoption of a formal code; and notes that this sequence has been subjected to critiques on the basis that historical analysis demonstrates widely differing patterns of professionalisation at different times and in different cultural contexts. There is, however, some evidence of a professionalisation process taking place both in public sector management generally and within management in the further education sector.

Within the public sector in Scotland the Scottish Executive led the establishment of the Scottish Leadership Foundation (SLF 2004) which serves as focus for bringing together leaders from the civil service, health service, enterprise networks, education, local government and housing bodies to debate standards and values in public life and to develop and underpin cross-sectoral initiatives for the professional development of world class leadership. Within the further education sector in Scotland the formation of the Principals' Forum within the Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC) provides a regular opportunity for senior managers to meet to discuss a collective response to policy directives. The development by the Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU) of a competence specification for principals and the launch of a series of Development Centres designed to prepare aspirants for the role of principal, has been followed by the design, jointly by ASC and SFEU, of a programme of continuing professional development exclusively for principals. These steps reflect developments within the rest of the United Kingdom. For example, a series of ERSC funded seminars in 1996-97 was designed to enable a redefinition of the field of education management and leadership in the light of the major changes in practice that have taken place since the 1980s. One of the objectives of these seminars was "to develop a forum for the exchange of views of leading academics, policy-makers and practitioners about the discipline of educational management in the changing policy climate of the late 1990s" (Ribbins 1999 p229).

On balance, I would suggest that these initiatives do not represent an out-dated attempt to establish traditional professional status for public sector managers. Professionalisation, in Johnson's terms, was primarily driven by an occupational desire for recognition, protection and ultimately power over entry to the profession and power over the practice of the occupation. This is no longer at stake. What is at stake is a redefinition of public sector values of service in a new context, which is creating a professional discourse for managers.

Newman and Clarke (1994) discuss management as a contested domain because of the "hollowness" or "emptiness" of the language of visions, mission statements and strategic plans. Management, they argue, whether in the public or private sector, has no superordinate goals or values of its own. Its values and ideology, whether for profit or efficiency or customer satisfaction, are defined by others. Management therefore finds itself open to contestation by different interest groups and stakeholders, both within and external to organisations. During the transition to incorporation, this unstable and ungrounded position is exactly the one in which college managers found themselves. The acquisition of skills, competences and leadership capability, although essential, has not filled this gap. The process of professional redefinition is also a process of trying to identify a superordinate value framework for what management should serve in the public sector and a set of orientations with other stakeholders.

For managers in further education, a pure public service ethic must now be regarded as outdated. The sector is operating in a mixed economy because of its diverse range of income streams and the purpose of management is to recognise and balance the diverse claims and expectations of stakeholder groups and individuals. The debate about a public service ethic does, however, serve to direct thinking towards users rather than funders and policy-makers and this is where the crux of the redefinition issue lies, in the relationship between managers, clients and other professionals and stakeholders, and on the mediation of policy implementation. The approach taken by Nixon et al (1997) is therefore helpful in creating a framework for a new sense of professionalism, not professionalism, for college managers. This article is written from the perspective of the teaching profession but it is applicable to a redefined profession of educational management. Indeed, the concept of different groups of professionals within a college collectively managing "difference" amidst the conflicting and changing demands of students, clients and stakeholders, is compelling. This model recognises that managers cannot ignore the exigencies of policy-makers, funders and Audit Commissions, nor should they ignore the potential for generating significant benefit for the college by

participation in a market which will bring in diverse income streams. The challenge for management is to understand these exigencies and opportunities and to locate them in a value framework which still places the student at the centre of decision-making, not the institution. It is this shift in focus which is necessary in a redefinition of the professionalism of college management. It parallels the challenge to teaching professionals to place the learner at the centre of debate, not the profession. Nixon's et al (1997) use of Williams's distinction between "dominant", "residual" and "emergent" cultural elements is also helpful. In terms of college management, the "residual" culture is the old public service ethic which is incompatible with a mixed funding institutional economy. The "dominant" culture is the private sector model of matching supply and demand with agreement being mediated by market considerations. The "emergent" culture is the primary importance of the learner and the learning experience, supported by a complex web of agreements, including agreements between professional groups within the institution. This is not a soft form of managerialism. It is a balance between respect for colleagues' freedom of operation and the organisational need to manage difficult choices and accommodate new constituencies of learners. This kind of balance presupposes that no-one settles for second best in terms of standards of practice and acknowledges that no one group has a monopoly of professionalism, if such is taken to mean a primary commitment to students (Lumby and Tomlinson 2000).

#### **4.4 Summary**

This chapter provides insight into my personal purpose in wishing to research and understand the interconnected personal and organisational contexts in which lifelong learning takes place. In doing so I am seeking to re-establish the role of senior college managers in creating learning environments, by understanding how all stakeholders need to work in an integrative manner, which recognises the values and priorities each brings to the process. This is particularly relevant in the case of adult learners, who perceive themselves as stakeholders. The starting point is to understand the learners: my research is strengthened by bringing to it a perspective on the ways in which institutions could and should redefine their relationships with learners.

I would suggest that professional management in further education should, in future, be defined in terms of four dimensions. Following incorporation, managers certainly need competence in the skills and disciplines appropriate for a complex organisation operating in both the public and private domains; and transformational leadership capability, appropriate for an external context of both opportunity and threat to organisational survival. The emerging sense of professionalism also demands the ability to create a value base which locates management, not in isolation from stakeholders, but within a web of internal and external stakeholders, the focus of which is the complexity of the needs, values and expectations of learners and service users. Finally, managers must be able to play an explicit and informed role in both influencing and implementing educational policy, which recognises political realities and vested interests but retains a client-centred value base.

This research therefore represents a case study in professional development on the part of a practising college principal. Earlier in my career my emphasis, like that of my peers, has been on the first two of the dimensions listed above: the development of practical competences and leadership capability to deal with the exigencies and opportunities of

incorporation. This research has offered the scope to move on to reflect on how the practice of management should be informed by the perspectives and experience of stakeholders, especially students. The managerialist critique had the negative effect of polarising and simplifying the debate on the management of the college sector (Lumby and Tomlinson 2000). Generalisations about senior managers ignore the complexity of human behaviour and the range of college environments and underline the need for continuing research in a dynamic political context. A specific objective of this research is to explore the implications for institutional management and practice of the experience of the research subjects, both in a very practical sense and in terms of the development of an institutional culture and ethos that is conducive to integration and achievement, as advocated by West (1996) who argued that:

“Those responsible for higher education need a better understanding of adults’ experience of learning and of institutions and need to consider the implications of those experiences for the development of a more supportive learning culture” (West 1996 p. ix).

Having explored policy and institutional perspectives, it is now appropriate to turn to the perspective of the student. The next chapter therefore explores theoretical aspects of student participation in higher education.



# CHAPTER 5

## **The Student Experience: Participation and Integration**

- 5.1 Defining the scope of the literature review
- 5.2 Motive and motivation
- 5.3 Sustained participation and achievement or dropout
- 5.4 Participation in part-time higher education
- 5.5 Summary

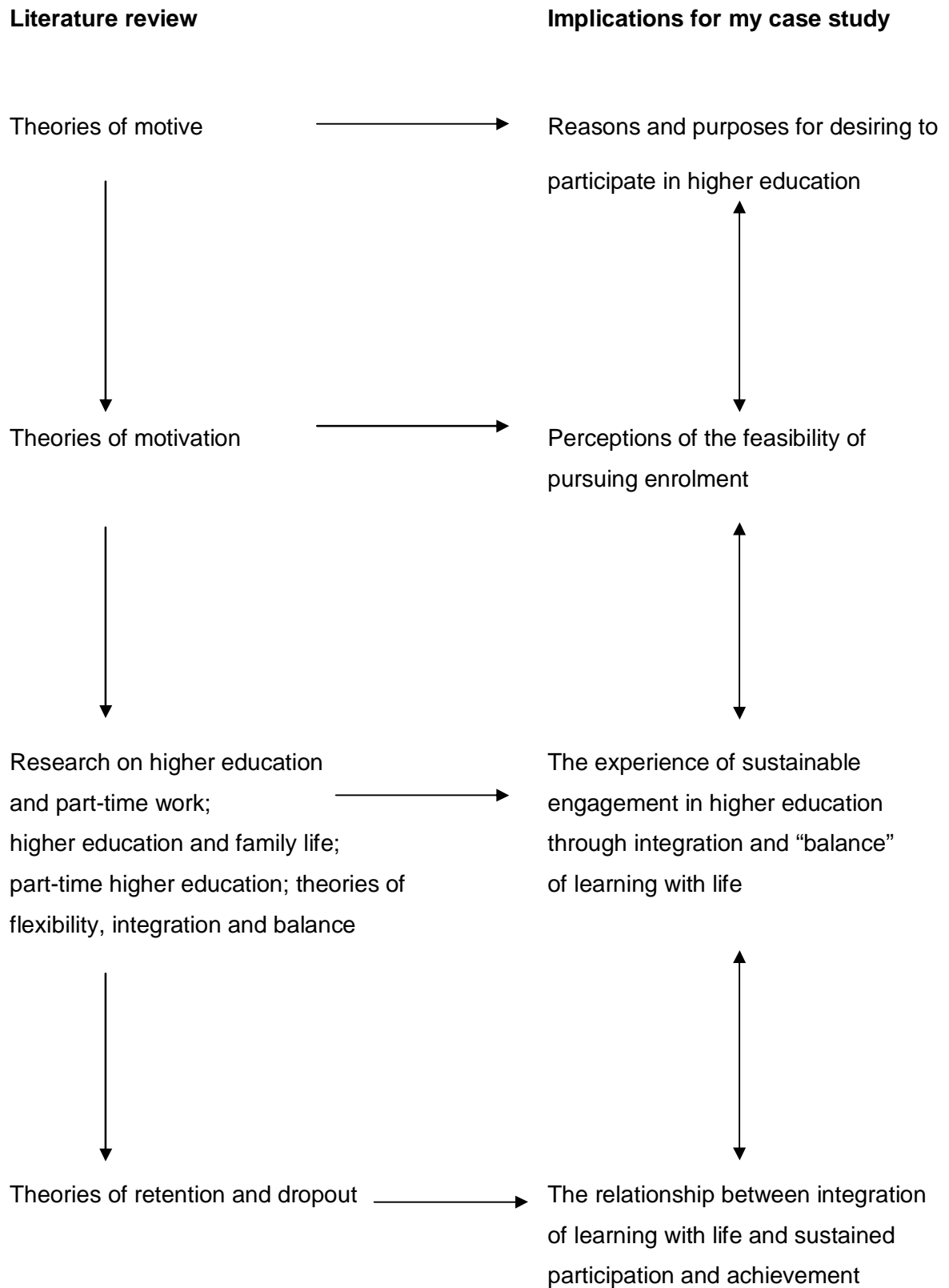
## **5.1 Defining the scope of the literature review**

There is a wealth of literature on aspects of students' experience of higher education. Haselgrove (1994) noted that, from an overall review of the literature, it was clear that the predominant interest was in one segment of students' experience – their role as learners. My focus is not upon pedagogy and the process of learning, nor is it upon academic progress and the completion of qualifications, nor is it upon the curriculum and its relevance to work. The purpose of this research is to investigate students' experience of participation in higher education in the context of their lives, based on the proposition that successful participation for many of the students in this case study will depend, at least in part, on the feasibility of combining study with work and/or domestic responsibilities. My literature review was therefore based on exploring concepts that might define or explain the determinants of successful engagement in higher education. These concepts are summarised in Figure 2.

The literature on motive and motivation suggested a distinction between the concept of motive, defined as initial desire to participate, and motivation, defined as determination to pursue enrolment based on a perception of the feasibility of participation (Courtney 1992). A review of research into the inter-relationship between higher education, work and family life informed the development of the concept of sustainable participation determined by the successful integration or “balance” of learning with work and/or family life. There is extensive literature on motive, motivation, participation and on the determinants of retention and withdrawal. Although my research is not primarily a study of initial motive or of retention and drop-out, these concepts are important as secondary determinants or indicators of successful sustained participation. I have therefore drawn from the research the salient findings, particularly in relation to higher education, that are relevant to the primary concepts of motivation and sustainable participation.

Figure 2

**Determinants of successful participation in higher education**



## 5.2 Motive and motivation

Early literature on motive and motivation tended to focus on adult education in the broadest sense, including higher level study, and to define adults, implicitly, as those who returned to education in later life (Courtney 1992). There was less interest in the motives of school leavers progressing to universities, as this was seen as the natural route for the brightest and best and, more cynically, as a move into “a kind of warehouse where they (school leavers) are shelved between leaving school and starting work, rather than as a positive choice” (Field 2000a p136). More recently there has been an interest in the motives of all entrants to higher education, perhaps generated by changes in the size and characteristics of the student population.

Perspectives on motive tend to be either sociological or behavioural. Courtney (1992) notes a number of early American sociological studies that review the function of education in the transmission of culture and the provision of work skills for the economy. Courtney suggests that tertiary educational institutions duplicate the functions of schools in respect of preparing people for work and leisure and maintaining the social order. Participation, therefore, is a function of social class of birth or desire for social mobility or status within the labour market and serves as a contributor to socialisation and social control. Hopper and Osborn (1975), writing about the British system, similarly explored the contribution of tertiary education to social control, suggesting that the principal function of an adult education system is “to continue the process of socialisation” (p19). Decisions about participation on the part of individuals are therefore governed by expectations of society through “an internalised source of self-evaluation, a censorious imperative from within, a standard by which a person evaluates himself as a success or a failure” (p34). Patterns of participation that support this sociological perspective are those that illustrate strong relationships between levels of schooling, class, status in the labour market and participation in later adult education. Courtney (1992) summarises this evidence and states (p5) that “those who have not completed high school and those who occupy

manual blue collar occupations are far less likely to be represented among the ranks of the educationally participating". In the United Kingdom, the Dearing Report (1997) confirmed a strong correlation between social class and participation in higher education and fuelled a policy agenda for the current government to increase demand for higher education from under-represented social groups.

Behavioural or psychological approaches to motive have tended to classify individual factors into broad categories: instrumental/ vocational; cognitive/ subject interest; personal or social development or life change; external expectations of others (Woodley, Wagner, Slowey, Hamilton and Fulton 1987; Osborne, Brink, Cloonan, Davies, Marks, Turner and Williams 2001). Motive, particularly in the case of adults, is complex and multi-dimensional (Woodley et al 1987; Field 2000a; Osborne et al 2001; Winn 2002). Encounter with personal change is a recurring theme (Courtney 1992; West 1996) although there is evidence of a dominant instrumental and vocational orientation in many investigations (Woodley et al 1987; Hopper and Osbourn 1997; Callender 1997; Rolfe 2001; Metcalf 2001). This is consistent with human capital theory and in apparent opposition to universities' own desire to maintain a more liberal, democratic educational ethos (Rice 2004). It may have to be recognised that a stronger perceived relationship between higher education and the economy, combined with near universal middle class participation, has estranged students from experiencing a meaningful, personal, academic purpose in wishing to engage in higher education (Winn 2002). Students from less advantaged backgrounds are particularly likely to expect their investment in higher education to lead to a good job (Connor 2001a; Cooke, Berkham, Audir, Bradley and Davy 2004).

Two related developments have encouraged researchers to look beyond the factors associated with initial desire to pursue advanced level study and to define motivation in terms of the situational factors that govern the feasibility and practicability of choosing to participate. The first of these developments is the reduction in state financial support for

students, which may be encouraging more full-time students to finance their higher education by working part-time whilst studying. The second is the increase in mature student participation. As Keep (1997 p446) points out: "motivation to learn is one thing: opportunity to learn, in terms of available time, money and energy is quite another".

The introduction of tuition fees in England and of the Graduate Endowment in Scotland, combined with the replacement of maintenance grants with loans, has changed student attitudes to higher education (Hesketh 1999; Rolfe 2001). Having to take responsibility for financing higher education through debt and/or through working is likely to result in a more instrumental orientation to initial enrolment in a chosen course of study, as well as creating financial pressures on students that affect the feasibility of participation. For students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, higher education now introduces both personal and economic risk into the dynamic of decision-making (Connor 2001a; Davies and Williams 2001; Archer et al 2003). The financial cost to the student of higher education is a barrier to increasing working class participation (Woodrow 1999) and is perceived by those who do enrol as unjust and ill-conceived (Hutchings 2003).

Several studies have considered the extent to which full-time students now work whilst studying and the impact of work on academic activity. Ford et al (1995), in a survey of non-first year full-time undergraduates in four universities, found that 30% undertook term-time employment at some time, with most working no more than 10 hours per week. Impact on academic performance was not measured but data on the students' own perception of the impact of employment on their studies was gathered and only 40% indicated no impact on the standard of their academic work. Taylor (1998) surveyed computer science students at Heriot-Watt University and found that over 25% were working at weekends and 10% were working during weekdays. The primary reason given was financial necessity although there was some perception of academic benefit. For 10% of students, there was a distinct possibility that weekday working led to reduced attendance at lectures and tutorials. The Cubie Report (1999) estimated that the numbers

of students who worked varied from 38% to 79% and found that, of pupils intending to apply for higher education, between 77% and 88% expected to find a part-time job while studying. Smith and Taylor (1999) found that 79% of full-time third year students at Glasgow Caledonian University and 52% at Glasgow University were working. Students worked both for financial reasons and for more positive reasons (e.g. relevance to studies); competing demands at times created stress; and there was a negative impact on academic activity and performance. Metcalf (2001) similarly looked at term-time working amongst third year standard-aged students at four universities. She found that almost 50% of students worked during term time, averaging 12 hours per week. Her study found that working had a negative impact on the educational experience of students and almost two thirds reported difficulty in handling employment and educational demands. Curtis and Shani (2002) and Hunt, Lincoln and Walker (2004) both investigated the effect of term-time employment on academic attainment. Both studies confirmed a growth in the incidence of part-time working amongst full-time students and a negative impact upon academic achievement. Hunt et al found a statistically significant impact on marks in assessments whilst Curtis and Shani found a qualitative perception amongst students that course work grades were worse than they would have been if the students had not been working.

This survey of the literature reveals consistent evidence of full-time students working during term-time. It is therefore likely that the availability of paid work and the feasibility of combining work and study will influence motivation to participate in higher education especially amongst students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are more likely to take paid employment (Cooke et al 2004). There is also consistent evidence that working has both positive and negative effects on the learning experience and may influence sustained participation and academic achievement. This evidence raises questions of institutional responsibility for change in the light of student employment and suggests that institutions should consider actively enabling the integration of study and work through different institutional practices in, for example timetabling and student support (Metcalf

2001). In reality, it is more likely that universities underestimate the impact of student employment and fail to acknowledge that some students want courses to be adjusted to accommodate employment (Winn and Stevenson 1997) or that the resulting pressures could be alleviated (Metcalf 2001). A more radical conclusion might be to consider that measures for enabling full-time students to integrate work with study would open up educational opportunities for those who chose to study part-time, thus blurring the traditional distinction and moving further towards Daniel's (1993) vision of a mass system of higher education.

The increase in mature student participation in higher education prompts a consideration of other pressures that such students might face in relation to their family responsibilities. Woodley et al (1987) found that the most intractable problem facing full-time mature students was that of time and family commitments. Osborne et al 2001 found a complex relationship between mature students' aspirations, the personal pressures that they face in embarking in study (whether full-time or part-time) and the institutional and policy factors that affected initial enrolment and continued participation. Osborne et al (2001 p83) report that "those who worked full-time and studied part-time found the juggling act hard to manage and reported stress". This study also found ambivalence on the part of women in respect of prioritising study and family, childcare and responsibilities. Many mature students had multiple roles and responsibilities which carried considerable emotional and financial burdens.

Edwards (1993) examined in detail the experiences of 31 mature women studying full-time in polytechnics or universities. This study explores the concepts of integration and/or separation of family life and education as fundamental to mature women in higher education. Interestingly women valued a position at either end of a continuum of integration or separation but found a mixture of connections and separations as a negative experience rather than as a valuable and sustainable one. This recognition that the experience of mature women in higher education has the potential to be either positive



or negative, depending on the circumstances of the individual woman and her preferred way of allowing education and family to co-exist in her life, again raises questions about institutional support systems for students.

Although the studies cited have tended to be small scale and restricted to pre-selected sub-sets of student populations, together they illuminate a diversity of “non-traditional” full-time experience that conflicts with traditional perceptions of higher education. The experience described is not congruent with the construction of a “normal” full-time student with no domestic responsibilities, working perhaps in vacations to reduce debt and to support a “student” lifestyle and pursuing an extended post-school study of a chosen academic subject. Participation in higher education by those with domestic responsibilities and the incidence of work amongst full-time students (from 10% to 79% working during term-time) challenge the concept of “full-time” study and direct attention towards understanding higher education within the context of students’ lives. The evidence suggests that many students’ decisions to enrol in higher education may be a function of personal motive or purpose and of the feasibility of managing and sustaining participation in the context of personal circumstances. If this is the case, institutions may have a different and more complex role to play in influencing motivation and sustained participation. In many institutions, programme flexibility is limited and would-be students face constraints on their choices, caused by timing and availability of courses (Field 2000a).

### **5.3 Sustained participation and achievement or dropout**

In section 5.2 I have suggested that, in post-compulsory education, the factors that influence the feasibility of sustained participation and achievement are now at least as important as those that influence the initial desire to participate. In this section, I review the related issue of retention and withdrawal and consider evidence of the reasons for dropout or completion.

Drop out rates from higher education in the United Kingdom as a whole remained relatively stable during the 1990s despite expansion in participation. Approximately 17% of UK domiciled students starting a full-time degree obtained no qualification (Davies and Elias 2002). The Scottish Funding Councils similarly confirm that, in Scotland, the percentage of full-time degree students achieving no award has remained stable at 16-17% over the period 1996-2001 (SFC 2004). No statistics are available for part-time students in higher education institutions. Student outcome data for higher education students in further education colleges, on the other hand, does not distinguish between full-time and part-time students. The first data published was for 2001-02: the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC 2003) records that 86% of higher education students completed their programme and, of these, 81% were successful and 17% achieved partial success. In the case of HNC or HND programmes, partial success (completion of one or more units) may be a significant level of achievement, allowing progression into employment or continuation of study at a later point in the future (SFEFC 2003; SFC 2004). Despite this overall stability in the rate of dropout, there is now a greater concern about the risk and consequences of non-completion. It has been estimated that non-completion of university courses in the United Kingdom costs £79 million per year (Christie, Munro and Fisher 2004).

Theoretical perspectives on retention and student success, like those relating to motivation, reflect different disciplinary traditions, mainly sociology or psychology, or take

a multi-disciplinary approach (Yorke 2004). It is helpful to review research into retention and achievement from two perspectives, that of the student and that of the institution (Christie et al 2004), whilst acknowledging that this is a complex field and that there is little consensus about the factors or combinations of factors that are influential.

From the individual student perspective, several studies have investigated the psychosocial characteristics and dispositions of students, to identify the factors that influence the stay or quit decision. A National Audit Office (2002) survey of first year students in England concluded that withdrawal was related to a lack of preparedness for higher education; personal circumstances; financial pressure; dissatisfaction with the course or institution. Two large scale studies (Yorke 1999; Davies and Elias 2002) both found that early departure was influenced by wrong choice of course or institution; financial, academic or personal problems; or dissatisfaction with the student experience or the institution. Personality variables in general, and self-esteem and achievement motivation in particular, have been found to have an influence on positive attitudes to learning and to completion (Abouserie 1995; Waters and Gibson 2001). For students with demanding commitments, the management of a complex life and the integration of study with other aspects of life can be a dominant factor in determining the quality of their academic performance and completion rates (Winn 2002; Kember and Leung 2004).

Bennett (2003), in a smaller scale study, created a complex model of student-related factors using self-esteem, commitment, financial hardship, personal problems and stress as primary determinants of withdrawal; with motivation, academic performance, study habits, satisfaction, social integration, personal investment and age as antecedents of one or more of the primary determinants. The results suggested that the strongest influence on the stay/quit decision amongst this group of students was financial in nature. Commitment and motivation also emerged as significant, with sound lecturer/student relationships contributing to motivation. Self-esteem was a determinant of motivation and

affected the likelihood of withdrawal in cases where students were experiencing low grades or financial hardship. Stress also had a negative effect on motivation.

Before turning to the institutional orientation, it is worth noting the contribution of Palmer (2001), who mounts a strong attack on what he sees as a policy of blaming institutions for high dropout rates. He attributes the “naming and shaming” policy to “new managerialism” as described by Randle and Brady (1997) and mentioned in chapter 4. Palmer critiques the work of Martinez (1995) in relation to FE colleges which suggests that poor quality teaching and support is the key factor in explaining early leaving. Palmer introduces the concept of “student disposition” as a determinant of retention and achievement. Unusually, he suggests that students do not all enter tertiary education with the aim of obtaining a qualification and may leave as soon as they have obtained the skill or knowledge that they need or as soon as a better option (for example employment) is available. These views are similar to Winn’s (2002) observations about the potential for a more instrumental, opportunist approach to education in the wake of expansion and wider participation. Palmer reflects the findings of Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997) who suggest that success is as much the result of the students’ actions, dispositions and learning careers, as it is of the resources of the college. The concept of “learning careers”, for adults as well as young people and at all stages of learning recognises that personal decision making is a complex process involving individual circumstances, external influences and the process of interaction with the education system (Crossan, Field, Gallacher and Merrill 2003; Bloomer and Hodkinson 1997).

An alternative view is that it is easy and irresponsible to “blame” students for early withdrawal from higher education and that more attention should be paid to investigating how institutions can contribute to sustained participation and achievement, particularly for “non-traditional” students (West 1996; Thomas 2002; Wend 2004; Tett 2004). Thomas’s research considers several influencing factors: academic preparedness; academic experience; institutional expectations and commitment; academic and social match;

finance and employment; family support and commitments; and university support services. Finance was again a predominant concern but Thomas goes beyond this to consider why a large majority of students are resigned to poverty, debt and poorly paid work but still complete their programmes of study successfully. She draws on Bourdieu's concept of habitus to consider why some students succeed in apparently adverse personal circumstances and some do not.

The concept of habitus is complex and may be summarised as "a set of dispositions created and shaped by the interaction between objective structures and personal histories, including experiences and understanding of reality" (Thomas 2002 p430). A person's habitus is therefore a product of family and early educational experiences and is consolidated or changed through subsequent choices and experiences. A corresponding concept is institutional habitus drawn from Bourdieu's belief in the needs of certain dominant social classes and groups to reproduce themselves and to maintain dominance by controlling access to educational opportunities (Jenkins 1992). Hence higher educational institutions may be expected to create a deeply embedded tacit and implicit culture of values, language and knowledge that mirrors those of dominant social groups (Tett 2004). Thomas (2002) explores this theoretical concept of institutional habitus in terms of the academic and social experiences of students in a post-1992 English university. She concludes that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to succeed within an institutional habitus that openly and explicitly values diversity and modifies its culture and practices to respond to the differing needs and orientations of different student groups. Specifically she draws attention to staff attitudes, inclusive learning strategies, a range of different assessment practices, advice on accommodation, a diversity of social spaces and a culture in which students are allowed to be themselves. Institutions have a responsibility for student completion and success and can make a significant difference if they are prepared to embrace fundamental change in their culture and values, not just in the practicalities of course administration. This approach is borne out, in part, by a study of six institutions considered to exemplify

good practice in supporting student retention in adverse demographic circumstances (Yorke and Thomas 2003). These institutions exhibited, inter alia, an institutional “climate” that was supportive of students’ development and a recognition that the pattern of students’ engagement in higher education was changing.

Research into retention has tended to focus on the reasons for non-completion and therefore to select non-completers as the research subjects. Christie et al (2004) investigated similarities and differences in both continuing and non-continuing students. Factors identified by students as contributing to withdrawal included loneliness and isolation, poor course choice and financial pressures. Those problems were not, however, confined to those who withdrew, confirming that, in a mass system of higher education, more attention should be given to understanding the complex nature of the whole student experience and the interaction between personal, social and institutional factors that contribute to success as well as failure.

The literature is inconclusive and has become less conclusive in recent years as researchers address retention and withdrawal in the context of changes in the nature and purpose of tertiary education and in patterns of participation. Polarised perspectives, such as those of Palmer (2001) and Thomas (2002), on the relative responsibility of the student or the institution for student retention and success tend to mask the complexity of the student decision-making process. Relatively simplistic explanations of dropout, such as financial pressures or term-time employment, derived from large scale studies, are similarly unhelpful. Examining retention from the broader concept of the student experience is more convincing. Most writers make reference to Tinto’s influential work with full-time students in the USA in the 1980s. His model can be summed up as an individual’s decision to persist or drop-out being initially influenced by his or her pre-enrolment characteristics, background variables and commitment levels, which are then attenuated by the process of social and academic integration into the institution (Brunsden, Davies, Stevlin and Bracker 2000). The strength of this model has been seen

as its recognition of the many factors affecting attrition but it has been subject to critiques, from an interactionist perspective, which suggest that Tinto's deterministic perspective over-emphasises generic factors and undervalues the individual students' interpretation of their experience. The crucial point is that any theory of retention should take account both of students' experiences and of the personal and institutional context in which they make individual decisions (Brunsden et al 2000; Hodgkinson and Bloomer 2001; Yorke 2004).

#### **5.4 Participation in part-time higher education**

The majority of undergraduate part-time higher education in Scotland takes place in further education colleges and the majority of higher education in further education colleges is part-time. For these reasons, one particular focus of my literature review is on part-time higher education. Because many students (full-time or part-time) work or have domestic commitments, there may be a progressive blurring of the distinction between full-time and part-time study. The experience of part-time students is therefore of growing relevance to the many full-time students who work or who have domestic responsibilities, as well as being of interest in its own right.

Tight (1992) summarises the history of part-time higher education in Britain, arguing that it has been a key feature of university and polytechnic education since the early nineteenth century, particularly in Scotland, where there has been a traditional pattern of local attendance rather than residence. After a comprehensive statistical analysis covering two centuries, Tight concludes that there have always been substantial numbers of part-time higher education students. They have, however, typically been involved in aspects of provision perceived as low status, attending extra-mural classes, correspondence courses or evening classes and studying for “sub-degree” or professional qualifications. Tight suggests that the expansion of full-time higher education from the 1960s to the 1980s in the wake of the Robbins Report (which did not include part-time higher education in its brief) will eventually be considered an aberration and that part-time, locally-based provision will again assume a central place within the higher education system.

Schuller et al (1999) are less optimistic and write in strong terms about “the marginality” (p25) of part-time higher education. They disagree with the perception that there has been growth in part-time higher education and demonstrate that, if statistics for 1996-97 are re-presented as FTEs rather than headcount and if the Open University and postgraduate students are excluded, then the proportion of part-time higher education



students within the system drops from over 30% to less than 10%. Schuller et al also demonstrate that the majority of this non-Open University, undergraduate, part-time higher education takes place in further education colleges. They summarise (p37) that part-time higher education:

“has been marginal in terms of numbers and public visibility. It has been marginal in terms of its location within the system, concentrated at sub-degree level and in the post 1992 universities and the Cinderella sector of further education. Above all it has been marginal in public debates”.

This marginalisation stands in stark contrast to the rhetoric of lifelong learning and to the policy of extending adult participation in education.

Part-time higher education is customarily defined only in terms of being other than full-time, which is in turn defined by eligibility or obligation in respect of fees, student loans and student financial support. In reality part-time higher education is not a single or homogeneous phenomenon (Tight 1991; Schuller et al 1999) and various attempts have been made to derive typologies or dimensions against which the field can be mapped and described (Tight 1991; Bourner, Hamed, Barnett and Reynolds 1991; Smith and Saunders 1991; Blaxter and Tight 1993a). Provision is divided into levels of study, with most attention being focussed on part-time degrees (Tight 1991; Smith and Saunders 1991). Students can be categorised (Tight 1991) by mode of attendance and qualification aim on six dimensions demonstrating the very wide diversity in patterns of participation. Tight’s analysis identifies two “polar” kinds of student:

- male, under 30, attending a course relating to his employment, without domestic responsibilities;

- female, over 30, with family responsibilities, wishing to experience higher education for diverse reasons.

Blaxter and Tight (1993a) provide another useful categorisation of part-time students along three dimensions. Along the first dimension, expressed motivation, they differentiate between vocationally orientated and professionally orientated students. Along the second dimension, study method preferences, they differentiate between institutionally focused and home-based students. Thirdly, they categorise students in terms of their previous educational experience, differentiating between “early school leavers”, “recyclers”, “returners” and “deferrers”. Tight (1991) continues to caution, however, against summarising the variety of part-time higher education students in too simplistic a fashion.

Motive to study, on the part of part-time higher education students, has been found to be diverse and multi-faceted. Several studies have grouped study aims under the headings of vocational, personal and subject-related (Woodley et al 1987; Bourner et al 1991; Schuller et al 1999). In all cases, vocational or career related aims predominated but not to the exclusion of other goals and often in combination with more personal motives. By contrast, personal development was ranked above career development in studies of part-time arts and social sciences students (Blaxter and Tight 1993b; 1995). Blaxter and Tight (1995) investigated the extent to which life transitions explained participation in part-time higher education and found a lack of evidence of clear goals or purposes. Although participation was associated with changing family patterns, retirement and employment prospects in some cases, the majority of the interviewees were involved in education because they wanted to be and because it suited them, with no immediate instrumental end in view. Attempting to explain lifelong learning as a response to life transition is now less meaningful in an age in which a chronological stage-based model of life is giving way to a more individualised conception of adult life in which the traditional phases of family and work life are overlapping and stretching (Field 2000a).

Successful part-time students adopt a range of strategies to balance and integrate a multitude of conflicting demands. Those who succeed in their studies do so because they adopt a range of coping mechanisms including securing support from employers, colleagues, family and friends, making specific sacrifices and renegotiating roles and social arrangements (Kember 1999). Those who fail in their studies may do so because they fail to achieve integration and attribute their lack of success to external factors. One key issue therefore, is whether students accept responsibility for balancing home, work and study. This does not mean, however, that institutions have no part to play. Kember (1999) lists a range of institutional practices that may contribute to success, including counselling, flexibility in study requirements and assignments, administrative arrangements, group work and childcare.

Hill and MacGregor (1998) looked specifically at support systems for part-time female nursing students. They identify five strong influences on women surviving part-time study: families; work colleagues; peers; teachers; and friends. The support of families and work colleagues is seen as critical in the early stages, with the other three being drawn in at times of need. Hill and MacGregor (1998) confirm Edward's (1993) work with full-time women students (discussed in section 5.1) and also draw attention to the complexity of women's relationships with their families during their period of study given that they are often changing the focus of their lives and disturbing the equilibrium of those around them. Families and friends can be both supportive and destructive as existing relationships are de-stabilised and reformed. Institutions could encourage part-time students to undertake a realistic self-assessment of support to families or offer a pre-course package in identifying support strategies.

Blaxter and Tight (1994a; 1994b) looked at the specific issue of time management for part-time students in a small scale study of students in two universities. They developed a typology that distinguished between "alternators" and "combiners". The former relinquish

or suspend some life roles to enable them to study whilst the latter attempt to continue with a full range of roles at work, at home and as a student. This small scale research described some of the strategies deployed by the students to manage their time and to juggle rather than struggle with the demands on their time. There is again an implication that there is a responsibility on institutions to recognise the demands on students and to make basic improvements in communication, course organisation, administrative processes and access to services such as libraries. This is not policy-driven “flexibility” (Morgan-Klein and Gray 2000) but a conclusion that more effective dealings with students in a very practical sense would be of positive value.

Retention and achievement of part-time students has, to date, attracted little research interest. One notable exception is recent work by Kember and Leung (2004) who investigated the relationship between the employment of coping mechanisms on the part of part-time students and their establishment of a “sense of belonging”. Attention is drawn to theoretical, logical and evidential links between the construct of “sense of belonging” and student retention.

This brief review of research interest in part-time higher education reveals a consistent recognition of the heterogeneity of the student body, and of the practical support that institutions can provide to assist students to “juggle” the different priorities that they may face. Part-time students are treated as a discrete category: the classification of students as full-time or part-time therefore remains a barrier to a more holistic research orientation, although there is some evidence of a shift in perspective. Schuller et al (1999) raise few questions about definitions of full-time and part-time higher education, but note the comment of one interviewee in their study that the distinction between full-time and part-time students is eroding. Morgan-Klein and Gray (2000) admit that, whilst it has become common to assert that full-time students combine their studies with part-time work, the relationship between flexibility and participation in the lives of full-time students is still under-researched. There is therefore little evidence of whether, as might be expected,

mass access to higher education has created a student body in which all students (whether officially full-time or part-time) are devising personal lifelong learning strategies and by their orientation to work and study respectively.

The experience of part-time higher education students in further education colleges has attracted little research interest. Schuller et al (1999) admit that the focus of most research on part-time higher education students has been on first degree study, despite the recognition that most part-time students are to be found at sub-degree level. Although Schuller et al recognise that part-time sub-degree higher education has been neglected, they give it no particular prominence in their work and only decide to include HNCs (the majority of provision in further education colleges) at a late stage. Less than one third of the sample of students in the survey were at further education colleges and little attempt is made to compare and contrast degree provision with sub-degree provision or degree students with sub-degree students.

## 5.5 Summary

In Chapter 1, I presented data that suggested that patterns of participation in higher education are changing towards higher proportions of adults, part-time students, students following higher education programmes in colleges and, possibly, students from more diverse backgrounds. It can no longer be assumed that a natural progression into higher education from school for the most academically well-qualified students is the only model. Questions of motive and motivation to study post-school are therefore of greater interest with respect to all students. Research to date has found motive to be complex, multi-dimensional and changing, with a growing predominance of instrumental and vocational rather than academic motives. The impact of obligatory personal financial investment in higher education for all students and of wider access initiatives is likely to cause continuing change.

Research interest is shifting to look at motivation in terms of the feasibility of participation, not simply at why people choose to enrol and with what end result they leave. Experience of participation in higher education is changing from the norm of a full-time student with no other responsibilities or commitments to an increasing frequency of study blended with work or family responsibilities or both, regardless of whether the student is technically studying full-time or part-time. This is as yet unacknowledged in research or policy formulation, which tends to continue to differentiate between full-time and part-time students as distinct categories. To date the relevant research on participation has been relatively small scale and fragmented in that the subjects have been sub-sets e.g. young people, women, part-time students, university students, students undertaking paid work.

Lifelong learning has, superficially, been taken to mean learning throughout life, a lifelong process of the discovery and development of the talents of each and every individual (Labour Party 1994). The task of promoting participation has been formulated in terms of persuading more people to embrace learning: convincing individuals to get involved in

learning at all stages of life is seen as critical (DfEE 1996). In respect of higher education, however, generating demand is only part of the challenge of extending participation. The concept of feasible, sustainable, successful participation is equally, if not more, important and cannot be taken for granted.

Research into retention of higher education students in universities reveals that financial pressures contribute to early leaving and that dropout or low motivation can be precipitated by personal variables, such as self-esteem, or social factors, such as family background or employment whilst studying. There is a lively debate about whether to “blame” the student or the institution, resulting in a variety of recommendations for action ranging, depending upon the orientation, from measures to enable students to cope better to radical change in institutional practice. Most research into retention and withdrawal examines why students drop out. There is an equal need to understand why many students achieve sustained participation and success in sometimes adverse circumstances as it cannot be assumed that the determinants of success are the obverse of the determinants of failure, which are, in any case, imperfectly understood. There is now a need to move beyond a negative discourse that explores the conflicting demands, constraints and difficulties that students experience. For some students, the successful management of multiple roles might be one that confers positive benefits and might therefore be a state of choice. Recent research is therefore moving towards a more holistic approach to the student experience of higher education, as a way of understanding “how the circumstances of higher education are played out in the lives of students and in particular how factors such as the domestic commitments of mature students, the need for many students to take term-time employment and the shift of higher education towards vocationalism impact on students” (Winn 2002 p447). No work of this nature appears to have been conducted amongst higher education students in colleges perhaps because the background of most researchers is in the university sector and they have a greater familiarity with degree level study (Schuller et al 1999).

Those interested in part-time students examine the nature of the boundaries between study and other aspects of life for individuals and explore how the management of relationships and boundaries can be improved. It has begun to be acknowledged that this approach may be equally relevant to many full-time students, but there remains a resistance to acknowledge fully that the traditional distinction between full-time and part-time study may no longer be valid from the perspective of the student experience. The perception that “the experience of part-time higher education students embodies the temporal complexities of modern life to a greater degree than the experiences of full-timers” (Morgan-Klein and Gray 2000 p47) remains unchallenged.

This review of the literature relating to the concepts of motive, motivation and sustainable participation suggests that a successful model of higher education as lifelong learning requires a better understanding of the total student experience and how learning experiences are integrated with students’ life experiences. Successful integration appears to be a function of the nature and quality of the “balance” that a student achieves amongst study, work and family life and of the factors that determine the quality of the “balance”. These concepts underpin my adoption of a new definition of lifelong learning as learning integrated with life. My proposition is that, for higher education students (whether full-time or part-time), the determinants of success may be found within the quality of the whole student experience and that successful integration of learning with life is a significant contributing factor to the quality of that experience. My interest is in “the shifting boundaries, for example between part-time and full-time study, between flexible work and study patterns and between students’ public and private worlds” (Morgan-Klein and Gray 2000 p47). This proposition has not, to date, been explored within a further education college where a model of lifelong learning defined as learning integrated with life may be expected to be relevant to the student population.

“An understanding of the different ways in which educational participation may be linked to other aspects of life, and of the need to make space for



such activity, is of major importance to educators and policy makers, given the emphasis now placed on lifelong learning and the learning society.”  
(Blaxter et al 1997 p145)

# CHAPTER 6

## Research Questions: Exploring a New Definition of Lifelong Learning in a Learning Society

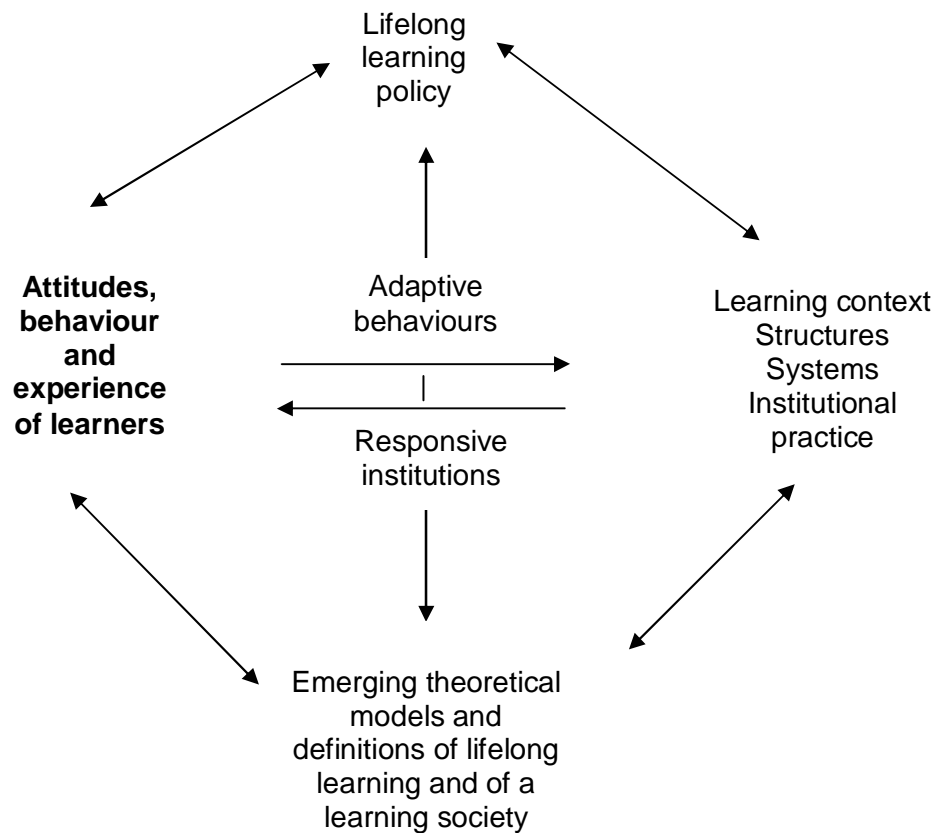
- 6.1 A model of progress towards lifelong learning
- 6.2 Research questions

## **6.1 A model of progress towards lifelong learning**

The overall purpose of my research is to contribute to a better understanding of aspects of participation in lifelong learning and of the effectiveness of policies on higher education in bringing about a learning society. In Figure 3, I have presented a model that identifies the determinants of progress towards lifelong learning in a learning society and illustrates the pattern of interaction between the components. In earlier chapters, I have examined, in turn, theoretical aspects of each component of the model: higher education in a learning society (Chapter 2); lifelong learning policy (Chapter 3); colleges as institutions (Chapter 4); and student attitudes and behaviours (Chapter 5). Figure 3 suggests that the relationships are complex and multi-directional and that an understanding of the progress of a society towards lifelong learning can be gained by studying each component of the model and their relationship with each other. My interest is in gaining a better understanding of the attitude, behaviour and experience of learners and of how this could and should impact upon policy and institutional practice, through an in depth case study of higher education learners in a Scottish college setting.

Figure 3

**Determinants of progress towards lifelong learning**



In chapters 1 and 2 I illustrated that, in the last decade, mass participation in higher education has begun to depart from traditional patterns. There are more higher education students in colleges; more part-time higher education students; more adults in higher education; more students combining work and study or work and family life. It is possible to assume that these patterns derive from changes in the choices of individual students, related to their identity, motivation, self concept and purposes in learning; and from their responses to the economic and labour market environment and to the policies, systems, structures and institutional models that they encounter.

Chapter 1 illustrates that the growth in full-time and part-time HNC and HND programmes in further education colleges has drawn into higher education new and distinctive categories of student, many of whom would not apply to and/or meet the accepted

requirements for degree level courses. The aspirations, circumstances and patterns of participation of these students are likely to be congruent with the rhetoric of lifelong learning. The traditional distinction, however, between full-time and part-time higher education may be increasingly irrelevant to students in further education colleges in that fewer conform to the traditional model of full-time study immediately post-school with no employment of any kind and no domestic commitments. For adult lifelong learners, learning is unlikely to take place in complete isolation from other aspects of life, such as work, family and community life. Students will define the relative balance between study and other components of their lives in their own terms, not in accordance with official definitions of full-time or part-time attendance. Chapter 5 reviews the literature that has explored these concepts of balance and integration and confirms that the experience of higher education students in further education colleges has been overlooked to date. Much of the early literature relates to motive to engage in adult learning. More recently attention has turned to the issues relating to motivation and to sustained and successful participation, particularly for adults. The literature, however, is fragmented in that research studies have examined the experience of young people or adults but not both (for example Edwards 1993; Osborne et al 2001; Metcalf 2001) or have selected part-time students or full-time students but not both (for example Schuller et al 1999; Ford et al 1995; Kember and Leung 2004). Few studies have given importance to students at higher education level in further education colleges. There are clear gaps in the current body of research in relation to: the experience of full-time students, particularly adults, in integrating learning with life, work and family commitments; the experience of higher education students in colleges; the comparative experience of full-time and part-time students.

In Chapter 3 I argued that, at the heart of the policy agenda for lifelong learning, is a struggle to accommodate a traditional model of full-time post-16 education with a new belief in the mainstream importance of adult learning, informal learning, continuing professional development, self-improvement and skills training. This distinction between

full-time education and part-time lifelong learning is embedded in structures, systems, institutional funding methodologies and student funding policies: there is therefore a resistance to move beyond the rhetoric of an integrated approach to lifelong learning. Although there is a pervasive policy emphasis on the importance of moving to a learning society and lifelong learning, there is little evidence of intent to effect strategic change of our education systems on the basis of new agreed priorities for lifelong learning. The locus of change remains, therefore, at institutional level. A plethora of initiatives has been launched, most of which appear to be aimed at increasing the volume of participation in existing post-school learning particularly from amongst people from those sections of society which have been under-represented in the past, for example those from lower socio-economic classes (Leathwood and O'Connell 2003). These initiatives are predicated on a need to change attitudes to learning on the part of non-learners and to change admissions practices. There is much less evidence of planned change in institutional learning environments to reduce barriers to lifelong learning and to promote sustained participation (Reay et al 2003; Tett 2004).

Institutional management in higher and further education has traditionally catered for distinct groups of students, classified by modes of attendance, with distinct predictable patterns of behaviour and priorities. Consideration of how educational systems and institutions should support more flexible opportunities for the integration of learning with life, rather than learning throughout life, which is the dominant concept in policy documents, is at an early stage. Given that the primary locus of change is likely to remain at institutional level, there is scope to explore how an institution can best create a learning context, not just a curriculum, which meets the needs and expectations of diverse groups of learners. The creation of learning opportunities (in the broadest sense) through which diverse groups of people and individuals can engage in learning which is effectively integrated with other aspects of their lives represents a new professional challenge for managers, requiring an understanding of the values and priorities for all stakeholders, including the learners themselves, as discussed in Chapter 4.

The model set out in Figure 3 brings together the strands of my literature review and demonstrates their relationship with each other. The model illustrates the direction and orientation of my research, which is to investigate the experience of higher education students within a Scottish further education college and then to relate that experience to theories of a learning society, to educational policy and to institutional practice.

## **6.2 Research questions**

This research project explores the attitudes, behaviours and experience of a specific category of students, those undertaking higher education programmes in a further education college. My purpose is to consider whether the individual and collective experience of the students represents a model of lifelong learning, which has relevance for institutional practice and for the further development of lifelong learning policy. The research does not consider the students' experience of learning from a pedagogical perspective nor does it investigate their academic performance and achievement of qualifications. The focus is on their personal experience of participation and on their approaches to combining higher education with other aspects of their lives. My definition of lifelong learning is of learning integrated with life, including work and family life.

My first objective is to describe and understand the personal and demographic characteristics of these students; their participation in higher education; and their experience of integrating learning with work, family and other commitments; and to assess the validity and importance of defining lifelong learning as learning integrated with life as part of the system of higher education in Scotland. My second objective is to understand how the students interact with the institution in which they are learning; and to consider the implications of their experience for a learner-centred approach to institutional management and practice. My third objective is to investigate the students' attitudes to lifelong learning policy; and, in particular, to test the proposition that the traditional, official distinction between full-time and part-time study does not reflect the reality of student experience.



My research questions are:

- What are the characteristics of these learners?
- For what purposes and with what objectives have they decided to study?
- In what ways do the learners combine study with work and domestic commitments?
- How successful are the learners in integrating learning with life?
- How do the learners themselves experience and manage their involvement in learning? To what extent are traditional distinctions between full-time and part-time study still relevant from their perspective?
- What institutional and policy factors contribute to successful integration of learning with life? What factors create difficulties?
- Are there any implications of the research findings for structural or cultural change within the college?
- Are there any implications of the research findings for policy development to promote lifelong learning and a learning society?

The multiple aims of this work are therefore to contribute to the current debate about the nature and purpose of higher education in Scotland in the 21st century and to contribute to emerging theoretical models and definitions of lifelong learning and a learning society.

# Chapter 7

## Methodology

- 7.1 Decision to adopt a case study approach
- 7.2 Focus groups
- 7.3 The development and issue of a questionnaire
- 7.4 Scope and scale

## **7.1 Decision to adopt a case study approach**

Verma and Mallick (1999) suggest that there is no generally accepted scheme for classifying educational research studies, but that it is helpful to identify three broad but not mutually exclusive categories of research methodologies: historical method, descriptive method and experimental method. Within these categories, the methods and strategies employed in any research programme should be dictated by the nature of the problem and the research questions. The objectives of my work, as presented in the Introduction, confirm that this is a descriptive and explanatory study: its aim is to discover and present new knowledge about a specific category of students, those studying at higher education level in a Scottish further education college. The process of descriptive research involves the collection of data to portray the present. The process goes, however, beyond the compilation and tabulation of factual data to discover meaning and to interpret the significance of what is described (Verma and Mallick 1999). Descriptive research may be subject to criticism on the grounds of the scope for bias towards the researcher's subjective perspectives and superficial impressions of the phenomena (Verma and Mallick 1999). These potential drawbacks can be reduced by adopting a clear definition of the research questions; by selecting appropriate subjects, methods, research techniques and instruments; and by addressing the research questions in the data collected.

In this study, the research questions clearly determined the scope of the data that was to be collected. This included: factual data about the demographic profile of the students; quantitative and qualitative data about the students' experience of integrating learning with work and family life; and data about the students' evaluation of their experience in relation to institutional practice and educational policy. The literature review has demonstrated that little research has hitherto been undertaken into the experience of higher education students in further education colleges and, in particular, few previous attempts have been made to include both full-time and part-time students in the same study, so that their experience may be compared and contrasted. The nature of the research questions,

combined with the absence of a body of relevant previous research, confirmed that a comprehensive range of data required to be collected. It was necessary to collect both large scale representative data and qualitative in depth evidence. The challenge was to gain an understanding of the complexity of the students' experience whilst still interpreting that experience within a broader description of the student body, the institution, the wider educational system and the policy environment.

This challenge was addressed by adopting a case study approach comprised of a variety of research methods. The case study selected was the advanced (higher education) students in Lauder College over 3 successive years. Merriam (2001 p27) defined a case study as "a single entity around which there are boundaries." These cohorts of students meet that definition in that they are studying at a specific institution, enrolled on courses at a specific level and within a defined time frame. Selection of the entire year groups is significant. Most previous relevant research has selected, as subjects, either full-time students or part-time students, in accordance with official or institutional definitions. In my research, the same process of enquiry is applied to the whole cohort, allowing the subjects to define themselves by their choices and behaviours and allowing the official definitions of full-time and part-time study to be tested against student behaviour and experience. The choice of an institutional case study contributed to the achievement of balance between breadth and depth in the study. Although generalisability would have been enhanced by conducting the research in a number of different institutions, this would have entailed significant reduction in scope and depth.

Merriam's (2001) review of the features of case studies as being particularistic, descriptive and heuristic further substantiates the applicability of this approach to my research questions and research orientation. The particularistic nature of a case study means that it can "examine a specific instance but illuminate a general problem" (Merriam 2001 p30). Its descriptive nature means that it can illustrate the complexities of a situation, obtain and present information from a wide variety of sources and include vivid, personal material as

well as summary material. The heuristic quality of a case study means it can evaluate, summarise and conclude, thus increasing its potential generalisability. A case study thus offers a balance between descriptive depth, wider applicability and the generation of new insights.

Having decided upon a case study approach, the next stage was to select the research techniques and tools to be included. Traditionally, some research methods (e.g. surveys) have been classified as quantitative whilst others (e.g. ethnography) have been classified as qualitative. Similarly, certain techniques and instruments (e.g. postal questionnaires, attitude inventories) have been categorised as quantitative whilst others (e.g. participant observation) have been classified as qualitative. Scott and Usher (1996) argue that quantitative and qualitative strategies and methods do not belong within separate research paradigms and can both be used within different methodological and epistemological frameworks. For the same reason, both quantitative and qualitative strategies and methods can be used within the same investigation and this is particularly appropriate to case study research. The design of my case study incorporated a selection of methods and techniques that corresponded with the breadth and depth of data required by the research questions.

Case study research requires access to the case study population. As Principal of the college I had unusual (for a researcher) access to the population. This had distinct advantages in that I was able to collect data from a range of sources and to enhance the effectiveness of the methods. I chose to collect data from public sources and institutional records, through a questionnaire survey and through direct interaction with the research subjects in focus groups. I was able to increase the response rate to the survey research and to secure a more representative and less self-selective response by using more direct methods of questionnaire issue than a postal survey. Access to the institutional database meant that purposive samples could be generated. Finally I was able to repeat the survey research over 3 successive years in very similar conditions.

I located the case study population within the context of higher education in Scotland by undertaking a review of relevant published statistics: this information is presented in chapter 1. From college records I derived aggregated factual data concerning the demographic characteristics of the case study population in each of the three years, providing a quantitative description of all of the students in each year. The primary method of data collection was a questionnaire survey, the design of which is described in section 7.3. This method was chosen because the research questions required the compilation of large scale representative evidence of the experience of the research subjects as a category of students within higher education in Scotland as well of their experience as individuals. It was also essential to collect representative evidence given the paucity of previous research and the importance of establishing a base of new knowledge from which further research might be developed in the future. Survey research within the social sciences has been subject to criticism and it was, therefore, essential that the design of the questionnaire took account of the major potential weaknesses of this method. Burton (2000) classified criticisms of survey research into three main categories: philosophical, technical and political. Philosophically based criticisms suggest that human behaviour is not amenable to empirical investigation and that surveys are incapable of generating meaningful interpretation of social phenomena. This weakness was addressed in my questionnaire by designing the instrument to collect both factual and qualitative data in the form of the respondents' descriptions, reflections and evaluations of their experiences. It included multiple response items and open questions, as well as closed questions, drawn from relevant research and from the transcripts of focus groups. Technical criticisms suggest that the questions used in surveys reduce the variety of human experience to clear cut categories necessary for variable analysis. Surveys therefore collect relatively superficial data about complex social, psychological and emotional issues (West 1996). Technical critique also focuses on the view that surveys are too statistical, "reducing interesting questions to incomprehensible numbers" (Burton 2000 p305). De Vaus (1996) argues that these criticisms are true mainly in instances where questionnaires are

inappropriate for the task in hand, poorly designed and inadequately piloted. To respond to these criticisms, the design of my questionnaire was informed by a literature review, discussions with colleagues and with my supervisors and its content was refined after a pilot exercise, involving college staff who were themselves undertaking part time study. Questionnaires are often subject to criticism on the base of poor response rates. Not only was this addressed in my case study by a two-phase approach to survey issue, described in section 7.3, but I also repeated the survey research over three successive years. This is relatively rare in educational studies and had the effect of improving the reliability and validity of the findings as well as facilitating cross-cohort analysis. In some cases, consistency of response over all three years underlined the significance of the results and in other cases inconsistency or trends in the findings facilitated more sophisticated interpretations of the data. Political criticisms suggest that survey research is intrinsically manipulative by giving power and control to those who undertake such work. Although it could be argued that there is a clear power difference between myself (as Principal as well as a researcher) and the students, care was taken at all stages to reassure students about the purpose of the work and also to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality.

My research design included a small scale study involving focus groups, selected using purposive sampling, who participated in semi-structured discussions. The selection and conduct of the focus groups is described in section 7.2. The transcripts of the focus groups contributed to the questionnaire design by improving the range and quality of the options presented in the multiple response questions and by suggesting where open ended data collection questions would add most value to the survey. The focus group material also provided rich illustrative and explanatory insights into some of the complexities of the students' attitudes and experiences that could not be fully addressed by the questionnaire. The focus group data was triangulated with the survey data to confirm and improve the validity of the findings and to provide underpinning evidence for some of the headline findings in the questionnaire.

The timing of the investigative aspects of the research was important because of the emphasis on exploring the subjects' attitudes and perceptions. Students' perceptions change throughout a programme of study and therefore the timing of the research might have influenced the way in which questions would be answered. The focus groups took place in November 2000 at a time when the students would be likely to be able to recall their motives and motivations for choosing to study. This was important in ensuring that the questionnaire design was influenced by initial aspirations as well as by subsequent experience. From November there was time to transcribe and absorb the content of the conversations and to incorporate this into the questionnaire design. The main questionnaire was issued in March/April in all three years. College records suggested that withdrawals tended to follow a pattern, with a peak in the early weeks caused by students changing their minds about wishing to study at all, followed by a stable withdrawal rate over the whole of the rest of the year. Although issuing the questionnaire in March would excluded those who withdrew between September and February, it was more important to issue the questionnaire at a point when the students would have experienced study for a sufficient length of time for them to reflect on relationships between study, work and home life and at a point when they might have experienced a range of positive and negative feelings. March represented a balance between these two factors.

Consideration was given to a separate, smaller survey of students who had withdrawn. In 2001 (the first year of data collection), I designed and issued a short postal questionnaire to students who had withdrawn. This did not yield useful results. The response rate was poor (less than 20%) and the survey instrument was too short to yield meaningful results. The reasons given for withdrawal accorded with the findings of studies cited in the literature review in section 5.4 (e.g. Davies and Elias 2002; Yorke 2004) in that the main reasons given were financial, personal and wrong choice of course. My study is not primarily concerned with withdrawal which, in my work, is used as a way of triangulating the concept of sustained participation through successful integration of learning with work



and family life. I therefore decided to discount my initial small scale questionnaire survey which was not repeated in years two and three.

The overall research design is set out in table 20.

*Table 20*

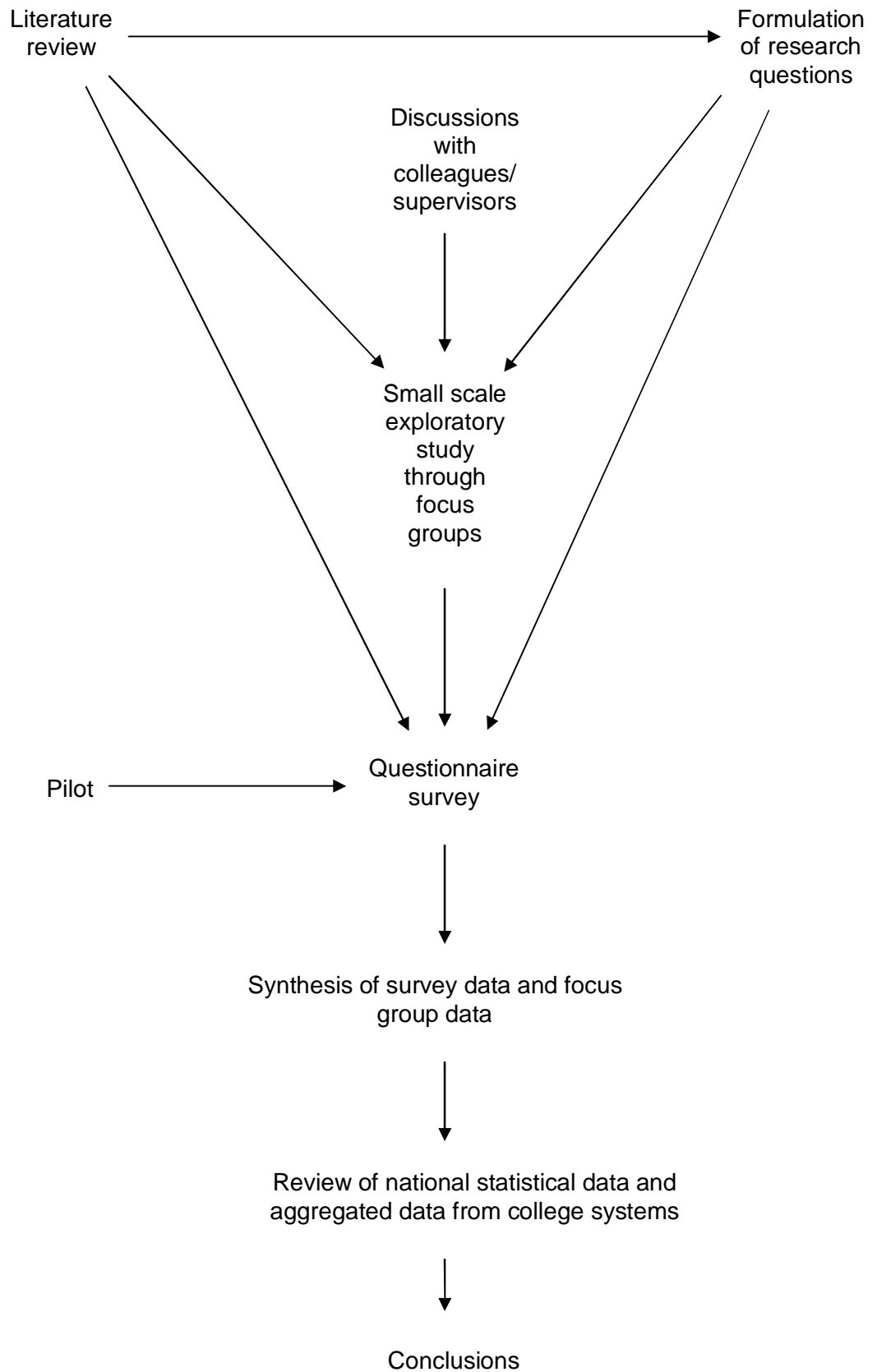
**Research Design**

	<b>Small scale work</b>	<b>Large scale work</b>
<b>September 2000</b>	Prepare format/ questions for focus groups	Design questionnaire
<b>October 2000</b>	Select participants for focus groups	Design questionnaire
<b>November 2000</b>	Focus groups and transcription	Refine questionnaire
<b>December 2000</b>		Refine questionnaire
<b>January 2001</b>	Pilot questionnaire	Refine questionnaire
<b>February 2001</b>		Refine questionnaire
<b>March 2001</b>		Issue questionnaire
<b>March 2002</b>		Issue questionnaire
<b>March 2003</b>		Issue questionnaire
<b>April-June 2003</b>		Statistical survey Collection of aggregated data from college system

The overall design of the methodology is shown in Figure 4:

Figure 4

**Design of methodology**



## 7.2 Focus groups

Focus groups are an accepted research method where concentrated data on a topic of interest is sought and where complex behaviour and motivation is being investigated (Morgan 1997). They offer a balance between interviews (where there is more control on the part of the researcher and less opportunity for unanticipated contributions and insights to be volunteered by the research subjects) and participant observation (where there is much less control and more likelihood of the subjects departing from the topics of most interest to the researcher). Focus groups can be conducted as a primary research method or can contribute to studies by providing supplementary data (Morgan 1997).

There were two reasons for conducting a series of focus groups in this study: to contribute to the refinement of the questionnaire; and to add qualitative depth and richness to the research evidence. The focus group transcripts initially provided useful guidance on the range and nature of the choices to be included in the multiple response questions in the questionnaire, contributing to its validity and relevance. Later more detailed analysis of the focus group data yielded insights into the complexity and variation of the students' experience and into the meanings that they attributed to concepts such as motivation to study and integration of learning with work and family life. They enabled the researcher to engage actively with the agenda of those being researched and to explore directly their experiences, values and orientations (Field 2000b).

A sample of 120 potential focus group participants was drawn up, from the target population of full-time and part-time advanced level students enrolled in 2000-01. In choosing a sampling method I rejected a probability (random) sample in favour of a non-probabilistic, purposive sample. Probability sampling allows the researcher to generalise from the sample to the population from which it was drawn, which was not my objective. Purposive sampling allows the researcher "to discover, understand, and gain insight by selecting a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam 2001 p61). My chosen

approach was maximum variation sampling as first identified by Glaser and Strauss (1967), who reasoned that a study would be more useful if it had been grounded in widely varying instances of the phenomenon. Using descriptive data about the population from the College's student records database, I compiled a statistically representative sample of 120 people, based on a variation in gender; age; postcode; full-time/part-time mode of study; day or evening attendance; source of funding for fees; employment status; level of study (HNC or HND); and subject of study. Although marital status and responsibility for dependants were not used (as the data was not available), selecting people from different age groups had the secondary effect of including people with a range of family backgrounds.

I decided to take a low key, non-directive approach to issuing invitations to attend focus groups. Given that, as Principal, I personally conducted the groups, it was essential that the invitees did not feel obliged or instructed to participate or fear that there would be any possibility of impact on their academic progress as a result of attending or not attending. Therefore the sample students were each sent a non-directive letter of invitation, with no follow-up. Also, to avoid disruption to study, the groups were held over lunch time or in the hour before the start of evening classes, with refreshments provided. This meant that the participants were giving up personal break time to attend. I made the arrangements and, in each case, held a focus group or interview with the people who chose to attend, regardless of the number of attendees.

In all cases the groups were small ( $n = 2.3$  on average). This meant that the groups resembled semi-structured interviews rather than free-flowing discussions, in that there was relatively little interaction between the participants. However the presence of at least one other participant in all but two cases created a degree of informality and meant that participants had time to think between their responses and compare their reactions with those of at least one other person. Morgan (1997) pointed out that interaction with others in focus groups makes people more aware of their own perspectives because they, overtly

or privately, defend or revise their own views in the light of the views of the other participants. All participants talked freely and appeared to be relaxed, often being willing to continue beyond the allocated time.

To ensure reasonable consistency across the eleven groups, I used an aide-memoire (Appendix 1), which provided me with introductory and explanatory remarks to assist the participants to understand the purpose of the exercise and to cover confidentiality. The aide-memoire provided a structured schedule for the discussions, ensuring that all areas were covered during the time available. There were five topics areas, each with a series of prompt questions. The five areas were:

- Reasons for studying and for choosing Lauder College
  
- Work/study balance
  
- Family life/study balance
  
- Positive/negative impact issues
  
- Identification with lifelong learning policy agenda and issues relating to financing of study.

The areas for discussion were closely aligned with the draft questionnaire, which ensured that the conversations would yield material that would assist in refining the questions asked in the questionnaire as well as providing qualitative material for the research. Each discussion was tape recorded and transcribed, providing a verbatim record of the conversations<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In one instance the tape recorder failed to function. In this instance I made an immediate summary of the discussions from memory.

Table 21

### Characteristics of focus group participants

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>			
	12	13			
	48%	52%			
<b>Age</b>	<b>&lt;20</b>	<b>20-50</b>	<b>&gt;50</b>		
	2	20	3		
	8%	80%	12%		
<b>FT/PT</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>			
	12	13			
	48%	52%			
<b>Source of funding</b>	<b>Self-funded</b>	<b>Employer-funded</b>	<b>State-funded</b>		
	6	7	12		
	24%	28%	48%		
<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Living with Spouse/Partner</b>	<b>Single</b>	<b>Undeclared</b>		
	15	8	2		
	60%	32%	8%		
<b>Dependants</b>	<b>Grown-Up children</b>	<b>Young children</b>	<b>Lone parent</b>	<b>No children</b>	<b>Elderly dependant</b>
	5	8	3	8	1
	20%	32%	12%	32%	4%
<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Working</b>	<b>Not working</b>			
	16	9			
	64%	36%			
<b>Level of study</b>	<b>HNC</b>	<b>HND</b>	<b>Diploma</b>		
	15	8	2		
	60%	32%	8%		
<b>Subject of Study</b>	Tourism			2	
	Social Sciences			5	
	Mechatronics			2	
	Computing			4	
	Social Care			1	
	Antique Furniture Restoration			1	
	Management			4	
	Construction Management			1	
	Health, Fitness and Leisure			4	
	Financial Services			1	

*n* = 25

The characteristics of the focus group participants are shown in Table 21, which demonstrates that the purposive sampling method was effective in securing a widely varying sample. The focus group attendees were representative of the respondents that completed the questionnaires (Table 22). In section 8.1 it will also be demonstrated that the questionnaire respondents were representative of the case study population.

*Table 22*

**Comparison of focus group and questionnaire populations**

	<b>Focus Group Population %</b>	<b>Questionnaire Population (2000-01) %</b>
<b>Male</b>	48	48
<b>Female</b>	52	52
<b>&lt;20</b>	8	15
<b>20-50</b>	80	81
<b>&gt;50</b>	12	4
<b>FT</b>	48	37
<b>PT</b>	52	63
<b>Single</b>	32	37
<b>Married/Living with partner</b>	60	53
<b>Young children</b>	32	57
<b>Grown-up children</b>	20	8
<b>Employed</b>	64	77
<b>Unemployed</b>	36	23
<b>HNC</b>	60	74
<b>HND</b>	32	19
<b>Diploma/Degree</b>	8	6

Analysis of the focus group transcripts was conducted in three phases. The first stage was to identify themes that could be used to generate options for the multiple response sections of the questionnaire. For example, reasons for studying or reasons for considering withdrawal were first generated from the literature then expanded and refined using the focus group data. The second stage was to code and analyse sections of the focus group transcripts to identify and synthesise recurring themes based on initial constructs from the literature (Silverman 2000). In the third stage, representative quotations were selected for inclusion in the thesis as illustrative examples of the themes that had emerged.

### **7.3 The development and issue of a questionnaire**

The questionnaire (Appendix 3) was designed to be completed by the subjects without the presence of a researcher/interviewer. Demographic and personal factual information was placed at the end as this is the least interesting part for the subjects. Motive and motivation were covered by multiple response questions with the opportunity to select primary reasons separately. The choice of responses was influenced by earlier studies (Woodley et al 1987; Courtney 1992; Hopper and Osborn 1997; Callender 1997) and by the focus groups. The prevalence and variation of vocational orientation during the focus groups, for example, led to the inclusion of a range of choices under this heading. The research subjects were also asked to indicate reasons for choosing Lauder College. Although this may, on the surface, appear to have a market research orientation for the College, the purpose was to explore aspects of motivation to study (i.e. decision to enrol) including practicality of access, perception of the likely nature of the experience and self-image in relation to institutions considered.

The core part of the questionnaire asked detailed questions about the pattern of activities undertaken by the students in respect of work and domestic responsibilities and their impact on study. This latter aspect was explored through multiple response questions with items drawn from and expanded on the basis of the focus group discussions. After considering options for summarising and capturing the qualitative essence of students' experience of integrating learning with life, I offered a choice from four descriptions of the nature of the "balance" achieved. This drew on themes derived from the focus groups, during which participants were asked to describe a good day and a bad day and on the repeated occurrence in the literature (Edwards 1993; Blaxter and Tight 1994a; Kember 1999; Morgan Klein and Gray 2000) of the notion of "juggling" different priorities and of concepts of "separation" and "integration" between study and other aspects of life. An open-ended question was added at this point to enable respondents to elaborate on what would make most difference to achieving a balanced life.



The work of Kember (1999) and Kember and Leung (2004) on the importance of the support systems available, particularly to mature and part-time students, influenced the insertion of a series of closed and open questions about the nature and source of personal and practical support. Participants were asked to exclude consideration of support from college academic staff as the questionnaire was designed to discuss the practical and personal feasibility of study, rather than academic progress.

The next section addressed factors that may affect issues of practicability of study and flexibility of college services. These were drawn from Lauder College's recent interventions to improve both the availability of and flexibility of attendance patterns and to extend the opening hours of support services, such that any differences between day and evening or weekends were minimised. Having evaluated what was available, respondents were invited to identify changes or improvements that they would like to see.

At this stage, there was a return to the more qualitative aspects of the study, and students were asked if they had ever seriously considered dropping out and, if so, why. These questions were designed to bring depth to the investigation of the concept of "balance" by, in effect, asking the same question in a different way. Potential to drop out was taken as a proxy for being at risk of failure to achieve sustained participation through successfully integrating learning with life. Multiple response options for reasons for considering dropping out reflected potential conflict with work and/or family responsibilities and also reflected the descriptions given by focus group participants of bad days.

In the next section of the questionnaire I attempted to ascertain whether the plethora of policy statements and policy initiatives detailed in chapter 3 had had the desired effect on those for whom they were intended. The respondents were offered a description of lifelong learning taken from Opportunity Scotland (Scottish Office 1998b p5) and carefully chosen to incorporate the key elements of policy rhetoric and the concepts of motive, motivation and sustained participation. The respondents were asked to comment on the

extent to which policy has encouraged lifelong learning and on their general awareness of and benefit from range of policy initiatives.

The questionnaire was revised and refined over a series of drafts through discussion with my supervisor, reference to the focus group transcripts and review of the literature. At final draft stage it was piloted with a group of nine members of college staff who were studying part-time either at Lauder College or at other institutions. This was invaluable and resulted in some important changes to specific questions and in changes of detail to the multiple response options leading to easier analysis. I also received positive feedback on the experience of completing the questionnaire in terms of its level of interest and relevance.

The questionnaire was distributed in two sequential phases to maximise the response rate. Over a two week period in March/April of 2001, 2002 and 2003, college administrative staff systematically visited classes and issued the questionnaires to students who were present, with the prior agreement of the lecturers. A brief explanation was given of the purpose of the research, together with assurances of confidentiality for individuals. This approach offered two significant advantages. First, it improved the overall response rate by reaching a captive audience and therefore capturing those who might otherwise have been too busy or too preoccupied to find the time to respond. Second, it improved the spread of responses by capturing some of those who might otherwise have failed to complete the questionnaire through lack of interest or motivation. Given the subject matter of the research, it was particularly important to adopt an approach to questionnaire distribution that was likely to reach those who were experiencing the kind of busy life that might have resulted in a postal questionnaire being overlooked. One disadvantage of this approach was the possibility that some students would not take the questionnaire seriously, given that it might have been seen as an unwelcome, compulsory task. Feedback from the staff administering the questionnaire indicated that the task of completion was undertaken diligently, with a very low perceived evidence of frivolous

attitude. This was borne out by the editing checks that were subsequently carried out as part of the data entry process.

Once the classroom phase was complete, the names and course codes of the respondents were logged against a database of the target population and a questionnaire was mailed out to those who were not logged as having completed a classroom questionnaire. The number of respondents providing no identifier information was small (6% in 2001, 10% in 2002 and 10% in 2003) so the risk of duplicate responses is very low.

The decision to distribute the questionnaires in two sequential phases (classroom completion and mailshot) took account of the diversity of modes of attendance of the student population for HNC and HND programmes and the college's timetabling arrangements. These qualifications are comprised of discrete units of study, each of which is taught and assessed in its own right and each of which has a credit value. To obtain a qualification (known as a group award), a student must complete 12 specified credits (for the HNC) or 30 specified credits (for the HND). This normally takes one year for a full-time HNC; two years for a part-time HNC; two years for a full-time HND; four years for a part-time HND. Different patterns are also possible as the unitised nature of these awards facilitates flexible or accelerated modes of attendance. Although many students study full-time or part-time towards a qualification goal (group award), others take one or more individual units at different times of the year for different purposes. Those choosing individual units of study may, in some cases, engage in a higher volume of activity, in terms of the number of units studied in a single year, than those pursuing a qualification over several years. For administrative purposes, the college offers timetabled programmes for those studying full-time or part-time towards a qualification (group award). These programmes commence in either September or January. Students wishing to take individual units then enrol to join classes at various points in the year, on an infill basis, depending on class capacity. The classroom distribution of the questionnaires covered all timetabled higher education programmes. The follow-up postal

distribution was designed to reach those who were not in the classes visited through absence or because they were following an individual flexible infill programme. In each year, the questionnaire was distributed to the whole population of students at higher education level, not just to new entrants. This means that, in 2002 and 2003, some students would have received the questionnaire for a second or third time.

*Table 23*

### **Student Populations**

	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2001-02</b>	<b>2002-03<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>Total no. of enrolments</b>	1813	1837	1679
<b>No. of full-time enrolments</b>	444	445	417
<b>No. of part-time enrolments</b>	1369	1392	1262
<b>No. of part-time students enrolled for a qualification or at least an equivalent number of units</b>	1035	918	730
<b>No. of active students at the time of issue of the questionnaire</b>	994	1030	776

Calculation of the response rate also took account of the diversity of modes of attendance. The difference shown in Table 23 between the total number of enrolments and the number of active students at the time of issue of the questionnaire is accounted for by differences in timing and volume of activity for those enrolled for individual units and by withdrawals before the point at which the questionnaires were issued. The total enrolment count also includes some instances of multiple enrolment by the same individual.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a noticeable drop in enrolments, particularly part-time enrolments in 2003-03. It is too early to ascertain whether this is a single year phenomenon. It is, however, in line with recorded activity across all Scottish colleges where higher education enrolments fell by 10.7% (2.2% for full-time and 12.9% for part-time) in 2002-03, compared with 2001-02.

On the basis of active students at the time of issue of the questionnaire (n = 994 for 2000-01; n = 1030 for 2001-02; n = 776 for 2002-03), the response rates are shown in Table 24.

*Table 24*

**Response rates (based on active enrolments)**

	%	Actual
<b>2000-01</b>	57	563
<b>2001-02</b>	35	357
<b>2002-03</b>	40	311

Several factors may have affected response rates. Attendance in class, particularly by part-time students, fluctuates for precisely the reasons being investigated i.e. work and family commitments. When completing the questionnaire 21% in 2001, 24% in 2002 and 23% in 2003 indicated that they were at risk of missing classes. These same factors may also have reduced the postal response. Students who enrol for individual units of study would be less likely to be in class when the questionnaires were distributed. Some students would have received the questionnaire for a second or third time in 2002 and 2003. Although they were encouraged to complete it again, this may have proved unattractive. These factors did not, however, reduce the response rate to an unacceptable level. The distribution methods succeeded in securing both an acceptable response rate and, as will be shown in Chapter 8.1, a range of respondents that was representative of the student population as a whole.

Analysis of the responses to the closed questions was undertaken using SPSS. Dealing with the open-ended questions was a time-consuming manual exercise but was essential as those questions often offer important and unpredictable insights into human attitudes and behaviour (Burton 2000). The process of analysis involved compiling all responses into a single list, then developing themes by colour coding the responses against theoretical categories and against categories that emerged iteratively through the analysis. Once the themes had been established, final coding enabled some statistical

tests to be performed. Both the statistical tests and illustrative examples of the responses are included in the presentation of the findings.

#### **7.4 Scope and scale**

In this section I discuss the relationship of the research design and methodology with the significance and generalisability of the findings. Throughout the work, in the objectives, the literature review, the research questions and the presentation of the findings and conclusions, I have maintained three foci: on the student experience; on the institution; and on educational theory and policy. The selection of a case study approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies and a mix of large scale and small scale data collection methods, was designed to achieve a balance amongst in-depth understanding of the student experience; applicability to the case study institution and other institutions; and relevance within the wider higher education sector and policy environment.

The scope of the work is restricted by its location in one college and by the fact that the qualitative data are drawn from only 25 research subjects. This is balanced by the use of the case study methodology, involving gathering data from various sources; by the good response rate to the survey; by the representative nature of the respondents in comparison with the whole case study population; and by the application of the questionnaire in three successive years. The case study findings exhibit both breadth and depth and present a rich description of a phenomenon about which there was little prior knowledge. The work is internally valid for the host institution and offers a basis for the development of institutional and professional practice.

Applicability beyond the host institution is restricted by the heterogeneous nature of the further education college sector in Scotland. Higher education represents approximately 25% of all student activity in colleges (ASC 2004b) and, in this respect, Lauder College is typical in that higher education represents approximately 25% of all student activity in this college. However there is a wide variety across the 44 further education colleges in Scotland in the type of institution, size of institution, percentage of higher education in

relation to total activity and breadth of curriculum. At the extremes are small, specialist agricultural colleges, community colleges with very little advanced level provision, and large colleges with over 50% of their provision at higher education level (SFEFC 2003). There is also a range of urban and rural locations. Whereas, therefore, the findings of this research are likely to be of general interest and relevance to other colleges in Scotland because the demographic profile of the students is representative of the profile across the college sector, it would be valuable for the study to be replicated in different institutions, including universities, to test its applicability in different institutional contexts.

A case study of a single institution does not provide generalisable evidence on the basis of which educational policy can be developed. The findings do, however, present a contribution to knowledge about a category of higher education students who are under-represented and poorly understood in the development of mainstream higher education policy. The case study approach has drawn out insights into policy issues and raised questions about the future direction of policy development. The work forms a basis on which a more extensive national cross-sectional study could be undertaken to test further the generalisability of the findings as a future contribution to evidence-based policy formulation.



# CHAPTER 8

## Integrating Learning with Life:

### The Student Experience

- 8.1 The demographic profile of the students
- 8.2 Motive and motivation to participate
- 8.3 Learning, work and family life
- 8.4 Balance and integration: learning and life
- 8.6 Reactions to lifelong learning policy

## 8.1 The demographic profile of the students

Data on the students enrolled in each of the three years of the case study were available from the college's records in respect of mode of study, gender and age. This enabled a demographic profile of the student populations to be compiled and a comparison to be made between the questionnaire respondents and the whole populations. It is important to clarify that the college's records included all enrolments during the academic year for any form of higher education, including single units of study<sup>1</sup>. This is distinct from the primary target population, comprised of students enrolled for a full programme (HNC or HND or equivalent) or at least an equivalent number of units, and still on course at the time that the questionnaire survey was administered. A list of the higher education programmes offered by Lauder College during the period 2000-03 is given in Appendix 5.

In respect of mode of attendance (Table 25) the comparison shows a higher proportion of full-time students in the respondent groups than in the populations, especially in years 2 and 3<sup>2</sup>. This indicates that the questionnaire reached the primary target group. The lower proportion of part-time respondents results from non-completion of the questionnaire by students enrolled for individual units, who were a low priority for this study.

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<sup>1</sup> The college system records all enrolments individually. Therefore some students were recorded as multiple enrolments. These represent less than 10% of the total in each year and will not, therefore, distort the results.

<sup>2</sup> Tests of association were as follows:

Year 1:  $\chi^2 = 3.58$      $df = 1$      $p < 0.05$ .

Year 2:  $\chi^2 = 14.50$      $df = 1$      $p < 0.001$ .

Year 3:  $\chi^2 = 5.79$      $df = 1$      $p < 0.05$ .

Table 25

**Mode of attendance (%)**

	Respondents		Population	
	FT	PT	FT	PT
<b>2000-01</b>	37	63	24	76
<b>2001-02</b>	50	50	24	76
<b>2002-03</b>	41	59	25	75

*n* = 563 (2000-01); 357 (2001-02); 311 (2003-03)

In respect of gender, Table 26 shows that the profile of the respondents is similar to that of the population but that the respondent groups contained a higher proportion of FT female students and a lower proportion of PT female students, compared with the populations.

Table 26

**Mode of attendance and gender (%)**

		Respondents		Population	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>2000-01</b>	<b>FT</b>	12	25	10	14
	<b>PT</b>	36	27	38	38
	<b>Total</b>	48	52	48	52
<b>2001-02</b>	<b>FT</b>	19	31	11	13
	<b>PT</b>	29	21	40	36
	<b>Total</b>	48	52	51	49
<b>2002-03</b>	<b>FT</b>	15	26	13	12
	<b>PT</b>	38	21	41	34
	<b>Total</b>	53	47	54	46

*n* = 562 (2000-01); 353 (2001-02); 311 (2002-03)

The overall age profile of the respondent groups is very similar to that of the population, as shown in Table 27. In each year the respondent group has slightly fewer young full-time students than the population.

Table 27

**Age (%)**

Respondents							
	>19	19-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
<b>2000-01</b>	6	25	30	29	9	1	>1
<b>2001-02</b>	9	27	26	27	8	1	2
<b>2002-03</b>	9	28	26	23	12	1	1

*n* = 550 (2000-01); 344 (2001-02); 293 (2002-03)

Population							
	>19	19-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
<b>2000-01</b>	9	20	29	27	12	2	>1
<b>2001-02</b>	10	23	28	28	10	1	>1
<b>2002-03</b>	10	23	27	27	10	>1	0

*n* = 1813 (2000-01); 1837 (2001-02); 1679 (2002-03)

If we now look specifically at the respondents, it becomes clear that they display a diverse range of characteristics and circumstances. As Tables 26 and 27 show, there is an even mix of male and female students and a spread across all age groups, with a mean and median both of 32 in 2000-01 and of 32 and 31 respectively in years 2001-02 and 2002-03. Full-time students are skewed towards the younger age groups as shown in Table 28.

Table 28

**Age and mode of attendance (%)**

2000-01							
	>19	19-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
<b>FT</b>	15	26	25	24	9	0	1
<b>PT</b>	1	24	34	31	8	1	0
<b>Total</b>	6	25	30	29	9	1	0
n = 550 $\chi^2 = 50.7$ df = 6 p < 0.001 Cramer's V = .304							
2001-02							
	>19	19-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
<b>FT</b>	17	31	23	19	7	2	2
<b>PT</b>	2	24	29	35	9	1	1
<b>Total</b>	9	27	26	27	8	1	2
n = 344 $\chi^2 = 32.89$ df = 6 p < 0.001 Cramer's V = .309							
2002-03							
	>19	19-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-75
<b>FT</b>	17	25	27	19	9	3	0
<b>PT</b>	3	31	26	25	14	0	1
<b>Total</b>	9	28	26	23	12	1	1
n = 293 $\chi^2 = 23.00$ df = 6 p < 0.001 Cramer's V = .280							

The split of gender and mode of attendance is shown in Table 29. There are proportionately more male part-time students and proportionately more female full-time students. It will be shown later that male part-time students are more likely to benefit from having their fees paid by their employer.

Table 29

**Gender and mode of attendance (%)**

		FT	PT	Total
2000-01	Male	33	57	48
	Female	67	43	52
2001-02	Male	38	58	48
	Female	62	42	52
2002-03	Male	36	64	53
	Female	64	36	47

*n* = 562 (2000-01); 353 (2001-02); 311 (2002-03)

Table 30 shows the marital status of the respondents.

Table 30

**Marital status and mode of attendance (%)**

	2000-01			2001-02			2002-03		
	FT	PT	All	FT	PT	All	FT	PT	All
<b>Single</b>	48	31	37	58	33	45	56	37	45
<b>Married</b>	26	49	41	23	51	37	29	41	36
<b>Living with partner</b>	14	13	14	12	12	12	10	15	13
<b>Separated</b>	5	3	4	4	2	3	2	3	2
<b>Divorced</b>	7	4	5	4	3	4	4	5	4

2000-01	<i>n</i> = 555	$\chi^2 = 33.05$	df = 4	<i>p</i> < 0.001	Cramer's <i>V</i> = .244
2001-02	<i>n</i> = 345	$\chi^2 = 31.67$	df = 4	<i>p</i> < 0.001	Cramer's <i>V</i> = .303
2002-03	<i>n</i> = 301	$\chi^2 = 10.81$	df = 4	<i>p</i> < 0.05	Cramer's <i>V</i> = .190

Full-time students were more likely to be single, separated or divorced than part-time students in 2000-01 and 2001-02. In 2002-03 full-time students were more likely to be single and less likely to be represented in any of the other categories. However, in all years, 35-40% of full-time students were married or living with a partner.

Given the age range and spread of different categories of marital status, it was not surprising to discover evidence of parental responsibilities. Table 31 shows the range of children these students had.

Table 31

**Parental responsibilities (%)<sup>1</sup>**

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
<b>Pre-school</b>	14	12	8
<b>Primary</b>	23	23	22
<b>Secondary</b>	14	17	15
<b>Tertiary</b>	8	4	8
<b>No response</b>	56	59	60

*n* = 563 (2000-02); 357 (2001-02); 311 (2002-03)

There is no difference between full-time and part-time students in respect of the number of children or their ages. In all three years there is an equal spread of children amongst full-time and part-time students, in terms of number of children and age of children.

The students were asked to give their employment status before starting their course of study. Table 32 shows the results

Table 32

**Employment status before enrolling by mode of study (%)**

	2000-01			2001-02			2002-03		
	FT	PT	All	FT	PT	All	FT	PT	All
<b>FT employment</b>	31	81	64	28	77	54	28	78	58
<b>PT employment</b>	31	11	18	28	15	21	30	15	20
<b>Unemployed for &lt; 1 year</b>	19	3	8	22	4	13	19	4	10
<b>Unemployed for 1-3 years</b>	6	1	3	7	1	4	12	1	6
<b>Unemployed for &gt; 3 years</b>	13	4	7	15	2	8	12	1	6

*n* = 534 (2000-01); 325 (2001-02); 284 (2002-03)

<sup>1</sup> Multiple response question.

Full-time students were more likely to have been unemployed before starting their course and part-time students were more likely to have been employed. However over half of full-time students in each year were employed before starting their courses and nearly a third were in full-time employment.

In terms of qualifications on entry, Table 33 shows the responses given.

Table 33

**Qualifications on entry (%)<sup>1</sup>**

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
<b>Standard grades</b>	90	89	89
<b>Highers/ A levels</b>	42	45	43
<b>NC/NQ modules/ units</b>	56	48	59
<b>Scottish Wider Access Programme</b>	0	<1	0
<b>City and Guilds</b>	18	18	16
<b>Advanced Craft Certificate</b>	3	5	5
<b>HNC</b>	25	20	23
<b>HND</b>	5	5	7
<b>Degree</b>	5	5	5
<b>Professional qualification</b>	6	6	8
<b>Postgraduate degree</b>	3	2	2

*n* = 541 (2000-01); 339 (2001-02); 301 (2002-03)

The traditional (and required) entry qualification for higher education programmes in Scotland is the Higher, typically taken in the fifth and sixth years of secondary education. This level of qualification was reported by less than 50% of the respondents, although City and Guilds and the Advanced Craft Certificate are broadly equivalent. Further analysis reveals that 29% in 2000-01 (31% in 2001-02; 29% in 2002-03) have been accepted only with National Certificate or National Qualification modules or units at levels 4-6 (see Figure 1 on page 32) combined with work/ life experience, an indication of wider access practice. There is no significant change in the entry qualifications over the three years ( $\chi^2 = 3.38$  df = 20  $p = 1.00$ ). A small but significant minority had enrolled on an HNC/D qualification route after already completing a degree, postgraduate or professional

<sup>1</sup> Multiple response question.



qualification. In all three years almost half of these students had completed the degree, postgraduate or professional qualification within the previous five years and had therefore chosen the HNC or HND as a vocational enhancement to a recent higher education qualification. One third in each year had a previous higher education qualification that was at least ten years old and the HNC/D therefore offered an opportunity to acquire a more modern qualification or a change of direction.

Finally, students were asked to indicate when they last studied formally before starting their current course. Table 34 shows the results. Around one in three students in each year were returning to study after a long gap. Less than half had studied within the previous 5-7 years. There were no differences between full-time and part-time students.

*Table 34*

**Year last studied (%)**

	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2001-02</b>	<b>2002-03</b>
<b>Before 1960</b>	<1	0	0
<b>1960-1969</b>	2	2	2
<b>1970-1979</b>	10	9	8
<b>1980-1989</b>	23	23	18
<b>1990-1995</b>	31	28	24
<b>1996-1999</b>	24	14	14
<b>2000-to date</b>	10	24	35

*n = 462 (2000-01); 284 (2001-02); 244 (2002-03)*

The policy rhetoric about lifelong learning and much of the research to date equate lifelong learning with participation by people from all walks of life and at different stages in life. This demographic profile of three cohorts of higher education students in a college demonstrates that this has been consistently achieved over at least three years. Policy statements and research also tend to assume that lifelong learning equates with part-time study whilst wider access initiatives aim to encourage more younger people to participate in full-time higher education. This demographic profile demonstrates that both full-time and part-time modes of study attracted people of different ages, with diverse family

circumstances and with diverse starting points in terms of qualifications on entry and time elapsed since the last instance of formal study.

The commonly held demographic stereotypes of young people without work or family responsibilities studying full-time and older employed people studying part-time are not valid for these cohorts. Although there are differences in the balance of demographic characteristics between those studying full-time and those studying part-time, there is not a clear distinction. The decision about whether to study full-time or part-time does not appear to be driven by age or family circumstances. There is evidence that employment status may be a determining factor and this will be explored further in section 8.3.

No attempt was made to categorise the research subjects in respect of disadvantage. It can be assumed that some respondents came from the disadvantaged communities within the college catchment area, as Lauder College annually recruits up to 20% of its total student population from some of the 20 most disadvantaged postcodes in Scotland, according to the Scottish Further Education Funding Council. The basis for this calculation is not made available to the college. It would, however, be quite wrong to stereotype higher education students in further education colleges as being poor. Amongst the part-time students, the mean annual earnings were £19,000 in 2000-01 (s.d. £9,200); £21,000 in 2001-02 (s.d. £11,000); £19,000 in 2002-03 (s.d. £10,000). At least 25% of the respondents over the three years earned more than £23,000 per year. The median was £17,000 in 2000-01; £19,500 in 2001-02; £17,000 in 2002-03 which can be compared with median annual pay for full-time employees in the United Kingdom, which was £21,944 in April 2004. Clearly there is a range of economic circumstances amongst these students.

## 8.2 Motive and motivation to participate

In the first part of the questionnaire, students were asked to give their reasons or motives for choosing to study. This was a multiple response section followed by an opportunity also to select the two most important reasons. This approach drew on previous studies (Hopper and Osborn 1975; Woodley et al 1987;) that found that mature students had multiple aims for pursuing learning.

Six choices were instrumental/vocational i.e. related to employment prospects or to the labour market. Four choices were instrumental/self-development i.e. pursuit of a personal goal. There were two self-development choices, one social choice and a final choice “to gain a qualification”. This option was included to test the assumption (Field 2004b) that the primary output of higher education is people with recognised qualifications. Many performance indicators are also based on this assumption.

Table 35

### All Reasons (%)<sup>1</sup>

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
Gain qualification	81	82	80
Improve job prospects	75	76	69
Improve skills/knowledge for job	45	39	37
Improve skills/knowledge (personal)	44	48	49
Secure a job	43	49	46
Change employment	37	40	36
Learn about subject (personal)	29	27	26
Progress to a degree	29	37	35
Gain promotion	25	23	21
Meet people	24	27	27
Support family	18	19	19
Progress to postgraduate study	14	14	13
Employer requirement	11	9	13
Be active in community	4	5	3
<b>Average No. of responses per respondent</b>	4.8	4.9	4.7

*n* = 561 (2000-01); 356 (2001-02); 310 (2002-03)

<sup>1</sup> Multiple response question.

These results confirm (Table 35) that students do give multiple reasons for choosing to study in that each respondent selected, on average, nearly five reasons. A large majority in each year (at least 80%) wish to gain a qualification but, conversely a significant minority do not aim to do so. Although improving one's job prospects is the next most frequently chosen option, it is also worth noting the commitment to improving personal skills and knowledge in the current job that these students display. More than 1 in 3 each year are studying to make themselves more useful to their employers and therefore ultimately to the economy. Although instrumental/vocational reasons predominate, over one quarter of the students in each year were motivated to learn about a subject for personal reasons or to meet people for social reasons.

Table 36

**First and second reasons 2000-01 (%)**

	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>	<b>All</b>
	<b>First reason</b>			<b>Second reason</b>		
<b>Instrumental/Vocational</b>						
Secure a job	31	8	17	10	3	6
Change employment	18	11	14	6	6	6
Gain promotion	1	12	8	0	5	3
Improve job prospects	16	27	23	22	23	23
Improve skills/knowledge for job	0	16	10	4	18	13
Employer requirement	1	5	3	0	3	2
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Instrumental/Personal</b>						
Progress to a degree	11	3	6	8	6	7
Progress to postgraduate	4	2	2	3	3	3
Be active in community	1	0	0	1	0	0
Support family	4	2	3	9	3	5
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Self-development</b>						
Learn about subject	5	0	2	2	5	4
Improve skills/knowledge (personal)	3	7	5	10	8	9
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Meet people</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Gain qualification</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>

*n* = 517 (First reason)

*n* = 509 (Second reason)

Table 37

**First and second reasons 2001-02 (%)**

	FT	PT	All	FT	PT	All
	First reason			Second reason		
<b>Instrumental/Vocational</b>						
Secure a job	33	10	21	10	4	7
Change employment	13	14	14	9	4	7
Gain promotion	1	16	9	0	6	3
Improve job prospects	22	25	23	16	20	18
Improve skills/knowledge for job	0	14	7	0	18	9
Employer requirement	1	2	2	0	3	2
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Instrumental/Personal</b>						
Progress to a degree	14	5	9	9	7	8
Progress to postgraduate	1	1	1	1	3	2
Be active in community	0	0	0	1	0	0
Support family	0	2	1	10	3	6
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Self-development</b>						
Learn about subject	2	2	2	3	3	3
Improve skills/knowledge (personal)	4	3	4	10	14	12
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Meet people</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Gain qualification</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>23</b>

*n* = 325 (First reason)

*n* = 318 (Second reason)

Table 38

**First and second reasons 2002-03 (% of valid cases)**

	FT	PT	All	FT	PT	All
	First reason			Second reason		
<b>Instrumental/Vocational</b>						
Secure a job	33	12	21	8	2	5
Change employment	9	12	11	8	4	6
Gain promotion	1	15	9	0	5	3
Improve job prospects	17	20	18	22	21	21
Improve skills/knowledge for job	0	12	7	2	12	8
Employer requirement	0	10	6	0	5	3
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Instrumental/Personal</b>						
Progress to a degree	12	4	7	12	7	9
Progress to postgraduate	2	1	1	0	3	2
Be active in community	2	0	1	0	0	0
Support family	6	2	4	7	2	4
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Self-development</b>						
Learn about subject	3	2	2	2	3	3
Improve skills/knowledge (personal)	5	4	5	7	13	11
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Meet people</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Gain qualification</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>

*n* = 277 (First reason)

*n* = 267 (Second reason)

Turning to the first and second most important reasons, a clear picture emerges. Gaining a qualification, which was the most frequently selected option in the multiple response section, is the primary aim of only 6% to 8% and the second aim of only 18% to 25%. The primary category of motive is overwhelmingly instrumental/vocational with 72% to 76% choosing an option in this category as their most important reason and 46% to 53% choosing one as their second most important reason. The vocational aims are also clearly personal in that, although 9% to 13% indicate that their employer requires them to study, the percentage choosing this as a primary or secondary reason is much lower. Similarly,

although progress to degree or postgraduate/professional study is given as a reason by around 50% of students, this does not carry through into first and second most important reasons, demonstrating that vocational motives precede academic progression motives. The Scottish Further Education Funding Council publishes programme completion rates and qualification achievement rates for qualifications as indicators of the quality of provision in colleges (SFEFC 2003). My results suggest that these indicators should be viewed with some caution, given that the primary objectives of the students were not framed in terms of completion of qualifications. It is possible that some students could achieve their primary aim of improving their position within the labour market without gaining a qualification. The results also underline the importance, for the college, of supporting students to achieve their vocational and not just their academic objectives.

It is also interesting to note specifically that only around one third of students chose progressing to a degree as a reason and less than 10% in each year gave this as a first or second most important reason. This casts some doubt on Field's (2004a; 2004b) comments on the reasons why relatively few who achieve a higher education qualification in a further education college subsequently progress to degree level study. Field assumes that the reasons that large numbers do not progress lie with failings in the colleges, failings in the availability of articulation routes and unwillingness on the part of some more prestigious "selecting" universities to accept articulating students. This approach appears to disregard the possibility that students consider HNC or HND qualifications to be valid in their own right for entry to or progress within the labour market rather than simply as a route to a degree. The HND was traditionally a qualification goal in Scotland as an alternative to a degree and may continue to be so for some students.

Blaxter and Tight (1993b) noted that motivation for adult learning in general varies with age and gender. Young adults and men are more likely to give employment related reasons for learning: women and older people are more likely to claim that they are learning for personal satisfaction or self-development. My results show a similar



association between age and most important reason for study in all three years<sup>1</sup>. Younger people are more likely to have specific vocational reasons or to be required to study by an employer. Older people have a broader range of reasons and are more likely to have a personal motive. My findings in respect of gender differ from previous theories to some extent. I found association between gender and most important reason for study in 2000-01 and 2002-03<sup>2</sup>. In both years both male and female students had strong vocational motives. Men were more likely to be studying to gain promotion or because of a requirement on the part of their employers. Women were more likely to be seeking a job. In 2000-01 only, women were more likely to choose supporting the family as the primary reason for study. In both years women were more likely than men to choose gaining a qualification or to wish to progress to a degree or to post graduate study.

Successful enrolment results from motivation as well as motive. In other words, successful enrolment requires a student to have a reason for wanting to study and to perceive a feasible opportunity to pursue his/her goal. To explore one aspect of motivation, students were asked if they had considered other institutions before choosing Lauder College and then why they had chosen Lauder College. In each year, the majority of respondents (74% in 2001, 71% in 2002 and 70% in 2003) had not considered applying to other institutions. Part-time students were not significantly more likely (77% in 2001, 74% in 2002 and 73% in 2003) to have considered alternatives<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2000-01	$\chi^2 = 392.86$	df=84	p = < 0.001	Cramer's V = .360
2001-02	$\chi^2 = 191.51$	df=78	p = < 0.001	Cramer's V = .318
2002-03	$\chi^2 = 146.03$	df=84	p = < 0.001	Cramer's V = .304

These results include some respondents who were under age 25 (6.5 % in 2000-01; 8.3% in 2001-02; 9.5% in 2003-03).

<sup>2</sup> 2000-01	$\chi^2 = 41.62$	df=14	p = < 0.001	Cramer's V = .284
2001-02	$\chi^2 = 8.73$	df=13	p = < 0.793	Cramer's V = .165
2002-03	$\chi^2 = 30.89$	df=14	p = < 0.01	Cramer's V = .334 .

<sup>3</sup> 2000-01	$\chi = 6.25$	df=1	p = 0.012
2001-02	$\chi = 1.62$	df=1	p = 0.203
2002-03	$\chi = 1.90$	df=1	p = 0.168.

Table 39

**Reasons for choosing Lauder College (%)<sup>1</sup>**

	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2001-02</b>	<b>2002-03</b>
<b>Prefer to study locally</b>	68	64	61
<b>Lauder would best help me achieve my objectives</b>	41	40	38
<b>Favourable impression when I visited</b>	27	30	27
<b>Favourable impression gained from others</b>	24	25	16
<b>Do not have qualifications for university</b>	21	23	23
<b>Employer directed me</b>	20	14	17
<b>Did not consider university suitable</b>	13	14	15
<b>Not able to travel</b>	12	17	18
<b>No other college offers programme</b>	8	8	10
<b>No other college offers class times</b>	7	9	8
<b>Average No. of responses</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.3</b>

*n = 553 (2000-01); 348 (2001-02); 306 (2002-03)*

Table 39 shows that students had chosen Lauder College predominantly because of a preference to study locally or because of positive perceptions about the institution. Negative reasons (e.g. other choices were unavailable) were selected less frequently. Table 40 confirms the importance of geography with over 70% of students choosing, as their first or second reason, a preference to study locally or an inability to travel elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup> Multiple response question.

Table 40

**First and second reasons for choosing Lauder College (%)**

	2000-01		2001-02		2002-03	
	First reason	Second reason	First reason	Second reason	First reason	Second reason
<b>Prefer to study locally</b>	47	18	47	17	47	14
<b>Employer directed me</b>	10	7	7	5	11	6
<b>Not able to travel</b>	9	3	12	2	12	2
<b>Lauder would best help me achieve my objectives</b>	8	22	8	23	6	28
<b>No other college offers programme</b>	6	2	5	2	7	2
<b>Favourable impression gained from other people</b>	5	11	6	9	4	5
<b>Do not have qualifications for university</b>	4	9	4	12	3	14
<b>Favourable impression when I visited</b>	4	16	5	16	4	14
<b>No other college offers class times</b>	1	5	3	4	3	3
<b>Did not consider university suitable</b>	0	6	1	5	2	8
<b>Other<sup>1</sup></b>	4	4	3	5	3	4

*n* = 540 (2000-01); 340 (2001-02); 296 (2002-03)

Section 1.3 demonstrated that colleges in Scotland make a distinctive contribution to higher education provision in that their mission is to serve local communities. For example, the Association of Scottish Colleges (2003) reports that 90% of the population of Scotland lives within 30 minutes of a college and 40% lives within 2 miles of a college. Colleges primarily offer HNC and HND qualifications that are vocational in content and are offered both full-time and part-time with the latter mode having higher numbers of students across Scotland. Colleges also offer distinctive learning environments with more extensive support services for learners, low class sizes, high staff: student ratios and more student: lecturer contact than universities.

<sup>1</sup> Mixed range of reasons, the most frequent being that the student had studied at Lauder College previously.

This part of the research appears to confirm that these students value the factors that differentiate colleges from universities in that their vocational motives are matched by a vocational curriculum and that their preference to study locally is a priority. At least 70% of these students in each year did not consider an alternative to their local college; and in each year less than 8% indicated that the experience of studying was not meeting their expectations. This aspect of the research is limited by the fact that students were not asked whether, ideally, they would have preferred to go elsewhere, nor whether, hypothetically, they would have applied elsewhere if Lauder College had not existed or had rejected their application.

The participants in the focus groups exemplified that, although vocational motives were common, there were many variations in the vocational orientation in addition to the obvious one of wishing to get a job. This led to the inclusion of a range of vocational choices in the questionnaire. Participants spoke about improving their general job prospects:

“it makes me a more marketable product”

or getting a job generally in a specific industry sector such as computing or tourism. One participant had been a manager in industry and was retraining in care as she wanted to do a job where she could “make a difference to people.”

Several of the participants exemplified the wish to improve their knowledge or skills for their current jobs:

“I discovered a knowledge gap in the work I’m doing.”

“I feel it would help me do my job better.”

One spoke about the confidence that professional knowledge would give her in a job in the future:

“You need to be knowledgeable to put it across properly and in a professional manner.”

The older, retired participants were learning for personal interest but, in both cases (Financial Services and Furniture Restoration), they intended to use their skills to earn additional money. One spoke about gaining the confidence to be able to charge for the service he planned to provide.

Other contributory factors in the decision to participate were self-improvement, self-confidence, self-esteem and gaining esteem from others and enjoyment of learning. The focus groups included women returners who had taken up study after having children. As well as having vocational aspirations, they expressed strong feelings about learning contributing to renewed self-esteem:

“It was really something to stimulate you... you sort of get this idea, well I must be thick but you think you’re really a lot more intelligent than you give yourself credit for.”

“I’ve got to do something. I can’t just stay in the house and look at the walls. I need something more for the kids.”

The dominant theme was one of diverse motives but very clear and specific ones. These were not school leavers who had embarked on full-time study in institutions that served “as a kind of warehouse, where they are shelved between leaving school and starting work, rather than as a positive choice” (Field 2000a p136). They had actively chosen

college for positive reasons. Their desires to improve their labour market position, to extend their knowledge and skill or to develop confidence or self-esteem were strongly stated and personally important. Even the two school leavers who were in the focus groups were forthright about using their college education positively as a “stepping stone” to a career or progression to university.

The results of the questionnaires and focus groups confirm that it is not helpful to seek out single categories of goals, as earlier researchers did, as this is over-simplistic. Most learners have a range of motives associated with and interwoven with other developments in their personal, family and work life. Some expressed unsolicited support for the concept of lifelong learning as being a natural part of modern life:

“Life doesn’t stand still and if you stand still with your qualifications then you don’t get anywhere.”

“It was two years since I finished my last course of study. I was ready to start again.”

“I’ve always been a lifelong learner.”

Self definition as a lifelong learner applied to over 70% of the questionnaire respondents as will be discussed in more detail later.

The concept of higher education being a multi-faceted part of life rather than something to do after school was strongly confirmed in the section of the focus group discussions where participants were asked if they had ever considered giving up and, if so, what motivated them to continue. There were some instances of instrumental factors influencing the decision to stay in. One individual, when encountering difficulties, had rationalised continuing by remembering that:

“what I wanted was to be able to walk out of here and be self-employable.”

Many students began by declaring, in the early part of the discussion, reasons for studying that were instrumental and/or vocational. This was later underpinned by statements about personal engagement with learning that was connected to self-esteem, meeting personal standards of performance, gaining esteem from others and maximising the value of learning for personal reasons. These illustrative extracts reveal strong intrinsic motivation to survive and excel often in difficult circumstances.

“I like to start something and I like to finish it.”

“I wasn’t letting anybody see me failing, not my ex-husband and I don’t want my kids to know that their Mum’s never achieved something for them.”

“I did it for them (family) as well as myself to show them that I could still do things and I still had a brain and I wasn’t this poor old soul that was going to be stuck in the house for ever either.”

“I wouldn’t feel any kind of satisfaction in getting an assessment handed back to me and being told, well, it’s a pass but it’s not a merit.”

“I’m always going to do more than was ever asked of me.”

One student was company-sponsored but there was, even in his case, an element of esteem involved:

“You wouldn’t want them to think that you were incompetent, not capable of doing it, letting them down when they’d paid for you.”

One other aspect of the focus group discussions contributes to conclusions about motive and motivation. Participants were asked to comment on why they had not chosen to go to university either as an option at this stage or when they left school. The responses fell into three categories. Some students recalled not feeling “ready” for higher education when they left school; some did not consider themselves “suitable” for university when they left school, often as a result of the perceived attitude of others; some were prevented by circumstances e.g. illness or lack of parental support.

In some instances, there is a sense of recovering lost opportunity and this contributes to intrinsic motivation. These quotations illustrate this.

“It’s something I’ve always regretted and, you know, at the back of my mind, I’ve always planned to go back and do it properly.”

“When you were at school, you knew who was going to university and you knew who is not and I think I just put myself in the I’m not league. But I’m glad that I’ve not wasted too much time from leaving school and coming back into education ....I feel good about that.”

In summary the learners in this study displayed a complex range of motives with an overriding importance placed on vocational outcomes in the questionnaire. The focus groups provided evidence of additional strong underlying personal motivation to succeed linked to realisation of potential and self-esteem. Locally available higher education contributed to motivation to enrol in most cases.

This evidence supports Courtney’s (1992) conclusion that participation is driven by “encounter with change” but extends it to suggest that the desire for change can be internally as well as externally driven. Motive and motivation for the learners in this study



was driven by proactive desire to achieve vocational and personal change as well as reaction to externally imposed change such as redundancy or career block. Overall, these cohorts of learners appear to have actively chosen to learn and to believe in the value of learning for personal and vocational reasons. This strong extrinsic and intrinsic motivation may be an important factor in influencing sustained participation in the face of conflicting pressures, which will be discussed later.

### 8.3 Learning, work and family life

This section uses the questionnaire and focus group data to create a vivid description of the life experience of the students, by describing the scope and nature of the activities and commitments that they combined with studying.

Over three quarters (77%) of the students in 2000-01 had a job and nearly three quarters of those who had a job (72%) worked for 30 or more hours per week during term time. This dropped to 61% with a job in 2001-02 and rose again to 72% with a job in 2002-03. In 2001-02 and 2002-03, the proportion of those in a job who worked more than 30 hours in term time was 65% and 66% respectively. The mean number of hours worked was 34 (s.d.12) in 2000-01; 32 (s.d.13.5) in 2001-02; and 33 (s.d.12) in 2002-03. During college vacations, 79% of those with a job worked 30 or more hours per week (78% in 2001-02 and 76% in 2002-03) with the mean being 36, 35 and 35 in the three respective years. Working hours and patterns varied considerably with at least one third working outwith the normal working week of Monday to Friday during the day. Table 41, Table 42, Table 43 and Table 44 demonstrate the differences between full-time and part-time students, which are not as marked as might have been expected.

Table 41

#### Do you have a job? (% YES)

	ALL	FT	PT
<b>2000-01</b>	77	47	95
<b>2001-02</b>	61	33	89
<b>2002-03</b>	72	40	95

*n* = 563 (2000-01); 357 (2001-02); 311 (2002-03)

Table 42

**Hours worked per week during term-time (% of those employed)**

		> 20	> 30
<b>2000-01</b>	<b>FT</b>	36	11
	<b>PT</b>	95	88
<b>2001-02</b>	<b>FT</b>	29	9
	<b>PT</b>	96	85
<b>2002-03</b>	<b>FT</b>	38	4
	<b>PT</b>	95	83

Table 43

**Hours worked per week outwith term-time (% of those employed)**

		> 20	> 30
<b>2000-01</b>	<b>FT</b>	71	39
	<b>PT</b>	94	90
<b>2001-02</b>	<b>FT</b>	61	34
	<b>PT</b>	97	91
<b>2002-03</b>	<b>FT</b>	57	29
	<b>PT</b>	93	92

Table 44

## Time of work (% of those employed)

	2000-01		
	All	FT	PT
Mainly during the day (Monday to Friday)	58	11	72
Mainly during the evening (Monday to Friday)	5	14	2
Mainly during the day (Weekend)	5	24	0
Mainly evening (Weekend)	2	8	0
Mainly shift work	16	11	17
Different times	14	32	9
	2001-02		
	All	FT	PT
Mainly during the day (Monday to Friday)	66	14	84
Mainly during the evening (Monday to Friday)	3	12	0
Mainly during the day (Weekend)	6	19	1
Mainly evening (Weekend)	3	14	0
Mainly shift work	6	4	7
Different times	16	37	8
	2002-03		
	All	FT	PT
Mainly during the day (Monday to Friday)	69	6	87
Mainly during the evening (Monday to Friday)	7	28	1
Mainly during the day (Weekend)	6	25	1
Mainly evening (Weekend)	1	6	1
Mainly shift work	6	4	6
Different times	11	30	6

Of the part-time students, almost all students in each of the three years said they had a job. Of the full-time students, 47% said they had a job in 2000-01 (33% in 2001-02 and 40% in 2002-03) (Table 41). Of the part time working students, at least 83% were working 30 or more hours per week during term time. Of the full-time students only 11% were working in excess of 30 hours per week (9% in 2001-02 and 4% in 2002-03) although a further proportion of the full-time students worked between 20 and 29 hours per week during term time in 2000-01 making a total of 36% working 20 or more hours in 2000-01

(29% in 2001-02 and 38% in 2002-03). During college vacations, the proportion of employed full time students working 20 or more and 30 or more hours went up to 71% and 39% respectively steadily decreasing over the three years. Working patterns varied between the full time and part time students as might have been expected (Table 44). However it is important to note that only 32% of the employed full time students in 2000-01 worked mainly at weekends with 68% spending a proportion of Monday to Friday at work. This proportion did not vary over the three years of the study.

It is not surprising that the majority of part time students worked substantial hours during the normal working week and that this did not change significantly over the three years of the study. There are, however, some interesting trends in the working activity of the full time students.

The proportion of full-time students working trends downwards over the three years as does the percentage of people working over 30 hours per week (Tables 42 and 43) although there is no clear trend in the mean hours worked (Table 45). This may be attributable to changes in student funding, in particular the abolition of up-front tuition-fees in 2001.

*Table 45*

**Mean and Median Hours Worked by FT Employed Students**

	Term-time			Outwith term-time		
	Mean	Standard deviation	Median	Mean	Standard deviation	Median
<b>2000-01</b>	18	8	17	26	12	25
<b>2001-02</b>	16	9	15	24	16	20
<b>2002-03</b>	16	7	16	24	13	20

2000-01 *n=88 (term-time); n=69 (outwith term-time)*

2001-02 *n=56 (term-time); n=41 (outwith term-time)*

2002-03 *n=47( term-time); n=35(outwith term-time)*

In year 3 there is a shift from working during the day (Monday to Friday) to during the evening (Monday to Friday). Generally there is variation in the patterns of work of the full

time students over the three years, possibly reflecting changes in the availability of local jobs and possibly reflecting a decision on the part of the College to establish a Job Resource Centre to assist students to find jobs during the evenings or weekends (for example in call centres) to avoid disruption to their studies.

Of those answering the question in 2001, only 14% chose to respond that their college course was more important to them than their job (Table 46). Overall, 49% rated their job as more important and 37% rated both as equally important. There was a difference between full- time and part-time students as might be expected but, even amongst the full-time students, 9% rated their job as more important and 37% rated both job and college course as equally important. This contrasts with the findings of Winn and Stevenson (1997) who found that all university students gave priority to their course. Equally surprising, 37% of the part-time students rated both college course and job as equal. These results vary only marginally over the three years of the study.

*Table 46*

**Prioritisation of college or work 2000-01 (%)**

	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>College</b>	55	2	14
<b>Job</b>	9	61	49
<b>Both equal</b>	36	37	37

*n = 430*

Students were next asked to select reasons for having a job. This was a multiple response question and those who responded each gave an average of 1.6 reasons. The results are given in Table 47.

Table 47

**Reasons for having a job (%)<sup>1</sup>**

	<b>2000-01</b>		
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Work experience relevant to study</b>	25	19	27
<b>Money for fees /study expenses</b>	18	39	12
<b>Money for living expenses</b>	24	65	12
<b>Pay for extras</b>	19	48	10
<b>Career/ professional job</b>	69	18	84
	<b>2001-02</b>		
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Work experience relevant to study</b>	28	27	28
<b>Money for study</b>	18	41	10
<b>Money for living expenses</b>	26	62	13
<b>Pay for extras</b>	22	55	9
<b>Career/professional job</b>	62	13	80
	<b>2002-03</b>		
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Work experience relevant to study</b>	21	17	22
<b>Money for study</b>	18	40	12
<b>Money for living expenses</b>	26	54	18
<b>Pay for extras</b>	21	46	14
<b>Career/ professional jobs</b>	65	10	81

*n* = 423 (2000-01); *n* = 217(2001-02); *n* = 216 (2002-03)

The responses of full-time and part-time students are again worthy of note. The majority (84%, 80%, 81%) of part-time employed students were in a career or professional role and the majority of full-time employed students were working for financial reasons but both categories also selected other options. A minority of full-time students had a professional or career job and, conversely, a minority of part-time students did not select this option. The spread of choices for full-time students was greater and each full-time student, on average, chose marginally more reasons than each part-time student.

<sup>1</sup> Multiple response question.

These findings suggest that employment status was a determining factor in whether students chose to study full-time or part-time but not the only one. The data offers evidence of behaviours and attitudes that depart from traditional assumptions about full-time and part-time students. The expected stereotypes of an unemployed student choosing to study full-time and working as a secondary activity and an employed student choosing to study part-time as a secondary activity are only partially present. There is evidence of a mix of priorities amongst these full-time and part-time students and a blurring of the clear distinction that underpins policy in fees and financial support. This points to a need for more research into the reasons for people choosing to study full-time or part-time, as traditional assumptions may be becoming less valid.



Turning to family circumstances, the results for all students and the split for full-time and part-time are shown in Table 48.

Table 48

**Family circumstances (%)**

	<b>2000-01</b>		
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Living with parents/ guardian</b>	26	32	22
<b>Living with spouse/ partner</b>	20	13	24
<b>Living with spouse/ partner and children</b>	34	26	40
<b>Living with friends/ other adults</b>	3	3	3
<b>Living alone</b>	9	10	8
<b>Living with own children</b>	6	11	3
<b>Other</b>	2	4	1
	<b>2001-02</b>		
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Living with parents/ guardian</b>	31	38	23
<b>Living with spouse/ partner</b>	18	14	22
<b>Living with spouse/ partner and children</b>	32	22	42
<b>Living with friends/ other adults</b>	1	1	1
<b>Living alone</b>	10	11	8
<b>Living with own children</b>	8	12	4
<b>Other</b>	1	2	0
	<b>2002-03</b>		
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Living with parents/ guardian</b>	34	40	31
<b>Living with spouse/ partner</b>	18	15	21
<b>Living with spouse/ partner and children</b>	30	23	34
<b>Living with friends/ other adults</b>	2	5	1
<b>Living alone</b>	10	10	9
<b>Living with own children</b>	6	8	4
<b>Other</b>	0	0	0

*n* = 561 (2000-01); 349 (2001-01); 309 (2002-03)

These results show some interesting patterns. Although nearly two thirds of the part-time students were living with a spouse or partner, with or without children, at least one in three were in less potentially stable situations and 22% in 2000-01 (23% in 2001-02 and 31% in 2002-03) were living with parents or guardian. Of the full-time students, only 13% were living alone or with friends. Nearly 40% were living with a spouse or partner. This breakdown again shows a shift away from the stereotype of a young student living alone or in the parental home and studying full-time compared with an adult living with a spouse

or partner and studying part-time. Only 52% of the students in my study confirm to these two traditional norms. Combining the results for family circumstances with the results for the employment status of the students demonstrates the potential for busy lives with pressure on time. Nearly 50% of the students in 2000-01 were living with spouse/partner and/or children or with children as a single parent and had a job. Conversely the proportion of students who lived alone or with parents or friends and did not have a job was only 9%. The most frequent combination (27% of the total of those responding to both questions) was to be living with spouse/partner and children and working. In 2001-02 and 2002-03 a somewhat greater proportion of full-time students lived at home with parents and the proportion in the most frequent category dropped to 21%. A separate analysis was undertaken to identify the proportion of students who have no job and no care responsibilities. The outcome was only 10% in 2000-01, 19% in 2002-03 and 17% in 2002-02. Further separating out those who have no job, no care responsibilities and no spouse or partner leaves a residual proportion of only 7% in 2001-02, 15% in 2002-02 and 13% in 2002-03.

This potential for a demanding lifestyle is also reflected in the students' analysis of how they spend their time during a typical week. Each student was asked to estimate the number of hours spent during a typical week on: studying; working; travelling to/from work/college; domestic tasks/care; family time, social activities, personal pursuits or relaxation. The questionnaire invited respondents to assume a "working" week of 120 hours (7 hours sleep per night) and, on the basis of the averages, the question appears to have been understood and completed in a valid manner<sup>1</sup>. Table 49, Table 50, Table 51, Table 52, Table 53 and Table 54 present the results<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> During the data cleaning and validation process, a small number of incomplete entries was deleted, mainly where the total activity for the week was recorded as less than 20 hours.

<sup>2</sup> The mean has been used throughout and zero responses are excluded. Therefore the results are valid for those students who work and have domestic responsibilities of some kind.

Table 49

**Mean hours spent per week on categories of activity: 2000-01**

	All	FT	PT
<b>Study</b>	20	33	12
<b>Work</b>	35	20	41
<b>Travel</b>	5	5	6
<b>Domestic</b>	12	13	12
<b>Family/ social</b>	34	31	36
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Total (excluding family/ social time)</b>	72	71	71

*n* = 524

Table 50

**Mean hours spent per week on categories of activity split by gender and mode of attendance: 2000-01**

	Male		Female	
	FT	PT	FT	PT
<b>Study</b>	30	12	34	12
<b>Work</b>	19	43	20	38
<b>Travel</b>	5	6	5	5
<b>Domestic</b>	10	10	15	14
<b>Family/ social</b>	39	39	27	31
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total (excluding family/ social time)</b>	64	71	74	69

*n* = 523

Table 51

**Mean hours spent per week on categories of activity: 2001-02**

	All	FT	PT
<b>Study</b>	23	32	13
<b>Work</b>	32	19	40
<b>Travel</b>	6	5	6
<b>Domestic</b>	11	10	12
<b>Family/ social</b>	31	30	32
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Total (excluding family/social time)</b>	72	66	71

*n* = 324

Table 52

Mean hours spent per week on categories of activity split by gender and mode of attendance: 2001-02

	Male		Female	
	FT	PT	FT	PT
<b>Study</b>	35	12	31	15
<b>Work</b>	17	42	21	37
<b>Travel</b>	5	6	5	6
<b>Domestic</b>	9	10	11	16
<b>Social</b>	35	34	26	29
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Total (excluding family/social time)</b>	66	70	67	72

*n* = 321

Table 53

Mean hours split by category of activity: 2002-03

	All	FT	PT
<b>Study</b>	21	33	13
<b>Work</b>	34	18	40
<b>Travel</b>	5	4	5
<b>Domestic</b>	13	16	12
<b>Family/ social</b>	37	35	38
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Total (excluding family/ social time)</b>	73	71	70

*n* = 269

Table 54

Mean hours spent on categories of activity split by gender and mode of attendance: 2003-03

	Male		Female	
	FT	PT	FT	PT
<b>Study</b>	36	13	31	13
<b>Work</b>	19	41	18	37
<b>Travel</b>	4	5	5	5
<b>Domestic</b>	12	9	18	16
<b>Family/ social</b>	38	42	33	29
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total (excluding family/social time)</b>	71	68	72	71

*n* = 269

This is a remarkably consistent average picture across the three years. All students are putting in a “working” week of 64-74 hours with the balance between work and study reversed on average between full-time and part-time students. Female students spend more time on domestic tasks, have less social time and therefore have a harder week. There is no real difference between full-time and part-time students in terms of overall demands on time and potential for overload and conflict.

If zero responses are included, the mean values are, of course, reduced. Whereas these results would be arithmetically correct, they include students who chose not to complete this section or whose entries were invalid as well as those whose actual response was zero. Even including the zero responses, the mean “working” week for full time and part time students is 60 hours and 67 hours respectively as an average for all respondents in 2000-01.

The range of responses is also worth noting. On average full-time students (2000-01) spent 33 hours per week studying and 20 hours working whilst part-time students spent 12 hours studying and 41 hours per week working. The range of responses indicates, however, a spectrum of combinations of activity rather than a polarisation. For example, in 2000-01, the interquartile ranges were as shown in Table 55.

*Table 55*

**Hours spent per week on categories of activity: 2000-01**

	Full-time			Part-time		
	Median	25 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	Median	25 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile
<b>Study</b>	30	23	40	10	8	15
<b>Work</b>	18	12	25	40	37	48
<b>Travel</b>	4	2	6	4	2	8
<b>Domestic</b>	10	6	20	8	4	15
<b>Family/ social</b>	30	15	44	30	20	50

*n* = 524

Earlier studies (Smith and Taylor 1999; Metcalf 2001) evaluated the negative impact of working on students' capacity to study effectively and successfully. In my research, I asked students to rate both the positive and negative impact of working and of their family circumstances.

Taking work first, students evaluated the nature of the impact on study as shown in Table 56.

*Table 56*

**Impact of work on study (%)**

<b>2000-01</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Negative impact</b>	25	26	24
<b>Positive impact</b>	9	4	11
<b>Both positive and negative</b>	49	45	51
<b>No impact</b>	17	26	14
<b>2001-02</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Negative impact</b>	20	20	20
<b>Positive impact</b>	17	9	20
<b>Both positive and negative</b>	46	42	47
<b>No impact</b>	17	29	13
<b>2002-03</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Negative impact</b>	25	38	21
<b>Positive impact</b>	11	8	11
<b>Both positive and negative</b>	51	36	55
<b>No impact</b>	14	18	12

*n = 429 (2000-01); 218 (2001-02); 220 (2002-03)*

For at least 74% of students, work had a negative impact on their ability to study effectively but over 50% recorded a positive impact. Full-time students were more likely to perceive no impact. Part-time students were more likely to perceive both positive and negative impact. Only a minority of students, both full-time and part-time, perceived work

to have a wholly negative impact. Students were then asked to identify the nature of the negative and positive impacts (Table 57).

Table 57

**Negative impact of work on study (%)<sup>1</sup>**

<b>2000-01</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Less time to study</b>	74	77	73
<b>Miss classes</b>	21	12	24
<b>Miss deadlines</b>	26	20	28
<b>Not well prepared for assessments</b>	21	10	24
<b>Tiring work makes study time less productive</b>	72	71	72
<b>2001-02</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Less time to study</b>	76	78	75
<b>Miss classes</b>	24	14	27
<b>Miss deadlines</b>	23	27	22
<b>Not well prepared for assessments</b>	13	14	13
<b>Tiring work makes study time less productive</b>	73	52	80
<b>2002-03</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Less time to study</b>	79	81	78
<b>Miss classes</b>	23	16	25
<b>Miss deadlines</b>	23	38	19
<b>Not well prepared for assessments</b>	18	22	17
<b>Tiring work makes study time less productive</b>	73	65	75

*n* = 319 (2000-01); 144 (2001-02); 164 (2002-03)

In 2000-01, part-time students recorded higher scores in those choices that directly affect performance and were more likely to miss classes and deadlines and be less well prepared for assessments. In 2001-02 and 2002-03 the problem for full-time students became more evident in terms of missing classes and deadlines but they coped better with the overall impact of tiring work. In general the picture for full-time students worsened in 2002-03 with a rise in the proportion recording a generally negative impact as

<sup>1</sup> Multiple response question.

well as in the proportion of those recording specific aspects of negative impact. This is noteworthy in the context of the findings in Table 45 that the number of hours worked, on average, had declined. However, in 2003-03, there is an increase in the proportion of full-time students working during the weekday evenings (Table 44), suggesting perhaps a link between time of work and negative impact.

Table 58

**Positive impact of work on study (%)<sup>1</sup>**

<b>2000-01</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>PT</b>
<b>Experience relevant to study</b>	78	45	86
<b>Helps manage time</b>	13	9	15
<b>More money reduces stress</b>	30	68	21
<b>Other</b>	4	6	4
<b>2001-02</b>			
<b>Experience relevant to study</b>	75	33	85
<b>Helps manage time</b>	17	22	15
<b>More money reduces stress</b>	27	67	17
<b>2002-03</b>			
<b>Experience relevant to study</b>	74	32	82
<b>Helps manage time</b>	14	23	12
<b>More money reduces stress</b>	24	64	16
<b>Other</b>	6	65	6

*n* = 247 (2000-01); 141 (2001-02); 134 (2002-03)

For full-time students, the most positive impact of work was to reduce stress by improving financial circumstances, although 45% of those responding in 2000-01 indicated that their work provided experience relevant to their studies. This reduced in 2001-02 and 2002-03. For both categories of student and particularly for part-time students, the relevance of work to the course of study is a significant positive factor. Whilst this is not surprising, given the vocational curriculum for the HNC and HND qualifications, it confirms that these students perceive lifelong learning primarily in economic terms and value the inter-

<sup>1</sup> Multiple response question.



relationship between work and study as contributing to their competitiveness within the labour market.

Turning to the impact of family circumstances, the overall impact, both positive and negative, is shown in Table 59.

*Table 59*

**Impact of family circumstances on study (%)**

	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2001-02</b>	<b>2002-03</b>
<b>Negative impact</b>	17	13	16
<b>Positive impact</b>	24	27	23
<b>Both positive and negative</b>	37	34	33
<b>No impact</b>	22	26	28

*n = 558 (2000-01); 347 (2001-02); 301 (2002-03)*

Students were again asked to identify the nature of the impact, both positive and negative, by selecting from a multiple response list. Table 61 and Table 62 record the proportion of respondents who selected each option.

Generally, family circumstances had less negative and more positive impact than work and less overall impact. Nevertheless almost half of the students recorded a perceived negative impact. There was no significant difference between full-time and part-time students.

*Table 60*

**Home impact split by gender (% of valid cases)**

	<b>2000-01</b>		<b>2001-02</b>		<b>2002-03</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Negative impact</b>	16	18	14	12	14	19
<b>Positive impact</b>	26	23	29	26	24	22
<b>Both positive and negative impact</b>	28	45	22	45	26	41
<b>No impact</b>	30	15	36	17	37	17

*n = 558 (2000-01); 344 (2001-02); 305 (2002-03)*

Table 61

**Negative impact of family circumstances (%)<sup>1</sup>**

<b>2000-01</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>No space to study effectively</b>	16	13	19
<b>Difficult to find peace and quiet</b>	50	52	49
<b>Demands of family make it difficult</b>	81	79	82
<b>2001-02</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>No space to study effectively</b>	21	26	17
<b>Difficult to find peace and quiet</b>	54	54	54
<b>Demands of family make it difficult</b>	72	63	77
<b>2002-03</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>No space to study effectively</b>	20	15	24
<b>Difficult to find peace and quiet</b>	52	48	54
<b>Demands of family make it difficult</b>	74	78	71

*n* = 268 (2000-01); 161 (2001-02); 143 (2002-03)

<sup>1</sup> Multiple response questions.

Table 62

**Positive impact of family circumstances (%)<sup>1</sup>**

<b>2000-01</b>			
	<b>All</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Good quality study space at home</b>	64	67	61
<b>Study in peace and quiet at home</b>	56	56	57
<b>Study at times that are good for me</b>	68	67	68
<b>Enjoy studying with family members who are also studying</b>	6	8	6
<b>Like to set a good example to other family members</b>	17	12	21
<b>2001-02</b>			
<b>Good quality study space at home</b>	67	69	65
<b>Study in peace and quiet at home</b>	58	63	54
<b>Study at times that are good for me</b>	68	71	65
<b>Enjoy studying with family members who are also studying</b>	5	3	6
<b>Like to set a good example to other family members</b>	21	11	29
<b>2002-03</b>			
<b>Good quality study space at home</b>	61	66	56
<b>Study in peace and quiet at home</b>	61	64	59
<b>Study at times that are good for me</b>	68	65	70
<b>Enjoy studying with family members who are also studying</b>	7	3	10
<b>Like to set a good example to other family members</b>	18	14	23

*n* = 344 (2000-01); 237 (2001-02); 197 (2002-03)

Given the traditionally greater responsibility for the home assumed by women, it is interesting to review these results split by gender rather than by mode of study (Table 60, Table 61 and Table 62). The work impact results show no significant difference between men and women. However, there is a gender difference in respect of home impact. The family circumstances impact results show, overall, a greater negative impact and positive impact for women. Women are more likely to enjoy studying with other family members and to wish to set a good example to other family members.

<sup>1</sup> Multiple response question.

An analysis of hours spent per week on care and domestic responsibilities confirms that the higher negative impact for women is explained, at least in part, by the higher demands on them.

*Table 63*

**Mean hours per week spent on care/ domestic responsibilities split by gender**

	<b>All</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>2000-01</b>	22(s.d.20)	17(s.d.13)	25(s.d.24)
<b>2001-02</b>	25(s.d.27)	16(s.d.13)	33(s.d.33)
<b>2002-03</b>	22(s.d.23)	19(s.d.18)	25(s.d.27)

*n = 403 (2000-01); 223 (2001-02); 198 (2002-03)*

Women on average spent more hours on care and domestic responsibilities than men although, as revealed by the standard deviations, there is not a clear pattern. A higher proportion of women had significant demands on their time. In 2000-01 31% of women who responded spent more than 25 hours per week on care compared with 21% of men. In 2001-02 43% of women who responded to this question spent more than 25 hours per week on care compared with 19% for men. In 2002-03, the results were 38% for women who responded to this question and only 16% for men.

In summary, the analysis of students' work and family commitments presents a picture of very busy people with an average combined working/studying/caring week of 64-75 hours, demanding by any standards. Only a small minority of students had no work or family commitments at all. The balance of activities is different on average for full-time and part-time students but the average overall activity level is equal for both categories. The combination of different activities in a typical week varies along a spectrum rather than being polarised into two distinct alternatives for full-time and part-time students respectively. There is some evidence of the two stereotypes of a young student living alone, with friends or in the parental home and studying full-time compared with an adult living with spouse or partner, working and studying part-time, but there is substantial

evidence of many different experiences. Similarly there is evidence that traditional assumptions about attitudes and priorities are not wholly valid for these students. The assumption that a full-time student would prioritise study over work and that a part-time student would prioritise work over study is not borne out. Work and family responsibilities both have negative and positive impact on study for full-time and part-time students. The home environment is more likely to impact on women, both positively and negatively. The relevance of work to the course of study is a positive factor for the majority of students.

The complexity of these findings, with the majority of students experiencing positive and/or negative relationships between their study and their personal/working lives, confirms the importance of recognising the potential diversity of the student experience. The next section explores in greater depth the quality of their experience and the implications for institutional practice and for policy.

#### **8.4 Balance and integration: learning and life**

One major question for this study was to examine the extent to which the students were able to integrate study within their life and lifestyle including, as appropriate, work and/or family and domestic responsibilities. The first purpose was to understand the combination of activities that the students engaged in and the split between study, work and home life; and to enable the students to record and describe their experiences. This has been explored in section 8.3. A second purpose was to understand the quality and nature of the students' experience and to identify whether any factors contributed to a positive or negative experience. Potential factors to be considered included: personal factors; institutional (college) factors; external (policy) factors.

After recording details about their work and family circumstances, the students were asked to decide how well they balanced the different priorities by choosing one of four options:

- I have a good balance with few problems.
  
- I manage to balance my priorities.
  
- I find it difficult to balance everything.
  
- Conflicting priorities create stress for me.

An analysis of the focus group transcripts, set against the work of Kember (1999), Edwards (1993), Blaxter and Tight (1994a) and Morgan-Klein and Gray (2000) enabled me to devise these four categories of "balance" in terms of the permeability of the boundary between study and work and/or family and the students' success in negotiating and managing agreement and equilibrium. The concepts of permeability of boundaries

and of separateness or connectedness are important. My first category (a good balance) is characterised by separation and compartmentalisation. Typically students in this category viewed their studies as a distinct part of their lives with limited impact or overlap with other activities. My second category (manage to balance) is characterised by integration. Typically students in this category had negotiated a place for study within busy lives and had secured co-operation and support from other key people so that all their activities fitted together effectively. This equilibrium required maintenance and continued negotiation to sustain its stability. My third category (find it difficult to balance) is characterised by over-lapping co-existence. Typically students in this category have attempted to achieve integration with only partial success so that interaction at the boundaries is subject to continuing negotiation and the equilibrium is unstable and at risk of breakdown. My fourth category (conflicting demands create stress) is characterised by instability. Typically students in this category have not negotiated a place for study within their lives and therefore attempt to manage the boundaries on a continuing basis depending upon the exigencies of different aspects of their lives at different times.

The distribution of the 25 students in the focus groups across the four categories is shown in Table 64.

*Table 64*

**Distribution of focus group participants by category of balance**

Good balance	7
Manage to balance	11
Difficult to balance	5
Conflicting priorities	2

The quotations below illustrate the four categories:

Compartmentalisation/ Good balance

“I’m single and I live on my own. I’m quite involved in the church and I’d normally be there two evenings a week as well as Sunday. But overall, I have enough time....I viewed this (study) as being another job”.

“My dad says to me, well you can work for me for two days a week and I can fit these days in any day that suits me so it doesn’t affect my studies”.

Integration/ Manage to balance

“I tend to study mainly at the weekends. I find that works better for me. I’ve seen me having to take a day off work to be able to do the assignments...I’m lucky in that my work has given to me the time to do that”.

“If I’m fortunate enough my wife’s off and I’m off then I’ll spend the whole day doing what I’ve got to do (studying). And failing that, I would probably stay up a couple of hours and do it. Sometimes put the kid to his Gran’s. I just sort things really”.

“I get up at 7 and I start college at 9 and I’ve got a class until 12 then a tutorial until 1 and then from 1 o’clock I come straight out of college and then I’m straight to my work until 6. When I get home I try to do some studying or I’ve got homework to do.....”



One single parent described a pattern of attending college all day for three days per week with her daughter in the nursery, spending one full day with her young daughter going swimming or to gymnastics and one full day studying whilst her mother looks after her daughter. The weekend comprised a mix of study and family time. This is a routine that worked and enabled her to be a good parent. Because she gave “equal” time to study and family, she avoided feelings of guilt.

Another student described attending college from 9am to 4pm, then cycling to the station, taking a train to Edinburgh to provide a meal for an elderly parent then travelling back to Dunfermline to work in a hotel and maybe studying before going to bed. This was a demanding schedule but the activities fitted together.

#### Overlapping co-existence/ Find it difficult to balance

“I have a professionally demanding job that I sometimes have little control over, you know, I just need to be at work”.

“Well I can’t do as much for my daughter as I would like. Homework needs done. I don’t have time during the day (at work) so I have to do it either at night or the weekends, so something has to give and I’m afraid it’s time with my wife and daughter that I have to give up. And, as I said, sometimes it doesn’t go down too well”.

Another student described a different kind of balance. Her husband was an oilrig worker and she therefore tried to study as much as possible when he was away and then give him attention when he was at home. She also had three young children and found herself studying late at night when they were in bed. This was a fragile arrangement but was sustained by a determined student.

Two single parents (female) studying full-time provided a vivid insight into the practical and educational pressures of combining study with caring for children. Both commented on the “hard work” of finding time to study in the evenings or weekend but both spoke positively about managing to cope with support from family, neighbours, ex-husband or boyfriend. However both trod a fine line between coping and not coping.

“I think it’s obvious when I get the balance right because I’m probably a different person, a lot calmer. But there’s times when I’m really stressed out and its just chaos in the house. And it’s especially when the kids have been unwell and I’m trying to get back to college and I just cannot understand what’s happening”.

#### Instability/ Conflicting demands

“So I find home things at the moment are sometimes...even just getting your house all, like normally I have a set day, well to dust and Hoover all your house so you’re thinking oh I should have been doing that today, but I’ve not got time because I really need to get this essay done, so sometimes the dining table is strewn with books and papers and it’s like, this is actually our meal place you know....so I feel it’s been quite difficult trying to juggle and keep other areas of our life happy because they feel they need time as well”.

“My husband quite simply pointed out, this is Boxing Day and you’ve brought homework down and I’m not wanting to hear about what you’re doing at college....it was like stop talking about college, we need some family time”.

“I work long hours, working for the health service, 50 to 60 hours a week is not uncommon for me, in fact that’s an average for me, so I fit that in and two night classes and do the studying and have the house and family and all the rest of it. It is very stressful at the moment”.

Turning to the questionnaire analysis, in all three years there was a range of responses, with evidence of a shift towards a higher proportion of positive experiences over the period, as shown in Table 65.

*Table 65*

**How well do you balance different priorities? (%)**

	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2001-02</b>	<b>2002-03</b>
<b>Good balance</b>	22	31	23
<b>Manage to balance</b>	35	35	38
<b>Difficult to balance</b>	24	21	26
<b>Conflicting priorities</b>	19	14	14

*n = 552 (2000-01); 348 (2001-02); 301 (2002-03)*

The questionnaire provided an open ended data collection opportunity for respondents to describe what they would most like to be different to enable them to have a balanced life. The results were analysed to identify themes and then the responses were categorised into the dominant themes. This is of interest in adding vivid perspective and colour to the analysis but is also helpful in enabling some conclusions to be drawn about differentiating factors in respect of the categories of balance.

The results are summarised in Table 66, Table 67 and Table 68. A test of association was performed on the relationship between the categories of balance and the categories of responses<sup>1</sup>.

Table 66

**Relationship between categories of balance and individual answers on what would make it easier to have a balanced life (% of responses): 2000-01**

	Good balance	Manage to balance	Difficult to balance	Conflicting priorities
More domestic help	18	7	8	21
More money/ better job/ easier travel	37	36	21	32
Changes at work	9	20	17	10
More time/ less personal stress	22	24	37	26
College factors	7	8	14	10
Positive response	7	5	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>No response</b>	63%	40%	25%	19%

$\chi^2 = 29.96$      $df = 12$      $p < 0.01$     Cramer's V = 0.161

Table 67

**Relationship between categories of balance and individual answers on what would make it easier to have a balanced life (% of responses): 2001-02**

	Good balance	Manage to balance	Difficult to balance	Conflicting priorities
More domestic help	8	13	12	7
More money/ better job/ easier travel	30	40	23	31
Changes at work	15	13	17	13
More time/ less personal stress	25	16	35	27
College factors	13	16	14	16
Positive response	10	2	0	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>No response</b>	63%	48%	31%	25%

$\chi^2 = 14.62$      $df = 12$      $p = 0.3$     Cramer's V = 0.113

<sup>1</sup> The test of association excluded the positive responses.

Table 68

**Relationship between categories of balance and individual answers on what would make it easier to have a balanced life (% of responses): 2002-03**

	<b>Good balance</b>	<b>Manage to balance</b>	<b>Difficult to balance</b>	<b>Conflicting priorities</b>
<b>More domestic help</b>	15	12	15	17
<b>More money/ better job/ easier travel</b>	35	40	29	23
<b>Changes at work</b>	20	10	19	11
<b>More time/ less personal stress</b>	10	22	28	26
<b>College factors</b>	20	9	6	20
<b>Positive response</b>	0	7	4	3
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100
<b>No response</b>	72%	50%	36%	26%

$\chi^2 = 31.80$        $df = 12$        $p < 0.01$       Cramer's  $V = 0.166$

Overall, those in the two most positive categories of balance were more likely to record financial or practical (extrinsic) issues as their choice. In all three years, more than 30% of those in the positive balance categories and who responded to this question, chose a financial improvement. Conversely, those in the two more negative categories of balance were more likely to choose an intrinsic improvement in the area of more time, better time management, reduction in personal stress as well as financial improvement. In all three years, for these two categories, this was the highest type of response, at over 25%. College, work and domestic factors varied evenly across the four balance categories. Many respondents, although asked for one improvement, took the opportunity to convey the many pressures that they face. Some were able to give a positive response that was also revealing.

Some illustrative responses are given below.

“I’m very adaptable and cope well with life. Not having children has allowed me to cope with the pressures of work, home life and studying.” (Good balance)

“Everything must be thought out and prioritised.” (Good balance)

“College time needs to be more structured so the classes are more productive, which would mean less time study at home.” (Manage to balance)

“Assessments better spaced out rather than three in one week”. (Manage to balance)

“Not so many assessments all at once: not such a stressful job: not so much pressure or expectations from parents.” (Find it difficult to balance)

“More time to attend college. But this is never going to happen when I have a full-time job”. (Find it difficult to balance)

“To sit down once a week and make a list of what I have to do for the week and prioritise.” (Conflicting priorities create stress)

“To have a more balanced life, I need someone to share domestic tasks and care of children. Also a continuous flow of manageable college work and more money so I do not have to work long hours and then I would have more time to study.” (Conflicting priorities create stress)

One potential consequence of conflicting priorities is that students will fail to complete their courses or will achieve lower grades. Research interest to date has tended (see section 5.3) to focus upon the reasons for dropout, failure and low achievement rather than on the reasons for sustained participation and success and, at the stage of drafting the questionnaire, I followed this direction by including questions on the factors that had made dropout more likely for my subjects. During the later analysis I also reflected on whether there was evidence of complementary or different factors influencing survival.

The questionnaires were distributed in March/April at a time when the majority of those who actually dropped out would already have done so. Asking the students whether they had ever seriously considered dropping out was initially included as a secondary indicator of incidence of conflict or stress. On later reflection it also provided evidence of incidence of survival i.e. of those at risk of withdrawal who had succeeded in remaining on track.

Table 69 shows that over one third of the students had seriously considered dropping out, confirming the impact of conflict and stress and creating a spectrum of survivors from those at higher risk of dropping out to those at lower risk. Again, there appears to be an improvement over the three years.

*Table 69*

**Have you seriously considered dropping out? (%)**

	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2001-02</b>	<b>2002-03</b>
<b>Yes</b>	38	35	33
<b>No</b>	62	65	67

*n = 549 (2000-01); 340 (2001-02); 301 (2002-03)*

As might be expected, there is a significant relationship between the category of balance selected and the potential for drop out, as shown in Table 70 and Table 71.

*Table 70*

**Comparison of nature of balance and likelihood of dropping out (%)**

	<b>2000-01</b>		<b>2001-02</b>		<b>2002-03</b>	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Good balance</b>	15	85	26	74	12	88
<b>Manage to balance</b>	32	68	24	76	29	71
<b>Difficult to balance</b>	53	47	49	51	43	57
<b>Conflicting priorities</b>	59	41	61	39	52	49
<b>All</b>	38	62	35	65	32	68

*n = 541 (2000-01); 334 (2001-02); 292 (2002-03)*

Table 71

**Test of association between balance and likelihood of dropout**

	Chi-square	df	p	Cramer's V
<b>2000-01</b>	61.69	3	<0.001	.338
<b>2001-02</b>	28.58	3	<0.001	.293
<b>2002-03</b>	22.99	3	<0.001	.281

This relationship between personal stress and propensity to drop out is further substantiated when the reasons for drop out are considered. During analysis, the reasons were categorised as extrinsic (i.e. pressures from sources external to the student) and intrinsic (i.e. factors personal to the student and his/her ability to cope) although this categorisation was not explicit in the text of the questionnaire.

Table 72 shows that extrinsic reasons are important, particularly unhappiness with the programme of study and financial pressure. Intrinsic reasons, related to students' ability to cope with the many demands that they faced, were generally perceived to be significant by a higher proportion of students. Significantly, over 50% of these respondents each year selected "personal stress due to conflicting demands" and a similar proportion indicated that they were struggling to keep up. These findings are important for the college. Around one in three surviving students had seriously considered dropping out and, of these, at least one in three was unhappy with the programme of study. This would suggest that investigation is required to ascertain what is causing dissatisfaction, particularly as the trend is worsening. Conversely, there is scope to offer support to the students who are experiencing stress and struggling to keep up. The question of support is important and will be considered again shortly.



Table 72

**Reasons for considering dropout (%)<sup>1</sup>**

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
<b><u>Extrinsic</u></b>			
Unhappy with programme of study	34	36	42
Under financial pressure	31	31	35
Offered a job	2	5	2
Had to work too much overtime	19	17	17
Partner/ family unhappy with time spent at college	16	18	7
Other (health/ family illness/ bereavement)	3	0	0
<b><u>Intrinsic</u></b>			
Struggling to keep up	47	47	57
Unhappy about not spending time with partner/ family	29	34	26
Personal stress due to conflicting demands	52	54	56
Average No. of responses per respondent	2.3	2.4	2.4

*n* = 202 (2000-01); 116 (2001-02); 98 (2002-03)

A relationship between reasons for dropout and categories of “balance” is not found consistently across the three cohorts. However some patterns are evident. In all three years, those finding it difficult to balance and those experiencing conflict and stress were more likely than the other groups to choose intrinsic reasons such as “struggling to keep up” or “personal stress”. Those experiencing conflicting priorities were more likely than the other groups to choose “partner or family unhappy with time spent studying”.

<sup>1</sup> Multiple response question.

This tends to confirm the characteristics of the categories of balance. Where the boundaries between college and other aspects of life are relatively impermeable, propensity to drop out is more likely to be caused by less personal factors such as dissatisfaction with the course. Where the boundaries are permeable or unstable, propensity to drop out is more likely to be driven by crises in relationships or conflicting demands. Bringing these analyses together appears to establish confirmatory relationships. Students who find difficulty in managing the integration of their study with their work and family commitments are at higher risk of dropping out. They are then more likely to identify boundary management as the reason for the risk of dropout.

These conclusions led me to reflect on whether it would be possible to identify from the questionnaire data any personal or institutional factors that were associated with survival, that might be predictors of survival or that might be contributory factors to survival. This was not the perspective from which the questionnaire was drafted. The original intention was to explore indicators of conflict and risk. Thomas's (2002) work influenced the shift to the converse perspective of identifying factors associated with survival. Although they are two sides of the same coin, there is an important difference: a focus on survival moves the agenda from one of compensating for the problems associated with integrating learning with life to one of promoting successful strategies for integration.

The first approach was to test for any significant relationship between balance and the personal and employment characteristics of the students. As the results in Table 73, Table 74 and Table 75 show, this did not prove to be a reliable or consistent indicator. No factors prevailed as indicators over the three years and these personal/ employment characteristics declined in significance over the three years.

Table 73

**Relationship between balance and personal/employment characteristics: 2000-01**

	df	Chi-Square	p	Cramer's V
<b>FT/ PT</b>	3	11.60	<0.01	.15
<b>Job (yes/ no)</b>	3	4.00	0.26	.09
<b>Hours per week at work</b>	15	13.61	0.56	.11
<b>Family circumstances</b>	18	26.39	0.09	.13
<b>Hours per week on care</b>	9	13.27	0.15	.11
<b>Gender</b>	3	9.30	<0.05	.13
<b>Age</b>	18	32.21	<0.05	.14
<b>Marital status</b>	12	22.73	<0.05	.12

Table 73 shows the results of the tests for year 1. Students who were studying full-time, or who were female, or who were in the 35-45-age band or who were separated or divorced were associated with stress. However these relationships are not strong.

Table 74

**Relationship between balance and personal/employment characteristics: 2001-02**

	df	Chi-Square	p	Cramer's V
<b>FT/ PT</b>	3	3.93	0.27	.11
<b>Job (yes/ no)</b>	3	1.93	0.59	.07
<b>Hours per week at work</b>	15	29.18	<0.05	.22
<b>Family circumstances</b>	18	31.56	<0.05	.18
<b>Hours per week on care</b>	9	8.87	0.45	.12
<b>Gender</b>	3	5.43	0.14	.13
<b>Age</b>	18	34.15	<0.05	.18
<b>Marital status</b>	12	18.48	0.10	.14

Table 74 shows the results of the tests for year 2. Stress is associated with less stable family circumstances and with the 45-55 age group.

Table 75

**Relationship between balance and personal/employment characteristics: 2002-03**

	df	Chi-Square	p	Cramer's V
<b>FT/ PT</b>	3	2.02	0.57	.08
<b>Job (yes/ no)</b>	3	2.76	0.43	.10
<b>Hours per week at work</b>	18	18.75	0.41	.17
<b>Family circumstances</b>	15	8.43	0.91	.10
<b>Hours per week on care</b>	9	2.43	0.98	.07
<b>Gender</b>	3	6.01	0.11	.14
<b>Age</b>	18	14.83	0.67	.13
<b>Marital status</b>	12	15.06	0.28	.13

Table 75 shows the results of the tests for year 3. There is no evidence of structured relationships between personal/ employment circumstances and stress.

A similar set of tests was performed to identify any relationships between likelihood of survival/ propensity to drop out and personal/ employment characteristics. The results are shown in Table 76, Table 77 and Table 78.

Table 76

**Relationship between likelihood of survival and personal/employment characteristics: 2000-01**

	df	Chi-Square	p	Cramer's V
<b>FT/ PT</b>	1	13.19	<0.001	.16
<b>Job (yes/ no)</b>	1	7.71	<0.01	.12
<b>Hours per week at work</b>	5	5.26	0.36	.12
<b>Family circumstances</b>	6	14.52	<0.05	.16
<b>Hours per week on care</b>	3	11.91	<0.01	.17
<b>Gender</b>	1	7.24	<0.01	.12
<b>Age</b>	6	14.80	<0.05	.17
<b>Marital status</b>	4	17.92	<0.01	.18

Table 76 shows the results of the test for year 1. Likelihood of survival is associated with students who are part-time, with those who do have a job, with those in more stable family circumstances, with those with lower than average numbers of hours spent on care and with men. However none of these associations is strong.

Table 77

**Relationship between likelihood of survival and personal/employment characteristics: 2001-02**

	df	Chi-Square	p	Cramer's V
<b>FT/ PT</b>	1	2.54	0.11	.09
<b>Job (yes/ no)</b>	1	4.26	<0.05	.11
<b>Hours per week at work</b>	5	14.67	<0.05	.27
<b>Family circumstances</b>	3	4.30	0.230	.13
<b>Hours per week on care</b>	3	16.95	<0.01	.28
<b>Gender</b>	1	7.00	<0.01	.14
<b>Age</b>	6	7.60	0.27	.15
<b>Marital status</b>	4	2.00	0.74	.08

Table 77 shows the results of tests for year 2. Likelihood of survival is associated with having a job, with lower than average number of hours spent on care and with men. The relationship between propensity to dropout and hours worked per week is not associated with the highest number of hours worked.

Table 78

**Relationship between likelihood of survival and personal/employment characteristics: 2002-03**

	df	Chi-Square	p	Cramer's V
<b>FT/ PT</b>	1	3.55	0.06	.11
<b>Job (yes/ no)</b>	1	0.29	0.86	.01
<b>Hours per week at work</b>	6	13.90	<0.05	.26
<b>Family circumstances</b>	5	3.88	0.57	.11
<b>Hours per week on care</b>	3	0.39	0.94	.05
<b>Gender</b>	1	.010	0.94	.00
<b>Age</b>	6	4.78	0.57	.29
<b>Marital status</b>	4	3.63	0.468	.12

Table 78 shows the results of the test for year 3. Likelihood of survival is associated only with students working lower than average hours.

These tests are therefore inconclusive. There is some evidence that the pressures on full-time students can be greater and those on men can be less. Part-time students who are working may benefit from a more structured, if hectic, agenda. However there is no firm

basis on which to categorise certain students as likely to be at risk nor to identify predictive characteristics.

The next avenue was to explore the students' need for support and the source and nature of that support. In answering these parts of the questionnaire, students were asked not to include support from the college or from college staff. The type of support received is summarised in Table 79.

Table 79

**Type of support received (%)**

<b>2000-01</b>				
	<b>No Support</b>	<b>Some Support</b>	<b>Great deal of Support</b>	<b>No Response</b>
<b>Financial</b>	31	36	23	11
<b>Childcare</b>	33	9	8	49
<b>Shopping/ Domestic</b>	26	28	21	25
<b>Lift/ Car sharing</b>	44	14	8	34
<b>Encouragement</b>	10	47	28	15
<b>Coursework</b>	28	45	10	17
<b>Leave of Absence</b>	39	16	11	34
<b>2001-02</b>				
	<b>No Support</b>	<b>Some Support</b>	<b>Great deal of Support</b>	<b>No Response</b>
<b>Financial</b>	31	37	20	12
<b>Childcare</b>	37	11	7	45
<b>Shopping/ Domestic</b>	38	22	13	27
<b>Lift/ Car sharing</b>	50	10	7	34
<b>Encouragement</b>	13	40	28	19
<b>Coursework</b>	28	43	9	20
<b>Leave of Absence</b>	36	15	8	41
<b>2002-03</b>				
	<b>No Support</b>	<b>Some Support</b>	<b>Great deal of Support</b>	<b>No Response</b>
<b>Financial</b>	39	29	17	16
<b>Childcare</b>	38	9	6	48
<b>Shopping/ Domestic</b>	36	19	14	32
<b>Lift/ Car sharing</b>	46	14	7	33
<b>Encouragement</b>	12	41	28	20
<b>Coursework</b>	27	44	9	21
<b>Leave of Absence</b>	38	15	7	40

There is consistency across the three years and the most striking result is that, under most headings except “encouragement”, one third of students are not receiving any support. This percentage increases if the missing values are removed and this is particularly relevant in the case of childcare and leave of absence (where the missing values may indicate non-applicability). In these two cases the valid percentage doubles to two thirds or over. Lack of financial support worsens in year 3, possibly due to the withdrawal of Individual Learning Accounts.

Students receive support from a variety of sources, with the results shown in Table 80.

*Table 80*

**Source of Support (%)<sup>1</sup>**

	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2001-02</b>	<b>2002-03</b>
<b>Family members</b>	80	80	78
<b>Friends</b>	48	48	50
<b>Colleagues at work</b>	34	28	28
<b>Employer</b>	26	26	26
<b>Fellow students</b>	64	68	61
<b>None of these</b>	3	4	4
<b>Average No. of responses per respondent</b>	2.5	2.5	2.5

*n = 548 (2000-01); 341 (2001-02); 293 (2002-03)*

Students were then asked if they needed more help or support than was available to them (Table 81).

*Table 81*

**Do you need more support? (%)**

	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2001-02</b>	<b>2002-03</b>
<b>Yes</b>	33	28	31
<b>No</b>	62	66	63
<b>No response</b>	5	6	6

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<sup>1</sup> Multiple response question.

This question was followed up by an open-ended data collection opportunity to describe the additional support needed. The results were analysed to identify themes and then the responses were categorised in accordance with the themes. The responses cover the expected range of issues, from more financial support, more leeway and understanding from employers, more domestic support or assistance with childcare and more or better support from the college. Most respondents understood that the question did not refer to academic issues although a few took the opportunity to comment on the quality of their learning programme. The majority of respondents who mentioned the college made comments on communication, organisation and personal support. In each of the three years, more financial support and more support from the college received the most mentions. Table 82 gives details.

*Table 82*

**Summary of responses on additional support needs (% of responses)**

	<b>2000-01</b>	<b>2001-02</b>	<b>2002-03</b>
<b>Domestic/childcare</b>	16	11	8
<b>Employer</b>	14	10	14
<b>Financial</b>	28	43	38
<b>Personal</b>	3	2	5
<b>College</b>			
• <b>Organisation</b>	8	6	6
• <b>Communication</b>	12	12	8
• <b>Support for learning</b>	17	16	21
<b>% of respondents who answered this question</b>	32	25	27



The value of this section, as for the other open-ended sections, is in bringing some colour to the statistics. A proportion of the responses is written with conviction and conveys a vivid sense of the pressure that many of these students experience. Examples are given below.

“I need more financial support from the government. Because I am a mature student with access to my daughter at weekends, it is very difficult to find a part-time job to fit the hours I can work”.

“It would be nice if there was someone to talk to regarding stress and anxiety”.

“I need more help from my employer. They are not consistent. My shifts make me tired and that leaves me no willpower left to study”.

“The college should recognise that mature students have families and depend on timetables not being changed after childcare has already been arranged”.

“Tutors need to realise that we cannot always fit with their timetable. A bit of respect and understanding would be a start”.

“I need more help at home from family. Although they encourage me, they are not aware of my juggling of tasks”.

“Just a lot of peace and quiet from everybody”.

“I need extra domestic help from my husband and extra financial support to enable me to work less hours”.

“Time off from work would be beneficial. Any time off to attend college has to be paid back by working additional hours or taking annual leave”.

The next stage was to ascertain whether there were relationships between the support available to students and their ability to balance their commitments and avoid dropping out of their course. Firstly, the “balance” categories and “serious consideration of dropout” were tested against the types of support available. No significant relationships were identified in respect of balance but in respect of dropout, students were less likely to have seriously considered dropping out if they were receiving financial support, encouragement/ understanding or assistance with coursework (2000-01), encouragement/ understanding or assistance with coursework (2001-02) and financial support or encouragement/ understanding (2002-03). It is worth noting in that it is primarily the qualitative, personal types of support that make a difference, rather than the practical ones e.g. childcare. The results are shown in Table 83.

Table 83

**Relationship between likelihood of survival and types of support available**

<b>2000-01</b>				
	<b>df</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Cramer's V</b>
<b>Financial support</b>	2	8.30	<0.05	.13
<b>Childcare</b>	2	2.92	0.23	.10
<b>Domestic help</b>	2	2.57	0.28	.08
<b>Lift</b>	2	2.15	0.34	.08
<b>Encouragement</b>	2	8.25	<0.05	.13
<b>Help with course work</b>	2	8.24	<0.05	.13
<b>2001-02</b>				
	<b>df</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Cramer's V</b>
<b>Financial support</b>	2	0.93	0.62	.06
<b>Childcare</b>	2	9.76	<0.01	.23
<b>Domestic help</b>	2	1.91	0.39	.09
<b>Lift</b>	2	0.48	0.79	.05
<b>Encouragement</b>	2	7.40	<0.05	.16
<b>Help with course work</b>	2	6.39	<0.05	.15
<b>2002-03</b>				
	<b>df</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Cramer's V</b>
<b>Financial support</b>	2	10.07	<0.01	.12
<b>Childcare</b>	2	0.21	0.90	.04
<b>Domestic help</b>	2	3.31	0.19	.13
<b>Lift</b>	2	3.36	0.20	.13
<b>Encouragement</b>	2	6.44	<0.05	.16
<b>Help with course work</b>	2	0.35	0.84	.04

Next, the “balance” categories and “serious consideration of dropout” were compared with sources of support. In all three years, those with a good balance or who managed to balance the demands made on them received more support from family, friends, colleagues and employers than those with a less stable balance. Support from colleagues and employers was related to lower likelihood of dropout, with other support being largely neutral, in all three cohorts.

Finally, the students' declared need for more help and support was tested against "balance" and "consideration of dropping out". In these cases there was, not surprisingly, a strong relationship (Table 84 and Table 85). Those who had not considered dropping out were less likely to need additional support. Those with a good balance were similarly less likely to need additional support.

Table 84

**Relationship between need for additional support and likelihood of drop out**

Do you need additional support?	Have you seriously considered dropping out? (%)	
	2000-01	
	Yes	No
<b>Yes</b>	59	41
<b>No</b>	27	73
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>62</b>
n = 525 $\chi^2 = 53.20$ df = 1    p < 0.001    Cramer's V = .318		
	2001-02	
	Yes	No
<b>Yes</b>	55	45
<b>No</b>	25	75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>66</b>
n = 327 $\chi^2 = 27.40$ df = 1    p < 0.001    Cramer's V = .289		
	2002-03	
	Yes	No
<b>Yes</b>	54	46
<b>No</b>	21	79
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>68</b>
n = 285 $\chi^2 = 30.28$ df = 1    p < 0.001    Cramer's V = .326		

Table 85

**Relationship between balance and need for additional support**

<b>2000-01</b>		
<b>Do you need additional support? (%)</b>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Good balance</b>	12	88
<b>Manage to balance</b>	24	76
<b>Difficult balance</b>	49	51
<b>Conflicting priorities</b>	64	36
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>65</b>
n = 525 $\chi^2 = 82.92$ df = 3    p = <0.001    Cramer's V= .397		
<b>2001-02</b>		
<b>Good balance</b>	16	84
<b>Manage to balance</b>	21	79
<b>Difficult balance</b>	46	54
<b>Conflicting priorities</b>	59	41
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>71</b>
n = 332 $\chi^2 = 41.24$ df = 3    p = <0.001    Cramer's V= .352		
<b>2002-03</b>		
<b>Good balance</b>	15	85
<b>Manage to balance</b>	23	77
<b>Difficult balance</b>	47	53
<b>Conflicting priorities</b>	64	36
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>67</b>
n = 284 $\chi^2 = 37.91$ df = 3    p = <0.001    Cramer's V= .365		

Considering all of this evidence, it would appear that it is not the demographic characteristics of the students, nor their personal or employment circumstances that influence whether they will cope effectively as lifelong learners, achieve a stable balance between study, work and home life and enjoy a sustained involvement in learning without risk of dropout. What appears to be more significant is the extent to which relationships are supportive and adequate help and support, particularly personal support and encouragement, are available. For employed students, the attitude of colleagues as well as that of the employer is important.

The participants in the focus groups illustrated that the quality of relationships can be very important. Some participants specifically stated that a supportive partner or a supportive employer contributes to a balanced life. Others described how they are giving support to

family members rather than receiving support. Several spoke about feelings of guilt, sacrifice and conflict in respect of family relationships, rather than support. One described how an employer specifically created problems by requiring time spent at college to be “paid back” by extra overtime. This qualitative evidence helps to confirm that supportive or unsupportive relationships are an important factor.

It would be very wrong, however, to focus entirely on support as if the students were at the mercy of their circumstances. Those who thrive and succeed despite all the challenges they face display an impressive array of personal skills, qualities and strategies. These can be summarised as: actively negotiating boundaries and relationships and juggling priorities; assertive time management; personal organisation; resilience and persistence.

Given the conclusion that the availability of support is significant and given that over 30% of those responding to a question on additional support needs mentioned aspects of college organisation, it is important to review the part of the questionnaire that dealt with the college factors. Respondents were asked to indicate if the following aspects of course organisation and availability of services had a positive or negative effect upon their experience as students:

- start date of programme
- length of programme
- timing of classes
- amount of attendance required at college
- location of college
- availability of staff
- availability of nursery
- opening times of library
- opening times of student development centre

- opening times of finance office
- opening times of customer services
- opening times of refectory
- opening times of student records office

Over 80% of respondents in all three years answered these questions with the exception of the question on the availability of the nursery. However very few negative responses emerged. Less than 10% of those responding indicated any difficulty, with the exception of timing of classes, amount of attendance required, and availability of staff. Even these had negative responses of less than 17%.

Turning to what would make it easier in terms of college factors, the most frequent responses related to more finance, particularly for books and equipment but there were other interesting choices, as shown in Table 86. In year 1 of the study, over one in three of those responding noted an interest in more flexible modes of study both in time and in location. This interest declines noticeably over the three years but remains at a level that merits further investigation.

Table 86

**Selection of college factors that would improve student experience (%)<sup>1</sup>**

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
<b>More finance for college fees</b>	39	42	44
<b>More finance for living expenses</b>	32	43	37
<b>More finance for childcare</b>	12	12	7
<b>More finance for books and equipment</b>	51	55	54
<b>More finance for travel expenses</b>	31	45	37
<b>More finance (other)</b>	2	4	2
<b>Opportunity to study at more flexible times</b>	34	30	30
<b>Distance learning option</b>	34	24	18
<b>On-line learning option</b>	36	31	27
<b>Classes available locally</b>	20	18	15
<b>Opportunity to complete programme more quickly</b>	30	28	25

*n* = 495 (2000-01); 295 (2001-02); 266 (2002-03)

For the college, the opportunity for improvement does not appear to be primarily in the area of institutional management and resource availability but in the quality of organisation and communication at course/programme level. This has already been highlighted in Table 66, Table 67, Table 68 and Table 82 and confirmed in the focus groups.

In summary, this analysis of balance and integration of learning with life has painted a picture of differing degrees of pressure, conflict, stress and difficulty for many of the students as they endeavour to juggle study, work and personal/ family life. Some cope well and easily but most have at least some difficulties to face. There is no clear evidence that particular types of student, or students following a particular mode of study experience more conflict than others. There is however, evidence that the quality of support available to a student combined with his/ her personal ability to cope and to juggle is influential, as is the way in which the college organises the learning experience. Those experiencing highest stress tend to express a wish for support to manage time, reduce stress and promote coping strategies, as well as the expected wish for more financial

<sup>1</sup> Multiple response question.



support. This was corroborated in the responses on additional support needs. Although financial needs featured highly, the most frequently occurring responses mentioned college factors, notably, communication, organisation and personal support.

## **8.5 Reactions to Lifelong Learning Policy**

In many respects, these students who have chosen to study for advanced level qualifications at a local community college display characteristics that are congruent with government policy and lifelong learning rhetoric. They are studying at different ages and at different points in their careers and lives. They have a vocational orientation to learning and appear to equate learning with improving their prospects in the labour market and therefore their contribution to the economy and the improvement of public services. They tend to be motivated to succeed and to progress, to be serious about their learning and to be making a personal investment and/or personal sacrifices to improve their knowledge and skills.

The research tested the students' own perceptions of policy and the relevance to them of a range of lifelong learning initiatives introduced in the years immediately prior to 2000-01, when the questionnaire was first issued. The questionnaire contained a short explanatory statement and a definition of lifelong learning taken from Opportunity Scotland (Scottish Office 1998b p5). The students were then asked three related questions:

- Do you consider yourself to be a lifelong learner?
  
- Do you believe that government policy encourages lifelong learning?
  
- Do you believe that government policy is likely to encourage lifelong learning in the future?

The results for 2000, 2001 and 2002 are shown in Table 87, Table 88 and Table 89. There is no significant difference between the responses of full-time and part-time students.

Table 87

**Do you consider yourself to be a lifelong learner? (%)**

	Yes	No	Don't Know
<b>2000-01</b>	71	11	18
<b>2001-02</b>	72	9	19
<b>2002-03</b>	73	12	15

*n* = 551 (2000-01); 339 (2001-02); 300 (2002-03)

Table 88

**Does government policy encourage lifelong learning? (%)**

	Yes	No	Don't Know
<b>2000-01</b>	25	56	20
<b>2001-02</b>	21	56	23
<b>2002-03</b>	17	62	21

*n* = 538 (2000-01); 335 (2001-02); 293 (2002-03)

Table 89

**Will government policy encourage lifelong learning in the future? (%)**

	Yes	No	Don't Know
<b>2000-01</b>	36	35	29
<b>2001-02</b>	25	41	34
<b>2002-03</b>	19	47	34

*n* = 540 (2000-01); 336 (2001-02); 292 (2002-03)

Worryingly for the Scottish Executive, there is a low level of confidence about government policy support for lifelong learning, a low level of optimism about support in the future and a downward trend year on year in confidence that government policy encourages lifelong learning or will do so in the future. Given the significance of this low level of confidence and downward trend, further analysis was undertaken to identify whether this low and declining level of confidence was a feature of any particular categories of students (Table 90).

Table 90

## Relationship between student characteristics and attitude to government policy

	Current policy			Future policy		
	df	Chi-square	Cramer's V	df	Chi-square	Cramer's V
<b>2000-01</b>						
<b>Age</b>	12	60.22***	.24	12	38.37***	.19
<b>Gender</b>	2	5.31	.10	2	3.66	.08
<b>Marital Status</b>	8	39.06***	.19	8	24.72**	.15
<b>Family circumstances</b>	12	40.86***	.20	12	26.49**	.16
<b>FT/PT</b>	2	2.83	.07	2	16.49***	.18
<b>Job</b>	2	2.49	.07	2	2.21	.06
<b>Source of fees</b>	14	36.18***	.19	14	46.12***	.21
<b>Source of finance</b>	8	15.54***	.12	8	18.64*	.13
<b>2001-02</b>						
<b>Age</b>	12	43.30***	.26	12	29.55**	.21
<b>Gender</b>	2	1.28	.06	2	4.10***	.11
<b>Marital Status</b>	8	21.43**	.18	8	27.88*	.21
<b>Family circumstances</b>	12	29.06**	.21	12	31.70**	.22
<b>FT/PT</b>	2	7.97**	.15	2	5.64***	.13
<b>Job</b>	2	4.43	.12	2	0.35	.03
<b>Source of fees</b>	14	20.89	.18	14	22.53	.19
<b>Source of finance</b>	10	16.07	.16	10	10.71	.13
<b>2002-03</b>						
<b>Age</b>	12	65.00***	.34	12	27.25**	.21
<b>Gender</b>	2	0.78	.05	2	2.38	.11
<b>Marital Status</b>	8	27.40***	.22	8	18.08*	.21
<b>Family circumstances</b>	10	43.21***	.39	10	25.37*	.22
<b>FT/PT</b>	2	3.71	.11	2	5.17	.13
<b>Job</b>	2	8.90***	.18	2	2.26	.03
<b>Source of fees</b>	14	22.34*	.20	14	19.26	.19
<b>Source of finance</b>	8	18.96**	.18	8	12.37	.13

In 2000-01, young people, single people, those living with their parents, those having their fees paid for them and those receiving a student loan were more likely to be negative or unsure about government policy for lifelong learning at the time and for the future. Older people and those living with spouse and children and those supporting themselves were more likely to be positive both at the time and for the future. Those receiving support from

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\*\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.001$ .

\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

\* Significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

ILAs were more likely to be positive about future support whilst those paying their own fees were less likely to be positive.

In 2001-02, there was a similar pattern. Young people, single people, those living with their parents, those having their fees paid by SAAS were more likely to respond “don’t know” for the present and the future. Older people were more likely to be positive. Full-time students were particularly unlikely to respond positively about the future.

By 2002-03, young and single people continued to be more uncertain about current policy and adults had become more negative. For the first time in 2002-03, having a job became a significant indicator of attitude to policy, with more employed students expressing negative views and more unemployed people expressing positive views. However in respect of the future the views of these groups reverted to average.

Table 87, Table 88 and Table 89 demonstrated a progressive lowering of confidence about government policy over the three years. The tests of significance (Table 90) show that, over time, lower confidence is less likely to be associated with specific groups of students and more likely to be generally spread throughout the sample. On the face of it, the overall negative attitudes across the three years are both puzzling and unwelcome to policy makers, in the light of the undernoted initiatives that have been implemented and that were intended to have a positive impact on this group of learners (HNC/D students in colleges):

- abolition of tuition fees for full time higher education from 2000-01 and introduction of means tested bursaries for young people in full time higher education from 2001-02 (Scottish Executive 2000);
- introduction from 2001-02 of a variety of support measures for mature students in full time higher education including disabled students

allowance, lone parent grant and discretionary mature student bursaries, administered by institutions (Scottish Executive 2000);

- exemption from the graduate endowment for mature students, lone parents, disabled students and those studying for HNC/HND qualifications (Scottish Executive 2000);
- introduction of Individual Learning Accounts in 2000-01 (with suspension following in November 2001) and reintroduction planned for 2005 (Scottish Executive 2005);
- increases in overall levels of funding for colleges by 50% over the life of the first Scottish Parliament resulting in more places and including specific funds for childcare (Scottish Executive 2001);
- rapid expansion during the first Scottish Parliament of funding for Modern Apprenticeship places, some of whom may complete a Higher National Certificate in addition to the required Scottish Vocational Qualification (Scottish Executive 2001).

It is, however, possible to suggest explanations for the negative or “don’t know” responses to the questions about government support for lifelong learning. The debate about tuition fees, although resulting in abolition of up-front fees in Scotland, has not only been accompanied by uncertainty and change, but the uncertainty has remained unresolved due to the controversial plans for top-up fees, for the rest of the United Kingdom (DfES 2003). A second potential explanation lies in the “initiative” approach to policy implementation that has resulted in a plethora of changes to structures, institutions and frameworks (e.g. Learndirect Scotland; the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework; the National Grid for Learning; Future Skills Scotland; reorganisation of Careers Scotland)

which have not yet had any direct or substantial beneficial impact on learners. The questionnaire tested respondents' awareness of a selection of these initiatives and the results tend to underline the reasons for the lack of confidence on the part of the students in government support for them. For each initiative, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they had or had not heard of the initiative and whether it was likely to be, or already was, of benefit to them. Although there was a reasonable level of awareness of the selected policy initiatives, they were of little perceived direct value, as shown in Table 91, Table 92 and Table 93.

Table 91

**Awareness of policy initiatives 2000-01 (%)<sup>1</sup>**

	Have not heard of this	Have heard of this	Likely to help me	Already helping me	No response
<b>New Deal</b>	25	63	2	2	9
<b>Training for Work</b>	22	58	2	8	10
<b>ILA</b>	33	29	11	19	8
<b>Fee waivers</b>	60	18	4	6	12
<b>Career development loans</b>	56	27	4	1	13
<b>Access funds</b>	40	42	3	5	11
<b>Hardship loans</b>	38	46	2	2	11
<b>SUFI</b>	67	16	1	0	15
<b>Learndirect Scotland</b>	34	50	2	0	12
<b>Higher Still</b>	35	50	1	2	12
<b>Modern Apprenticeships</b>	23	56	2	8	11

Table 92

**Awareness of policy initiatives 2001-02 (%)<sup>1</sup>**

	Have not heard of this	Have heard of this	Likely to help me	Already helping me	No response
<b>New Deal</b>	20	67	2	1	9
<b>Training for Work</b>	16	64	5	7	9
<b>ILA</b>	23	44	7	17	9
<b>Fee waivers</b>	59	19	3	5	13
<b>Career development loans</b>	56	28	1	0	13
<b>Access funds</b>	44	37	2	2	15
<b>Hardship loans</b>	33	51	2	2	12
<b>SUFI</b>	66	18	0	0	15
<b>Learndirect Scotland</b>	21	64	2	2	11
<b>Higher Still</b>	27	54	0	5	13
<b>Modern Apprenticeships</b>	17	63	2	7	12

<sup>1</sup> This section was intended to elicit multiple responses. However it was interpreted by respondents and coded as a single response per policy initiative.



Table 93

**Awareness of policy initiatives 2002-03 (%)<sup>1</sup>**

	Have not heard of this	Have heard of this	Likely to help me	Already helping me	No response
<b>New Deal</b>	23	63	2	2	10
<b>Training for Work</b>	19	58	4	7	12
<b>ILA</b>	35	39	4	10	12
<b>Fee waivers</b>	58	22	1	4	15
<b>Career development loans</b>	55	28	2	1	15
<b>Access funds</b>	56	28	1	1	14
<b>Hardship loans</b>	42	43	1	2	13
<b>SUFI</b>	64	20	1	0	15
<b>Learndirect Scotland</b>	12	73	4	2	10
<b>Higher Still</b>	31	52	1	5	11
<b>Modern Apprenticeships</b>	9	67	3	11	10

Awareness of many of the selected initiatives rose in 2001-02 but, in most cases fell back again in 2002-03. Awareness of Learndirect Scotland rose again in 2002-03, possibly reflecting the organisation's investment in advertising, ranging from TV commercials to painted taxis. Awareness of Modern Apprenticeships rose in line with growth in take up of this method of learning across Scotland (Scottish Enterprise 2004b). Less than 10% of students registered any perceived value from the selected lifelong learning policy initiatives, with the notable exception of Individual Learning Accounts.

A third potential explanation for negative views about government policy may lie in the fact that, although funding for colleges has certainly increased, the majority of the expenditure has been allocated to additional places and to improvements to infrastructure (e.g. ICT networks). With the exception of additional childcare funds, little if any of the "new" money has found its way to benefit learners personally, particularly those on HNC/D programmes. Much attention and development in colleges, driven by policy directives, has been directed to non-advanced students, to combat social exclusion. Specifically, there have been no significant beneficial changes for part-time higher education students in colleges. Limited access to loans and fee waivers was introduced in 1998 and extended in

<sup>1</sup> This section was intended to elicit multiple responses. However it was interpreted by respondents and coded as a single response per policy initiative.

2001-02, but mainly for those in universities (Scottish Executive 2000). The perceived lack of support for this group is clearly demonstrated by an analysis of their sources of funds for fees and living expenses, as shown in Table 94, Table 95, Table 96, Table 97, Table 98, Table 99, Table 100 and Table 101.

Table 94

**Mainly responsible for paying fees 2000-01 (%)**

<b>Full-time</b>	
<b>SAAS</b>	85
<b>Myself</b>	6
<b>Training for Work</b>	7
<b>ILA</b>	1
<b>Other</b>	1
<b>Part-time</b>	
<b>Employer</b>	47
<b>Myself</b>	26
<b>Employer and myself</b>	6
<b>ILA</b>	14
<b>Fees are waived</b>	8

*n* = 203 (FT); 346 (PT)

Table 95

**Mainly responsible for paying fees 2001-02 (%)**

<b>Full-time</b>	
<b>SAAS</b>	81
<b>Myself</b>	7
<b>Training for Work</b>	12
<b>Part-time</b>	
<b>Employer</b>	51
<b>Myself</b>	26
<b>Employer and myself</b>	3
<b>ILA</b>	11
<b>Fees are waived</b>	10

*n* = 168 (FT); 175 (PT)

Table 96

**Mainly responsible for paying fees 2002-03 (%)**

<b>Full-time</b>	
<b>SAAS</b>	87
<b>Myself</b>	3
<b>Training for Work</b>	10
<b>Part-time</b>	
<b>Employer</b>	55
<b>Myself</b>	29
<b>Employer and myself</b>	4
<b>Fees are waived</b>	13

*n* = 124 (FT); 178 (PT)

Table 97

**Primary source of financial support for living expenses 2000-01 (%)**

<b>Full-time</b>	
<b>Student loan</b>	57
<b>Grant/bursary</b>	1
<b>Benefits</b>	6
<b>Salary/ wage</b>	22
<b>Spouse/ family earnings</b>	14
<b>Part-time</b>	
<b>Grant/bursary</b>	1
<b>Benefits</b>	3
<b>Salary/ wage</b>	84
<b>Spouse/ family earnings</b>	11

*n* = 202 (FT); 333 (PT)

Table 98

**Primary source of financial support for living expenses 2001-02 (%)**

<b>Full-time</b>	
<b>Student loan</b>	59
<b>Career development loan</b>	1
<b>Grant/bursary</b>	2
<b>Benefits</b>	12
<b>Salary/ wage</b>	12
<b>Spouse/ family earnings</b>	15
<b>Part-time</b>	
<b>Student loan</b>	1
<b>Benefits</b>	4
<b>Salary/ wage</b>	83
<b>Spouse/ family earnings</b>	11

*n* = 164 (FT); 169 (PT)

Table 99

**Primary source of financial support for living expenses 2002-03 (%)**

<b>Full-time</b>	
<b>Student loan</b>	54
<b>Grant/bursary</b>	5
<b>Benefits</b>	9
<b>Salary/ wage</b>	13
<b>Spouse/ family earnings</b>	19
<b>Part-time</b>	
<b>Student loan</b>	4
<b>Benefits</b>	3
<b>Salary/ wage</b>	82
<b>Spouse/ family earnings</b>	10

*n* = 120 (FT); 174 (PT)

Table 100

**Employer financial support<sup>1</sup> for part-time students (% of students supported) split by gender**

	2000-01		2001-02		2002-03	
	Wholly	In part	Wholly	In part	Wholly	In part
<b>Male</b>	55	6	60	2	66	4
<b>Female</b>	36	10	36	10	34	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>4</b>

Table 101

**Employer financial support<sup>1</sup> for part-time students split by age (% of age group supported)**

Age	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
<b>&lt;25</b>	75	72	76
<b>25-35</b>	51	50	36
<b>36-45</b>	48	47	52
<b>&gt;45</b>	38	50	62
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>57</b>

The large majority of part-time students (between 87% and 92% over the three years) are responsible for their own fees either personally or through their employer. With the exception of a very small percentage who secure grant funding or exist on benefits, almost all also support themselves by working or by sharing family income. They make no direct claim on public funds. Individual Learning Accounts, which helped 14% of part-time HNC/D students in 2000-01, were discontinued during late 2001, perhaps adding to the scepticism amongst this group that there was any government interest in their particular way of progressing their own lifelong learning.

The support of employers in respect of fees is clearly important for part-time students. If the employer contribution to the fees of those students who took advantage of Individual Learning Accounts is taken in to account, the proportion of students supported by employers is above 50% in each of the three years. To their credit, employers do not

<sup>1</sup> Employer support may involve full or part payment of fees or a financial contribution to a student using an Individual Learning Account.

restrict their support to younger employees as can be seen from Table 101, but they are more likely to support male rather than female employees (Table 100). A test of association for gender and employer support for fees reveals a strengthening association, as show in Table 102.

*Table 102*

**Relationship between gender and employer support for fees**

	<b>df</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Cramer's V</b>
<b>2000-01</b>	1	3.93	<0.05	.14
<b>2001-02</b>	1	5.13	<0.05	.16
<b>2002-03</b>	1	19.38	<0.001	.31

In summary, it has been shown that over 70% of the students consider themselves to be lifelong learners and espouse government aspirations for a learning society. However they do not perceive reciprocal recognition from government in that only 25% in 2000-01, declining to 17% in 2002-03 consider that government policy encourages lifelong learning. There is only marginally more optimism about future likelihood of encouragement. This may be accounted for by uncertainty about tuition fees, by policy emphasis on systemic initiatives rather than on direct support for students and by the continuing persistent neglect of equity of financial support for part-time students.

# Chapter 9

## Conclusions

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 The student experience of integrating learning with life
- 9.3 Institutional and professional challenges
- 9.4 Full-time or part-time: the end of the great divide
- 9.5 A model of lifelong learning

## 9.1 Introduction

At the core of this research is a desire to understand the experience of a substantial but neglected category of higher education students, those studying in Scottish further education colleges; and to present evidence that will enable their aspirations, expectations, priorities and experiences to contribute to discussion about the nature and purpose of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The evidence raises questions about what the state and institutions could do to enable these students to expand as a constituency and to succeed as individuals, within a mass system of higher education and within a learning society.

Daniel (1992a; 1992b; 1993) proposed that progress towards a mass system of higher education in the United Kingdom was dependent upon five criteria: institutional diversity; expansion of part-time study; integration of full-time and part-time programmes; funding policies for institutions and students that are fair to part-time students; and cultural change within institutions. Some ten years later these criteria have not yet been fully met and both policy makers and the educational community are struggling to reconcile the preservation of a traditional, intensive academic experience for young people with a new imperative for the higher education system to respond to the implications of a post-industrial knowledge economy and to offer a higher education experience for a larger and more diverse student body. Progress in developing a broad policy for higher education has been pre-empted by the perceived priority of resolving the funding crisis in higher education institutions and of resourcing continued expansion. This emphasis on institutional funding is enabling the universities to command political attention without endangering their innate conservatism about curricula, qualifications and the patterns and practices of full-time degree education for young people. It has diverted attention away from the perspectives and priorities of students and other stakeholders and away from any consideration of how funding policies might contribute towards a more differentiated system of higher education that is more compatible with principles of lifelong learning.



Current lifelong learning policy tends to be driven by a desire to increase the numbers of people participating and to extend the social and economic catchment from which participants are drawn. There is less interest in adapting the system of higher education to accommodate a greater diversity of student participation. Universities have responded by admitting greater numbers of selected students to an academic experience that does not take much account of students' life circumstances. Colleges offer higher education to people at all stages of life and from all walks of life and the diversity of their student population leads to a recognition of the obsolescence of isolating study from personal circumstances. This, in turn, demands that a deeper understanding of the diverse nature of the student experience should inform both policy and institutional practice. The empirical research presented in this thesis represents the first comprehensive investigation into the experience of higher education students in a further education college. The findings offer a body of new evidence about the expectations and experience of the students in this case study that raises questions for institutions, for future policy development and for a future research agenda.

## **9.2 The student experience of integrating learning with life**

The characteristics and life circumstances of the students in this case study challenge the commonly held stereotype of a higher education student as a young full-time student without domestic commitments and with occasional or vacation work to support a student lifestyle. The demographic profile of the students, both full-time and part-time, varied on all dimensions, demonstrating that people had entered higher education in a further education college at all stages in life and the life cycle, exemplifying this aspect of lifelong learning rhetoric very well. The heterogeneity of the students extended to age, family circumstances, employment and economic status and orientation to learning. So-called “non-traditional” students such as lone parents and those wishing to escape from unemployment and under-achievement at school were present but so were young, upwardly mobile professionals and retired people seeking new vocational outlets for their energy. This heterogeneity, normally associated only with part-time students, extended to full-time students and contributed to an impression of a mixed community of lifelong learners. The case study has achieved its objective of placing on record a detailed and comprehensive description of aspects of the experience of higher education students in a further education college. Given the diversity of the demographic profile, it is unlikely that any student would feel unusual or out of place and this underlines the success of colleges in attracting those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The literature review had suggested that motive and motivation would be complex and this was indeed the case. Instrumental and vocational motives predominated and these students were, in accordance with human capital theory, studying to improve their position in an uncertain and changing labour market for the benefit of themselves, their employers and the economy. A more complex social process underpinned this headline message. On average, each student chose five different reasons for studying, ranging across the instrumental and developmental categories. The focus group discussions confirmed this complexity. The presence of small numbers of participants in each group encouraged

personal revelations that supported theories of motivation as a means of defining and redefining self-concept and identity (West 1996). The findings provided evidence of a significant investment of meaning, expectation and purpose in the experience of higher education, far removed from the traditional progression from school to university and compatible with the economic, personal and democratic versions of a learning society that were explored in section 2.1. For each student, motive, motivation and participation were complex and inter-related. Participation was initiated when there was a reason or reasons for wishing to study (motive) and a perception of a viable opportunity to study taking into account practical considerations of work, finance, child care and travel (motivation). Participation was successfully sustained when the student achieved a manageable or successful balance between study, work and domestic commitments based on the qualitative nature of the boundary between study and other aspects of life and the student's success in negotiating and managing agreement and equilibrium at the boundary.

The direction of this research was influenced by the formulation of a new definition of lifelong learning as learning integrated with life. This definition challenges the tendency to perceive students only as learners and leads to a perception of a student as a whole person inclusive of, not exclusive of, her or his roles as partner, parent, worker, carer or job seeker, all of which have to find a place in busy lives. Balance and integration in the realms of study, work and family life were differentiated both quantitatively and qualitatively. Looking first at the factual evidence, all students spent an average of 70 hours on a combination of study and paid work. There was a distinct difference between full-time and part-time students in terms of the average relative time spent on work and study but there were variations from the average for each mode of study. Some full-time students were working as many hours as some part-time students and, conversely, some part-time students were investing the same amount of time in studying as some full-time students. The impression is one of a variety of individualised patterns of activity, rather than one of polarised alternatives. The students appeared to be interpreting the options

and opportunities available to them and devising personal strategies that would result in feasible participation for each student, depending on his or her circumstances and preferences. Traditional assumptions about priorities were called into question and it could not be taken for granted that full-time students would prioritise study over other aspects of their lives or that part-time students would prioritise their employment.

Turning to the qualitative nature of their experience, mode of study was not a differentiating factor in the nature and quality of balance and integration achieved. Nor was it possible to predict that certain types of student would be more or less likely to achieve successful and stable integration of learning with life. The influential factors appeared to be the coping strategies and resilience of the students and the quality of support received from family, employer, fellow students and from the institution. Work and family life both had positive as well as negative consequences for study, for both full-time and part-time students and over half achieved a positive or manageable balance, suggesting a fit between the concepts of institutional and personal flexibility (Morgan-Klein and Gray 2000). There is some tentative relevance to social capital in these findings. Work-rich/time-poor households are at risk of reduced opportunities to develop social capital because their time for family and community interaction is reduced. For example, the growth in dual-earner households has been identified as a factor in the decline of social capital (Schuller 2000). In this case study, students who had supportive networks and those who experienced a positive connection between family life and study were more likely to survive and achieve at college.

Much previous work in the field of participation and dropout starts from the assumption that any departure from the “norm” of full-time study (for example taking employment) represents the potential for a negative consequence, for example stress, dropout, poorer examination performance. Students are seen as being at a potential disadvantage that causes concern and discussion of findings suggests ways in which the impact of departures from the “norm” should be minimised. I therefore set out, initially, to look for

evidence of stress and conflict with a view to formulating recommendations on ways to predict, identify and mitigate stress and difficulty caused by the necessity of combining learning with other aspects of life. Defining lifelong learning as learning integrated with life suggests an alternative perspective. The levels of stress and difficulty experienced by some of the students in my study are certainly noteworthy. But perhaps more important is the evidence that sustained participation and success in higher education is being achieved by people whose experience is very different from the traditional stereotype of a higher education student. Their experience suggests that it is not valid simply to discuss how to minimise the impact of life circumstances on study and remediate potential “failures”. Their experience suggests, instead, that success can be achieved by people who experience a variety of life circumstances. These students are more likely to thrive in learning environments that openly recognise and respond to the reality of student experience, and that are conducive to successful integration and therefore to successful lifelong learning, as the norm, not as the exception. The notion that the acquisition of human capital through qualifications can be facilitated by the development of social capital through supportive and integrative networks and relationships within the family and the workplace forms a basis for further investigation. It would be interesting to explore further the nature and quality of the supportive relationships and the interaction between the acquisition of qualifications and the development of social capital. Acknowledgement of the multiple experiences and role sets of the students adds a further dimension to the relationship between the vocational curriculum and the workplace and suggests that there is also scope for considering the implications for learning and teaching of the permeability of boundaries between work, domestic life and learning.

### **9.3 Institutional and professional challenges**

In this section I relate the findings of the research to my second objective: to consider the implications of the students' experience for a learner-centred approach to institutional management and practice. In chapter 4, I developed the argument that the progressive shift in the locus of policy change towards the institution creates challenges and opportunities for all professionals and for leaders and managers of institutions. Following a turbulent phase of constitutional and financial change for further education colleges during the 1990s, college managers have the opportunity to re-establish the quality of the learning experience for students as their principal priority as professional managers. This research contributes to that process in two distinct ways. In the first place, its orientation as a piece of research is learner-centred. It has the purpose of enabling the researcher and readers to understand the students' experiences in a very direct way and to accept the students' own interpretation and definition of their preferences and priorities. In the second place, the research offers insights into ways in which both this and other institutions can become more learner-centred in the ways that they provide lifelong learning. Colleges already have a unitised and credit-based higher education curriculum that is available to students in a variety of modes of study from a defined full-time or part-time course to an individualised programme of individual units. My research aimed, however, to go beyond the concept of a flexible curriculum to explore whether the institutional culture was a determining factor in enabling students to integrate learning with life and, if so, whether the host institution had created an environment that was conducive to successful integration.

The research found that successful integration was not a function of the personal or employment characteristics of the students. Much more significant were the levels of support that the students experienced and perceived to be available to them. Practical aspects of the college environment were not identified as significant factors, perhaps because these had already been addressed. Most students did not find that the college

infrastructure created difficulties for them although there is demonstrable scope for investigating the feasibility of ever greater flexibility in time and location of study. The most significant scope for institutional change to support integration lies in the less tangible aspects of institutional culture and ethos.

At least eighty percent of students did not define the relationship between learning and other aspects of life as one of separation and compartmentalisation. Their experience therefore demands a more open recognition that the boundary between study and life does not, for most students, exist at the doors of the college. My research subjects, like those of Edwards (1993), had different preferences for the nature and quality of balance that they achieve. The findings suggest that students need support to understand the concept of boundaries and to develop more conscious strategies to manage and negotiate relationships. Open recognition of the potential for boundary conflict would assist these students to incorporate the role of student within their personal role sets and actively to decide how to achieve optimum balance and integration. In more practical terms, the students would benefit from guidance in how to mobilise rather than alienate potential sources of support and how to develop effective study skills and time management.

The qualitative data from the focus groups and the open-ended sections of the questionnaire indicated that effective communication and understanding between staff and students was an important aspect of a supportive culture. Staff should actively discuss with students how aspects of course organisation, timetabling and work scheduling impact on integration. This would contribute to open acknowledgement of the realities of student lives, avoid the difficulties caused by short-term demands and changes and enhance effective forward planning on the part of students. Underlying these sensible and practical measures is the need for a more profound shift in institutional ethos towards a recognition that students are people for whom the learning experience may be practically demanding and may also involve challenging changes in self-concept and self-esteem and in personal and family relationships. Students in professional careers may

face difficult conflicts of loyalty and priority between employment and personal development. Allowing students to bring all of these challenges into the college rather than attempting to leave them at the door, requires a sophisticated response which balances the academic purpose of the institution with the reality of the students' lives. Lecturers face these issues on a day to day basis, particularly in colleges where student contact time is relatively high and where lecturers are expected to fulfil a guidance as well as a didactic role. This research suggests that staff development could play an important role in enabling lecturers and other student-facing staff to understand both the practical and the psycho-social pressures that students face and to adapt their practices and approaches accordingly in course organisation and communication but also in their strategies for valuing students, recognising their experience and providing sensitive support.

For college leaders, this study suggests that there is cause for reflection on how the culture or "habitus" of an institution can be further developed to recognise the reality of students' lives and to enable them to feel that they belong, are welcome and are understood as whole people. Colleges have already done much to ensure that opening hours and availability of services are compatible with flexible access. The next stage is to consider more sophisticated changes to attitudes, assumptions, beliefs and relationships that convey an inclusive message to a diverse student body with diverse expectations and aspirations. Institutional "habitus" creates an "unexamined practical way of proceeding" that rules out as extravagant or unconventional any other type of behaviour (Tett 2004). For college leaders, the next professional challenge is to understand how to examine and change "ways of proceeding" to accommodate the specific needs and aspirations of the student body of each institution. Tett (2004) suggested that elite universities find the behaviour of "non-traditional" students to be extravagant and unconventional. Colleges, on the other hand, already welcome and accommodate "new" higher education students, whether they are tentative women returners or working professionals. This research provides evidence that the students in this case study would value a culture of flexibility



that extends beyond the temporal availability of the curriculum to offer the opportunity for each student to choose and negotiate a model of balance and boundary management that is compatible with his or her circumstances and preferences. Given the representative demographic profile of the students in this case study, in relation to the further education college sector, the findings will be of interest and relevance to other colleges. Replication of the work elsewhere would contribute to an even deeper understanding of the ways in which colleges can effectively support their higher education students.

#### **9.4 Full-time or part-time: The end of the great divide?**

In this section I relate the research findings to my third objective: to investigate the students' attitudes to lifelong learning policy; to consider the significance of their experience for the system of higher education in Scotland; and, in particular, to test the proposition that the traditional distinction between full-time and part-time study does not reflect the reality of the experience of these students. In section 7.4 I acknowledged that a case study of higher education students in one college is does not provide generalisable evidence on which to base policy development for the higher education sector as a whole. The evidence in this study forms a basis from which further research may be undertaken in different institutions to extend or refine the validity of the findings at national level. The evidence does, however raise questions about the direction of future policy development.

Whilst over 70% of the students in this case study described themselves as lifelong learners, a much smaller and declining proportion had confidence in government policy in respect of lifelong learning now and in the future, apparently because few policy initiatives have resulted in direct benefit to this category of students. It is possible to conclude that one way of improving their confidence would be to offer a more equitable and flexible student funding regime that would be more compatible with individualised patterns of study. To do so would require a shift in policy away from the current fundamental official distinction between full-time study and part-time study.

The experience of the students in this research suggests that the official distinction between full-time study and part-time study may be both arbitrary and incompatible with the principles of a fully developed approach to lifelong learning. Hardly any of the students behaved as if they were "full-time" students, in the sense of enjoying a life of academic study and leisure. Almost all were engaged in a combination of study and/or work and/or family life in a variety of different patterns. Almost all were part-time students in the sense of having other essential commitments which formed an important part of

their lives. In real life, the official boundary between full-time and part-time study is, therefore, very blurred. In particular, many students who were classified as “full-time” had other commitments that resulted in what was effectively part-time study. Conversely, some part-time students were working to support their studies on a very similar basis to full-time students. Domestic commitments were not an indication of mode of study and both full-time and part-time students exhibited a variety of family circumstances. This therefore invites the question of why students chose to study in one of the two officially distinct modes. In some cases, the decision is likely to have been driven by economic considerations. Full-time status confers financial benefits that are not available to all part-time students. Some part-time students can claim benefits and all can (at least in theory) work more hours and earn more money than full-time students. For some students, full-time employment precludes anything other than part-time study. But this research suggests that the decision is not clear cut and that the reality is one of degrees of “part-time-ness”, depending both upon the balance of the time spent on various activities and on the priority accorded by the student to study or to work. Importantly, the findings suggest that full-time students do not necessarily prioritise study and that part-time students do not necessarily prioritise work. The focus groups suggested that students in both categories were ambivalent and anxious about the priority to be accorded to family and parental responsibility.

Equalisation of financial benefits for both modes of study would not only reflect the experience of these students but would enable each student to choose a pattern of study that is compatible with his/her life circumstances and that contributes to an optimum quality of integration and balance. This would align policy in respect of student and institutional funding with policy in respect of lifelong learning. Opponents of equalisation will point to the perils of substituting state subsidised tuition fees for employer contributions to fee payments. They may also point out that the introduction of the Graduate Endowment in Scotland and the imposition of tuition fees in other parts of the United Kingdom represents, in effect, equalisation, in that full-time students now incur the

same responsibility for the cost of tuition as part-time students. There are, however, many remaining actual and perceived differences. Part-time students are responsible for the upfront payment of fees, unless they are in a household that is in receipt of benefits. They have only a restricted income-assessed entitlement to loans and no eligibility for grants or bursaries. An employed person who decides to study part-time receives no financial support whilst a full-time student who decides to work continues to be eligible for financial benefits. In its *“Review of Funding for Learners”* the Scottish Executive (2004d) admits that there is no recorded source of funding for over 50% of part-time higher education students and that the evidence base on whether lack of funding suppresses demand for part-time higher education or causes students to attempt to study full-time whilst working full-time is incomplete. This may herald an investigation into some of the issues raised by my findings, which reflect emerging thinking amongst leaders of higher education institutions who have begun to advocate a change in government practice in favour of part-time students (Tysome 2005).

In 2003-04 the number of Scottish school leavers entering university dropped for the first time in five years (Scottish Executive 2004c), possibly as a result of a more buoyant labour market that is attracting school leavers into jobs instead of into full-time higher education with its accompanying financial burdens. This may or may not represent an indication of trends for the future. It does, however, lend credence to the proposition that people, including young people, might be encouraged to see satisfying work and higher education as complementary rather than as mutually exclusive choices. A means-tested system of support for all higher education students would conform to the principle of equality without detracting from the responsibility of those in highly paid work or their employers to make a contribution. A more radical approach would be to implement the proposals of the Scottish Parliament’s Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee (2002) for a “learning credit” that would enable students to use a personal funding entitlement for full-time or part-time study.

An equally substantial issue in respect of dismantling the distinction between full-time study and part-time study is the accessibility of the higher education curriculum to part-time students. Colleges have, in association with the Scottish Qualifications Authority, pioneered a unitised credit-based higher education curriculum that is equally accessible in all modes of study and is combined with a system of guidance that promotes flexible modes of study. This accounts, in part, for the colleges' success in attracting part-time higher education students. The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council has indicated an intention to move towards a credit-based system for funding higher education institutions, which may accelerate progress towards a more accessible curriculum. This may not only help to break down distinctions between modes of learning, it may also promote integration of learning with the life circumstances and life changes of students in higher education institutions. Introducing financial incentives for all universities and colleges to introduce a flexible curriculum may, on the other hand, not be the best approach to equality of opportunity for students. Progress towards a more heterogeneous system of higher education providers, offering different types of learning opportunities, may be more compatible with a system of mass higher education. A more diverse system of institutions may offer a more recognised place for the flexible higher education curriculum already available for study full-time, part-time or by individual units of study in further education colleges.

My findings provide evidence of compatibility between the aspirations and expectations of the students and the experience offered by the college. Vocational motives are matched by a vocational curriculum. The practical demands of integrating learning with work and family life are matched by opportunities to study part-time at different times of day and evening. Locally accessible, student-centred higher education attracts students who would not consider other institutions and offers opportunities to combine work, family obligations and study in manageable ways, despite the pressures. This apparent fit is confirmed by the finding that over 70% of the questionnaire respondents had not considered applying to an alternative institution and over 80% found that their

expectations were being met. The student experience therefore does not appear to exemplify a model of colleges as a kind of safety valve, absorbing new constituencies of “non-traditional” students on the margin of the university sector (Smith and Bocock 1999). The picture is, instead, of a diverse student population comprised of school leavers, adult “returners”, employed professionals, career changers and retired individuals, the majority of whom have actively chosen to study at a college for vocational reasons that accord directly with policy imperatives to increase skill levels in the workforce. This raises the question of whether the 28% of higher education provided by further education colleges should continue to be marginalised in policy development. The Scottish Executive’s Review of Higher Education in 2003 and 2004 excluded higher education in further education colleges because data was not easily available. This study has shown that quantitative data can be compiled from published statistics. Qualitative data is, indeed, in short supply and its absence allows ill-informed perceptions of higher education in colleges as a second class vocational option to prevail. This case study has presented a more complex and positive view of the experience of students in one college and an example of institutional diversity. There are legitimate concerns that social justice will not be achieved if participation in higher education by working class students is restricted to less prestigious institutions and to vocational HNC and HND courses (Archer et al 2003): attempts to widen access to traditional degrees in traditional institutions are a necessary response to a class-based system of higher education. A complementary but equally valid response would be to recognise the value of college-based higher education as part of a more heterogeneous notion of the higher education experience. Colleges in Scotland certainly do attract working class students as the *“Young Participation in Higher Education”* Report demonstrates (HEFCE 2005). This case study shows that these students are not entering a ghetto of disadvantage: they join a diverse community of motivated, mainly adult lifelong learners whose expectations of higher education are positive, who have legitimate vocational objectives and who appear to succeed in making higher education a part of their lives. Finding even better ways for college higher

education students to complete university degrees at a later stage may well offer the best of both worlds.

## 9.5 A model of lifelong learning

This research had the ambitious aim of contributing to the debate about the nature and purpose of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It also aimed to contribute to emerging theoretical models and definitions of lifelong learning and a learning society. It aimed to do so through a case study approach, by enabling a particular group of students to add their views to the debate through an analysis and evaluation of their experience. Further education colleges in Scotland are relative newcomers to higher education, having offered higher education programmes for a matter of decades at most, and there is therefore a paucity of evidence about the contribution that they make. This is the first extensive study of the experience of higher education students in a further education college and the first attempt to present this experience as a valid model of lifelong learning, of relevance to the evolution of a mass system of higher education in a learning society.

These cohorts of higher education learners within the setting of a further education college exhibit diverse demographic characteristics. They are certainly learning at different stages of life and the majority define themselves as lifelong learners. Their motives for learning are overtly vocational and compatible with a model of a learning society that is based on investment in human capital in response to the knowledge economy. There is also evidence of underlying personal motives that are compatible with social justice and equality of opportunity. In particular, the availability of higher education within a local community college is significant in creating equality of opportunity. The main significance of this work is in the exploration of the integration of learning with work and domestic life. Almost all of the students were part-time in the sense of having priorities and demands other than study and they therefore faced daunting individual challenges in managing their learning. The diverse ways in which they take up this challenge supported by a flexible vocational curriculum and a learner-centred learning environment offered by the college is a compelling model of higher education as lifelong learning, which complements the traditional academic experience offered by universities. The evolution of a learning



society in Scotland is partially contingent on an effective and diverse mass system of higher education. Within that system, higher education in further education colleges, as a model of lifelong learning, has the potential to contribute to that essential diversity. The extent to which it will do so in the future depends upon the decisions of policy makers and upon the professional response of institutional leaders and staff.

I suggest that this research provides evidence of three sequential steps that could be taken to enable higher education students in further education colleges to expand as a constituency and to succeed as individual lifelong learners for the benefit of themselves, society and the economy. The first step would be for policy makers to bring to an end the marginal status of colleges as providers of higher education by removing or reducing the effect of the new “binary line” and by recognising and valuing colleges and their qualifications as part of a unified system of higher education comprised of different but equally respected types of institutions. The second step would be for policy makers and higher education institutions to relinquish their exclusive obsession with the preservation of a single dominant model of full-time post-school degree education for young people. Whilst maintaining this model, we can surely accept the importance, for a learning society, of a more diverse mix of models of higher education that are compatible with the expectations and aspirations of lifelong learners. This would mean introducing an equitable funding regime for all learners in higher education; providing effective and high quality part-time higher education; and creating incentives for both learners and employers to participate effectively. The third step would be for colleges and possibly for some higher education institutions to develop further as learner-centred learning environments where students are welcomed as people and where the priority is on valuing highly individualised strategies for the integration of learning with life. This means recognising that there are many stakeholders in students’ learning, whether they are employers, family members, fellow students or staff and enabling students to negotiate a network of support that will underpin confident, meaningful and successful lifelong learning. Further investigation into the boundary between full-time and part-time study, to

discover what governs students' choice of learning strategies and to test the implications of a more equitable system of student finance would enable the conclusions from this case study to be tested more widely.

This research aimed to give students a voice and to allow their views to influence the future of higher education in Scotland. Taking the steps that I have set out would respond to the voices of the students in this case study. Replication and extension of this work would determine whether there would be similar benefits for higher education students in other types of institution and for the system of higher education in Scotland.

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# Appendices

Appendix 1 Aide-memoire for focus groups

Appendix 2 Notes for Issue of Questionnaire

Appendix 3 Questionnaire

Appendix 4 Summary of data editing and data cleaning

Appendix 5 Higher education courses offered by Lauder College: 2000-2005

## Appendix 1 Aide-memoire for focus groups

### 1 Arrangements

- 10 groups.
- 2/4 per week for 4 weeks.
- Select 3/4 to continue, possibly by combining groups to meet on 2/3 further occasions.
- Select participants from focus groups for case studies.

### 2 Focus Group Format

- Thank for attending.
- Declare composition of group.
- Explain what will happen:
  - I will introduce my research
  - I will introduce topics for discussion
  - free discussion for one hour
  - tape-recording
  - transcription
  - anonymity will be protected
  - encourage honesty.
- Offer option to leave.

#### Notes:

- Do not necessarily record immediately.
- Keep recorder out of line of sight.

### 3 **Background to Research**

- Government and Scottish Parliament emphasis on lifelong learning and a learning society or a learning nation. Importance of learning for a competitive economy and social inclusion. Emphasis is still on full-time study post-school. Important to understand the different circumstances which people of all ages at all times of life choose to study. What is lifelong learning from the perspective of students?
- Three main themes in the research:
  - Why do people study?/Do students study because they want learning to have an impact on their lives in some way?
  - How do people integrate learning with other parts of their lives such as work or domestic/family life?
  - How can the College and Government policy help more?

### 4 **Facilitate Discussion**

Possible prompt questions:

- Why are you studying?
- Do you think you will get out of it what you wanted/expected?
- Why?/Why not?
- Since you started studying, have you changed your mind about the future?
- Why Lauder?/Why not University?
- Are you working? (Depending on composition of group.)

- How important is work? (Instrumental? Professional?)
  - How do you fit work/studying together?
  - Do they impact on each other? How?
  - Would you like it to be different? Why? How?
- 
- Do you have family? (Depending on composition of group.)
  - Discuss impact of study on domestic life and vice versa.
  - Discuss balancing work/study/family. What is it like? How difficult is it? Why did you choose your pattern?
  - Would you like it to be different? Why? How?
  - Can you give me an example of a good day/typical day/bad day?
- 
- What helps?/What makes a positive difference? What could make it better?
  - What doesn't?/What is negative?
  - Have you thought about dropping out? Why? When?
  - When was the first time you thought about dropping out?/When was the most recent time?
  - How did you decide what to do?/Who helped?/Who didn't help?
  - Would you like your programme to be more flexible? Local? On-line? Why?
- 
- What do you think the government means by lifelong learning? Do you think you are part of the government's lifelong learning agenda? Does it apply to you? Is it important? Why?

10 minutes for each group of questions.

Notes:

- Avoid asking hypothetical questions.
- Ask subordinate/follow-up questions.
- Ask for examples to get depth.
- Reflect back/use "tell me more".
- Use "in what ways?/how often?/in what circumstances?"
- Does anyone think differently?

**5 Round Up**

- Thank everyone for participating.
- Explain that the tape will be transcribed but that individuals will not be identified by name.
- Ask if anyone would come back for another session after Easter.
- Try to identify potential case studies and note their names/ask if anyone would be interested in being a case study.

## Appendix 2 Notes for Issue of Questionnaire

### LAUDER COLLEGE

#### Lifelong Learning Research

#### Notes for Issue of Questionnaire

- 1 “I apologise for interrupting the class. You are being asked to complete a special questionnaire which is different from student feedback questionnaires.”
- 2 Read out the information on the front page of the questionnaire.
- 3 “The questionnaire is being issued to all higher education students in Lauder College (over 1,000 people).”
- 4 “It will take about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. We would appreciate it if you would think carefully about the questions and answer as accurately and honestly as possible. The questionnaire asks about your work and family life and about how much time you spend on your studies. Please be honest. Your answers will remain confidential to the research and there is no possibility at all of any link between the questionnaire and your progress on your course. If any questions don’t apply to you or if you prefer not to give the information, leave blanks.”
- 5 Issue the questionnaires. Help students to complete the front page by offering to confirm course codes. Encourage students to give either name or ID number or both. If any student is unwilling or unable to do this, don’t insist. Agree without discussion and ask the student to complete a questionnaire completely anonymously.
- 6 Remember to say thank you at the end.

## Appendix 3 Questionnaire

### 1 Introduction

This questionnaire is part of a research project being undertaken in Lauder College with all higher education students. The purpose of the research is to improve understanding of how students integrate learning within their busy lives and how well aspects of policy assist students to learn.

The research is part of a doctoral programme at Stirling University.

The anonymity of all students who complete the questionnaire will be preserved and the results will not identify any specific individuals.

Your co-operation in completing the questionnaire is much appreciated.

To assist us in collating the results, please provide:

Your name (*leave blank if you prefer*): .....

Your student ID number: .....

Your course title: .....

Your course code: .....

## 2 Reasons for Choosing to Study

2.1 We are interested in why you chose your programme at Lauder College. Please tell us what reasons you had for choosing your programme. *Select as many reasons as you wish from the lists below or add your own reasons. Then tell us your two most important reasons overall by numbering them 1 = most important and 2 = next most important*

	<i>Tick any which apply to</i>	<i>Choose your two most important reasons</i>
To help me secure a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To help me change employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To help me secure promotion with my current employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To improve my general job prospects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To improve my skills/knowledge in my current job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My employer requires me to study	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To enable me to progress to a degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To enable me to progress to a postgraduate/professional course	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To help me to be more active in voluntary/community work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To enable me to support my family members	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To learn more about my subject for personal reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To improve my skills/knowledge for personal reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To meet people and enjoy social contact	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To gain a qualification	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Others (*Please give details.*)

- .....
- .....
- .....

2.2 So far, do you think your programme of study is meeting the expectations you have of it?

- Yes, in full
- Yes, to some extent
- No
- Don't know

2.3 Did you consider other Colleges/Universities before you chose Lauder College?

- Yes
- No

2.4 Why did you choose Lauder College? *Select as many reasons as you wish from the list below or add your own reasons. Then tell us your two most important reasons by numbering them 1 = most important and 2 = next most important and so on.*

	<i>Tick any which apply to</i>	<i>Choose your two most important reasons</i>
I am not able to travel outside my local area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I prefer to study locally even though I can travel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No other College/University offers the programme I want	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No other College/University offers class times I want	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I gained a favourable impression of Lauder College from other people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I gained a favourable impression of Lauder College when I visited the College	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do not have the qualifications for University	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I did not consider University to be suitable for someone like me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I formed the view that Lauder College would best help me to achieve my objectives in studying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My employer directed me to Lauder College	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others <i>(Please give details.)</i>		
.....		<input type="checkbox"/>
.....		<input type="checkbox"/>

**3 Balancing Priorities**

We are interested in how students balance the different priorities in their lives. The following questions ask you to describe what you do besides studying.

Employment

3.1 Do you have a job?

Yes (Please go to question 3.2.)

No (Please go to question 3.10.)

3.2 Please answer whichever of the following questions is easiest for you.

How much do you earn approximately before tax per week?

£.....

or

How much do you earn approximately before tax per year?

£.....

or

How much do you earn approximately before tax per hour?

£.....

3.3 In a typical week, how many hours do you normally work:

During term time? ..... hours per week

Outside of term time? ..... hours per week

- 3.4 When do you work? *(Please choose the one which most applies to you.)*
- Mainly during the day (Monday to Friday)
- Mainly in the evening (Monday to Friday)
- Mainly during the day (Saturday and Sunday)
- Mainly in the evening (Saturday and Sunday)
- Mainly shiftwork
- At different times during the week
- 3.5 Which of these categories does your job fall into? *(Please tick any which apply to you.)*
- It gives me work experience which is relevant to my studies
- It helps me find the money for my studies
- It helps pay my living expenses whilst I study
- It helps pay for extras such as social activities whilst I study
- It is a career/professional job
- 3.6 Which is more important to you?
- Job
- College Course
- Job and College Course both equal

3.7 Does working have an impact on your studies?

No impact *(Please go to question 3.10.)*

Negative impact *(Please go to question 3.8 and then to question 3.10.)*

Positive impact *(Please go to question 3.9.)*

Both positive and negative impact *(Please go to question 3.8.)*

3.8 What kind of negative impact does working have on your ability to study?

*(Please tick any which apply to you.)*

I have less time to study than I need

I miss classes

I miss deadlines or hand work in late

I am not well prepared for assessments

Tiring work can make study time less productive

Other *(Please describe.)*

.....

.....

*Please now go to question 3.9 if working also has a positive effect on your studies. If working does not have a positive effect on your studies, please go to question 3.10.*

3.9 What kind of positive impact does working have on your ability to study?

*(Please tick any which apply to you.)*

I get experience that is relevant to my studies

Working helps me manage my time

Having more money reduces stress for me so I study better

Other *(Please describe.)*

.....

.....

Domestic/Family Life

3.10 *Would you please describe your family circumstances.*

Living with parent(s)/guardian(s)

Living with spouse or partner

Living with spouse or partner and children

Living with friend(s) or sharing with other adult(s)/sibling(s)

Living alone

Living with my children

Other *(Please describe.)*

.....

.....

- 3.11 Does your income provide financial support (wholly or partly) for
- Child(ren) living with you
  - Child(ren) living elsewhere
  - Adult(s) living with you
  - Adult(s) living elsewhere

- 3.12 Do you provide care/domestic support for
- Child(ren) living with you
  - Child(ren) living elsewhere
  - Adult(s) living with you
  - Adult(s) living elsewhere

3.13 Can you estimate the number of hours you spend per week on domestic activities/caring activities, whatever your home situation?

..... hours per week

- 3.14 Does your home environment have an impact on your studies?
- No impact *(Please go to question 3.17.)*
  - Positive impact *(Please go to question 3.15 and then to question 3.17.)*
  - Negative impact *(Please go to question 3.16.)*
  - Both positive and negative impact *(Please go to question 3.15.)*

3.15 What kind of positive impact does your home environment have on your studies?

*(Please tick any which apply to you.)*

I have good quality study space at home

I can study in peace and quiet at home

I can study at times which are good for me

I enjoy studying along with other family members who are studying

I like to set a good example to other family members who are studying

Other *(Please describe.)*

.....

.....

*Please now go to question 3.16 if your home environment also has a negative effect on your studies. If your home environment does not have a negative effect on your studies, please go to question 3.17.*



3.16 What kind of negative impact does your home environment have on your studies?

*(Please tick any which apply to you.)*

I have no space in which I can study effectively

It is difficult to find peace and quiet to study at home

The demands of other family members make it difficult for me to find good quality time to study

Other *(Please describe.)*

.....

.....

3.17 Most people have around 120 hours per week waking time (assuming 7 hours sleep per night). We are interested in how you prioritise your time during a typical week during College term time. *Please tell us approximately how much time per week you spend on studying, work, domestic tasks, social activities or relaxation.*

Number of hours

in a typical week

At College or studying at home or elsewhere

.....

At work or doing work (job-related) tasks at home or elsewhere

.....

Travel time to/from College and/or work

.....

Domestic tasks such as shopping or ironing

.....

Family time, social activities, personal pursuits or relaxation

.....

Other *(Please describe.)*

.....

.....

TOTAL

.....

3.18 How well do you feel you balance the different priorities in your life at present?

*(Please tick one.)*

I have a good balance with few problems

I manage to balance my priorities

I find it difficult to balance everything

Conflicting priorities create stress for me

3.19 What would you most like to be different to make it easier for you to have a balanced life?

.....

.....

.....

3.20 Could you please indicate if you receive practical or personal support which helps you to be able to study. *(Please tick any which apply to you. Please do not include support from the College or College staff.)*

	No Support	Some Support	A Great Deal of Support
Financial support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help with childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help with or sharing shopping/domestic tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lift/car sharing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouragement/understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assistance with coursework	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leave of absence from work for study or exams	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other <i>(Please describe.)</i>			
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.21 From whom do you receive practical or personal support? *(Please tick any which apply to you.)*

- From family members
- From friends
- From colleagues at work
- From your employer

From fellow students

From none of these

Other (*Please describe.*)

.....

.....

3.22 Do you ideally need more help/support than is available to you?

Yes (*Please go to question 3.23.*)

No (*Please go to section 4.*)

3.23 Please describe what additional support you need and from whom?

.....

.....

.....

.....

#### 4 **Factors That Affect Your Studies**

We are interested in how the College makes it easier or more difficult for you to pursue your studies.

4.1 *Please rate the following College factors by ticking any boxes that apply to you.*

	Positively helps me	Neutral for me	Creates difficulty for me
Start date of my programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Length of my programme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Timing of classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Amount of attendance required at College	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Location of College	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of nursery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opening hours of:			
Library	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student Development Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finance Office	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Customer Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refectory	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student Records Office	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.2 Please rate the following factors, which are outwith College control, by ticking any boxes which apply to you.

	Positively helps me	Neutral for me	Creates difficulty for me
(Non)availability of finance for course fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(Non)availability of finance for maintenance/ living expenses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.3 Is there anything else which particularly helps you to be able to study?

.....

.....

.....

.....

4.4 Is there anything else which makes it difficult for you to study?

.....

.....

.....

.....

4.5 What could be done to make it easier for you to study? *Select as many items as you wish from the lists below or add your own reasons. Then tell us your two most important items by numbering them 1 = most important and 2 = next most important.*

	<i>Tick any which apply to you</i>	<i>Choose your two most important items</i>
(More) finance for course fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(More) finance for living expenses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(More) finance for childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(More) finance for books and equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(More) finance for travel expenses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(More) finance for .....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunity to study at more flexible times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distance learning option	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On-line learning option	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Classes available locally in my home area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunity to complete my programme more quickly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other <i>(Please give details.)</i>		
.....		<input type="checkbox"/>
.....		<input type="checkbox"/>
.....		<input type="checkbox"/>

4.6 Have you seriously considered dropping out?

Yes *(Please go to question 4.7.)*

No *(Please go to section 5.)*

4.7 Why did you consider dropping out? *(Please tick any which apply to you.)*

I was unhappy with my programme of study

I was struggling to keep up

I was under financial pressure

I was offered a job

I had to work too much overtime

My partner/family was unhappy about the time spent on my studies

I was unhappy about not spending time with my partner/family

I experienced personal stress due to all the demands on me

Other *(Please describe.)*

.....

.....



## 5 Lifelong Learning

- 5.1 The Government and the Scottish Parliament have lifelong learning at the heart of policy. This is illustrated by the following extract from Opportunity Scotland (Cm 4048 1998).

*"There is real recognition that learning opportunities and the system for delivering them must be geared to reflect the need, priorities and preferences of learners. The Government is committed to working with other partners to motivate people to think of learning as relevant to them and to take up the opportunities which will enable them to achieve their goals. The concept of lifelong learning reflects the fact that, in the midst of change, we need to update the skills in the workforce and equip people to manage their own future..... By 2002 all Scottish citizens will have the means to access learning at any stage of their lives."*

We are interested in your views of the importance of lifelong learning to you.

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you consider yourself to be a lifelong learner?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have government policy changes encouraged you to engage in learning?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you see evidence that government policy will be a positive factor in encouraging you to continue to learn in the future?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5.2 Please comment on your awareness of some of the Government's initiatives to support lifelong learning. *(Please tick any boxes which apply to you.)*

	I have not heard of this	I have heard of this	This is likely to be of use to me in the future	This is already helping me or has helped me
New Deal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training for Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individual Learning Accounts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fee waivers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Career Development Loans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access funds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hardship loans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scottish University for Industry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LearnDirect Scotland	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Higher Still	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Modern Apprenticeships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**6 Individual Circumstances**

It would be of assistance to the research to know some details about you and your background.

This information, like all the information you have given, will be used only anonymously.

6.1 *Please indicate your gender.*

Male

Female

6.2 *Please indicate how old you are.*

..... years

6.3 *Please tell us your marital status.*

Single

Married

Living with partner

Separated

Divorced

6.4 *Please tell us if you have any children.*

No. of children (pre school)

No. of children (primary)

No. of children (secondary)

No. of children (further or higher education)

6.5 *Please tell us your employment status before starting your programme.*

Employed full-time

Employed part-time

Unemployed for up to six months

Unemployed for six months to one year

Unemployed for 1-3 years

Unemployed for over 3 years

6.6 *Please indicate what qualifications do you already hold. (Tick all those which apply to you.)*

Standard grade(s)/'O' grade(s)/GCSE(s)

Higher(s)/A levels

National Certificate module(s)

SWAP programme

City and Guilds

Advanced Craft Certificate

Higher National Certificate

Higher National Diploma

Degree

Postgraduate qualification

Professional qualification

6.7 Please state in which year (before starting at Lauder College) you last studied formally.

.....

6.8 Please indicate who is mainly responsible for paying the fees for your programme.

Student Awards Agency Scotland

My employer

Myself

My employer and myself

Training for Work

New Deal

Individual Learning Account

My fees are waived

Other (Please describe.)

.....

6.9 Please indicate your primary source of financial support for living expenses.

Student loan

Career development loan

Grant/bursary

Benefits

Salary/wage

Spouse/family earnings



**7 Additional Information**

7.1 Would you like to make any other comments or give any additional information about yourself?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

***Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.***

We would like to identify students who have found this survey interesting and who would be prepared to spare a further one hour to participate in a focus group or an individual discussion.

If you would be prepared to be invited to a focus group or individual discussion, please indicate below:

Focus Group

Individual Discussion

***Thank you.***

#### **Appendix 4 Summary of data editing and data cleaning**

Course titles were standardised for ease of analysis.

“Other” responses were recoded to defined responses when there was an obvious fit or deleted if they had no connection to the question being asked.

Obvious column errors were corrected eg weekly earnings of £20000.

Inconsistencies such as Job=No but working hours and earnings >0 were corrected either by reference back to the original questionnaire or by imputation from other responses.

Missing entries under FT/PT were inserted by reference to College records.

In one copy, values for hours worked per week earnings per hour, week and year, hours spent caring and age were recoded into bands to simplify analysis.

In the data on split of hours within the week, a small number of frivolous or incomplete entries were deleted. Most of these involve a total of activity within a week of less than 20 hours. The remainder of the data for these respondents was checked and retained.

Analysis of source of funds for fees and living expenses highlighted some inconsistencies eg part-time students stating fees paid by SAAS. These were referred back to College records and, in most cases, were found to have arisen from an error in the FT/PT field. In some cases, discussions with the College’s guidance expert clarified the reasons for the individual entries and supported recoding. In many cases she knew the individuals.

In one copy of the data, all references to Individual Learning Accounts were recoded to a consistent treatment. Although it is recognised that the ILA would not have been the primary



source of fees in the majority of cases, it was worthwhile to identify the total number of students accessing these funds.

In one copy, all missing values in the split of hours section were replaced with zeros, which gave two different ways of calculating the mean values.

**Appendix 5 Higher Education courses offered by Lauder College during the period  
2000-2005**

HNC Accounting
HNC Administration and Information Management
HNC Antique Furniture Restoration
HNC Art and Design
HNC Biomedical Sciences
HNC Business Administration
HNC Childcare and Education
HNC Complementary Therapies
HNC Computing
HNC Computing Software Development
HNC Computing Technical Support
HNC Construction
HNC Contracting Management
HNC Digital Media
HNC e-commerce
HNC Electronic Engineering
HNC Engineering Management
HNC Fabrication Welding and NDT
HNC Financial Services
HNC Fitness Health and Exercise
HNC Health Care
HNC Hospitality Operations
HNC Human Resource Management
HNC Interactive Multimedia Creation
HNC Interior Design
HNC Jewellery Design, Production and Business
HNC Management
HNC Marketing
HNC Mechanical Engineering
HNC Mechatronics
HNC Photography
HNC Professional Cookery
HNC Social Care
HNC Social Sciences
HNC Supporting Learning Needs
HNC Technical Engineering
HNC Tourism
HNC Waste Management

HND Administration and Information Management
HND Antique Furniture Restoration
HND Art and Design
HND Business Administration
HND Computer Software Development
HND Computer Technical Support
HND Computing
HND Construction Management
HND Digital Media

HND Electronic Engineering
HND Engineering
HND Engineering Management
HND Hospitality Management
HND Human Resources Management
HND Marketing
HND Mechatronics
HND Social Sciences
HND Tourism

Diploma in Management
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Advanced Craft Certificate
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BA Management
BEng Electronic Manufacture
BSc Network Computing