WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN FURTHER EDUCATION: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ADULT LIFELONG LEARNING FROM THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE.

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on barriers and enablers to participating in Further Education from the central viewpoint of student perspectives. The starting point for this research is the work of Veronica McGivney (1993) who reported on research undertaken by Cross (1981) which divided deterrents to participation into three categories namely, Situational, Institutional and Dispositional. McGivney reports these categories to be "oversimplified". Reasons for student participation/non-participation in Further Education are explored via the opinions of learners on the Access to Higher Education Diploma, delivered in a Further Education College within a traditional mining community which is in the process of redefining its identity following the closure of local coal mines within the last few decades. To accommodate the complexity that arose from this research, it was important to problematise a discourse that is at times taken for granted in Further and Higher Education, namely that of individual needs. It was also important that the discourse of student voice was problematised so as to establish that this research is based upon student perspectives and differs from doing student voice work.

The research draws on quantitative and qualitative survey methods including data from questionnaires and a focus group. This was supplemented with data from college Management Information Systems. Nine emergent themes that may act as sub-layers to the themes of Situational, Institutional and Dispositional categories reported by McGivney and one meta-theme (Opportunity) are discussed. High levels of interrelatedness between emergent themes point to a fluid dynamic within the decision-making of prospective participants. The research concludes with a 'framework for participation' that attempts to reflect this fluidity through consideration of how local college conditions in Further Education might interact with more macro themes.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE AND AIMS OF THIS RESEARCH

Education should be made readily available to all who wish to participate within it. It should not only be available to a privileged few, young in age or financially capable. Adults in particular who decide to return to education do so for varied reasons be they career-orientated, personal or both. Often, it is found that adults have overcome substantial barriers from personal and social perspectives in order to make profound changes in their own lives via the medium of education.

The Three Broad Research Aims

- To increase understanding of what the barriers and enablers to adults returning to education are;
- To explore if and how adult students have overcome barriers to succeed in their aims (the first two broad aims will be explored via the critiques of individual barriers theories in the literature review, chapter 3 pages 57-63);
- To arrive at a 'framework for participation' – Based on the findings of this research, it will act as a reference point in order to establish how barrier-effects interact and therefore how targeted support can be administered to counteract those effects.

Giving voice to student perspectives must remain central to the aims above so as to ascertain the ways in which colleges need to support adult learners. Accordingly, the notion of 'student voice' is problematised in the literature review, pages 36-41. The challenge to me as an educator and to the college and wider society is to respond to the individual needs of students in a manner that is accommodating. To aid in this endeavour, the discourse of

‘individual needs’ has also been problematised in the literature review, pages 44-47. Davies (2004) states that:

“Education should contribute to a future that is unequivocally envisaged as inclusive and requires the conscious sharing of resources and power with those who are currently excluded” (Page 54).

It is appropriate to note that the role of the individual educator or college may be limited both in the resources and the power needed to effect change. Therefore, we need to extend the view to consider that it is necessary that education as a whole contribute toward a more inclusive future through Governmental policies that reflect this.

Current Governmental thinking argues for the need to tailor the environment of Further Education colleges to the courses that are specific to the needs of adult students, and that this group of learners should be encouraged to attend these institutions. If one explores the Department for Education and Skills White Paper (2006), it is interesting to note how there has been a noticeable shift in emphasis from Further Education being the provider of education for post-16 students, to the current standpoint of it being a resource that can and should be used by *adults* in order to update skills. This shift in emphasis is made clear at the start of the White Paper (2006) where it states in the Foreword that:

“Our economic future depends on our productivity as a nation. That requires a labour force with skills to match the best in the world...Our reforms will renew the mission of the Further Education system, and its central role in equipping young people and adults with the skills for productive, sustainable employment in a modern economy”(Page 1).

A great deal has been written concerning potential barriers to education that adult students face and how to overcome them. The *how*, *when* and *why* of both successful and less successful experiences of students that I have taught within the Further Education sector will

form the focus of this research and will act as valuable currency, both in terms of decision making and of understanding the barrier/enabler issues faced by prospective students, for a variety of stakeholders (including, but not limited to, educators, managers, policy makers and legislators).

The basic premise from which the aim of realising 'real life experiences' will be grounded is in the writings of McGivney (1993), who notes that the reasons for participation and non-participation are numerous, complex and much debated. More particularly I will also draw on the work of Cross (1981), who in her synthesis of American research, divided deterrents to participation into three categories - situational, institutional and dispositional. As McGivney (1993) points out:

"Although they have been described as oversimplified, these categories provide a useful starting point for considering the problems of non-participation" (Page 17).

These categorisations will be used as the starting point for my own research which will attempt to generate a framework for participation, based on analysis of the student perspectives in relation to support requirements.

Background and Context of the Research

The students that I have worked with during this research are from the Access to Higher Education Diploma. The reasons for choosing this specific group are that these students will have felt the barrier effects reported by McGivney above most keenly. They are drawn from a section of the population who have children, jobs, mortgages and rents to pay, spouses and families to consider; they are adults living adult lives and have more complex decisions to make in terms of participating in Further Education as opposed to students who are just out of education and are familiar with contemporary education systems. All students

in the study group are aged between 19 to their mid 50's. They are from a localised area in the West Midlands and are often from a strong working class background where families traditionally earned their income from mining. Once adults decide that they need to return to education via the Further Education sector it is not always the case that it caters effectively for their needs. Helena Kennedy QC (1997) recognised this phenomenon when she argued that:

"Further Education suffers because of prevailing British attitudes. Not only does there remain a very carefully calibrated hierarchy of worthwhile achievement…but there is also an appalling ignorance amongst decision-makers and opinion-formers about what goes on in Further Education" (Page 1).

Experiential conversations with people from this catchment area, which will be drawn upon in this research, have pointed towards endured economic hardship in their lives whilst bringing up children during a period where all the mines have slowly been closed. Money has been hard to come by due to a previously limited importance of education in their lives only enabling them to work in relatively unskilled jobs. That said, many participants have progressed from the Access to Higher Education Diploma to undergraduate studies and have both realised potential that has allowed them to move into careers with more attractive remuneration as well as participating in new fields of interest.

Overview of the Methodological Framework.

The methodological framework for this research is that of a phenomenological case study. The aim is to attempt to understand the phenomenon of barriers to education and how students overcome these barriers by interpreting their subjective experiences. It is important not only to recognise that these students have faced and overcome barriers but also to attempt to understand *how* they did so from their own point of view. But what is the most

effective method that can be used in order to understand the students' perspectives and how they impact on the huge body of writing relating to barriers to education? Cohen et al (2003) observe that:

"Positivism strives for objectivity, measurability, predictability, controllability whilst the interpretive paradigms strive to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors" (Page 27).

Both paradigms, though useful in their own right would form an incomplete picture of the phenomena that are being researched. It is more useful to use a synthesis i.e. collecting some 'hard' data to form a picture of the phenomena to be researched as well as 'soft' data from the views of the participants to gain a deeper understanding and a fuller interpretation of observations.

The Broad Research Questions.

The broad research questions to be addressed - based on the broad aims set out on page 1 - are as follows:

- When and why do adults return to education?
- What barriers or enablers do adults typically face in returning to education at different stages in their adult lives and from a range of vocational or personal contexts?
- What are the implications for the role we can play as educators, managers and policy-makers in helping adult learners to take advantage of educational opportunities throughout their lives?

In answering these questions the aim is to better understand the participants' viewpoint regarding barriers and enablers to Further Education and to move towards the instigation of a practical framework aimed at widening participation within the college by

taking into consideration the needs of the local community. The framework will be useful in helping to drive college strategy in ways that in turn impact on how students relate to the college, their expectations of it and their experiences of teaching and learning within it. The theoretical framework that guides this research is therefore a pragmatic synthesis of positivist and interpretive paradigms with a view to better equip and understand those who currently feel they are powerless in terms of re-entry into and achievement within the Further Education sector.

In order to understand the context of this research and the methodologies that I will use within it, it is important at this stage to say something about myself as a researcher. Cohen et al (2003) suggest that:

"Investigators adopting an objectivist (or positivist) approach to the social world … will choose from a range of traditional [research methods] - surveys, experiments and the like. Others favouring the more subjectivist (or anti-positivist) approach … will select from a comparable range of recent and emerging techniques- accounts, participant observation and personal constructs, for example" (Pages 6-7).

My Role as Educator and Researcher

From a personal perspective, I find Cohen et al's categorisations to be too polarised. How can the researcher truly be objective as the nature of objectivity implies that there is a truth 'out there' that everybody can grasp as well as understand to be that truth? Is one person's concept of truth necessarily the same as the next person's? On the other hand, to be completely subjective would suggest a plethora of truths that can be accessed by different researchers. This would mean abandoning the notion of finding general principles or that a stable, ordered and consensual view of the world could be found. In attempting to locate my

own viewpoint, I feel it is necessary to understand both extremes but to work somewhere in the middle. That is, to be conscious that truth exists although described from differing viewpoints, but to attempt to be sensitive to and explicate bias toward any one viewpoint clearly and explicitly when conducting research. Therefore, it is essential to rigorously attempt to ensure that any assumptions or preconceptions with regard to research settings are exposed as far as possible in a reflexive and reflective approach. Robson (2002) encapsulates this viewpoint as follows:

"Phenomenological approaches to qualitative research stress the importance of reflexivity…the ability to put aside personal feelings and preconceptions is more a function of how reflexive one is rather than how objective one is, because it is not possible for researchers to set aside things about which they are not aware" (Page 172).

Reflexivity is operationalised is in the cause and effect nature of the research, e.g. phase 1, 2 and 3 during analysis of the focus group. Each phase is informed by the previous one so that the data tells the story rather than bringing my own opinions and preconceptions to it. Acknowledgement does however need to be given here to the fact that it may not be possible to totally eradicate bias. If the researcher is to acknowledge subjectivity, can s/he really be fully sensitive to his/her own biases? It seems that we can only try to give as much detail as possible about ourselves and our participants and the cultural and physical contexts and settings they are located in.

Structure and Overview of the Thesis

In the remainder of this chapter, an overview of the thesis will be provided.

Chapter 2 will contextualise the thesis from both a micro and macro perspective so as to identify some of the factors affecting students' decisions to participate in Further Education. This is a huge task in itself, so key points will be discussed pertaining to:

- The relationship between education and the economy
- Politics and policy: how and why education is governed in ways which are expected to impact on participation?
- Issues of social conformity, norms and values
- Issues of control and power: how the curriculum mediates between institutional policy and government policy
- The macro (top-down perspective): from government policy to participation in education
- The micro (Bottom–up perspective): from individual aspirations to participation in the global economy

Chapter 3 presents a literature review, which looks at the current writings and thinking concerning how the present state of participation in Further Education has been arrived at. Perspectives that are analysed will relate to:

- Whether education advantages society, or is used as a tool for conformity – Do students re-enter education as a means to operating more effectively within society (e.g. up-skilling in a more advanced technological age), or do they do so in order to conform to the needs of society (e.g. necessity to up-skill in order to hold on to a job/career in an ever more technological age?)
- The present ethos of the Further Education sector with regard to participation
- A look at typology and its limitations for generalisation
- How and why students are motivated: extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation and their relationship to participation

This chapter will act to inform detailed emerging research questions.

Chapter 4 will be a detailed look into two aspects. Firstly, the methodological framework that is used to structure the thesis will explore the tensions between positivist and interpretive paradigms and how these are resolved through the choice of methods for data collection, analysis and interpretation. Most importantly, the choices of methods needed to best capture the student perspectives are discussed. Secondly, tools for data collection and interpretation will be explored in detail together with the following methodological issues:

- Generalisability/Transferability
- Validity/Credibility
- Ethical considerations and reflexivity.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will provide the empirical core of the thesis with the student responses to questionnaire and student utterances from the focus group taking centre position. The three broad research aims - see page 1 - underpin the direction that these chapters take. Viewpoints from questionnaires, a focus group and data from college M.I.S systems are triangulated. Barriers to education and opportunities for access will be analysed through the perspectives of those from the college catchment area to establish enabling/disabling factors as well as motivating/de-motivating ones. Finally, any interrelationships between these will be explored to assist in informing the requirements for a framework for participation.

Chapter 8 will bring together the findings of the research, exploring in detail how they can be used to formulate a 'framework for participation' through synthesis and analysis of the observed data. This will lead to summary and recommendations for further work.

CHAPTER 2

A CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR

Educational Policy - Political, Economic and Cultural Aspects that Affect Widening Participation.

There is currently a call to all sectors of Education to provide the means to upgrade the skills of the masses from lower level manual and basic cognitive skills to include higher level intellectual skills such as problem-solving, creative synthesis and critical thinking, as these are the purported skills needed for a modern workforce; (DIUS 2007: pages 21-35; DfES 2006: Foreword; LSC 2007: pages 51-58). Therefore, there is a need to increase participation in Further Education and to put incentives into place to entice those who are seen traditionally as non-participants.

Widening participation within the Further Education sector necessitates encountering the problematic area of the relationship of education to the dynamics of the economy, be they local, national or global. It is all well and good to state that through education we empower adult students to operate with greater efficacy within a technologically advancing world; but this is a utopian view. There are many interrelated strands that operate at both micro and macro levels within society and the Further Education institutions, which need to be understood in order to comprehend the dynamics of the relationship between tertiary education and acceptance of the need to pay for its resources by wider society. In order to understand these economic relationships, the ways in which the curriculum has been used - both in historical and contemporary contexts to mediate between institutional and Governmental policy regarding social markets/mobility is explored.

Donald (1992) observed during the period leading up to the Forster's 1870 Education Act, that:

"Several factors combined to build up the pressure for change. New manufacturing technologies, growing challenges to England's industrial supremacy, …all these, combined with the glaring inadequacies of the existing voluntary school, meant that the principle of state-provided elementary education became more generally accepted" (Page 26).

In the same way, tertiary education – both current and changing- falls into the spotlight via rhetoric which argues for subsidising post-compulsory education due to need for both a more highly skilled and qualified population. Alison Wolf (2009) talks of how 'these arguments are couched in terms of 'UK plc' and the 'knowledge economy'', and moves further to point to the fact that:

"[Subsidising post-compulsory education is based around ideas that] have been internalised, and are offered uncritically, by large numbers of businessmen and civil servants as well as by politicians. These groups genuinely believe it to be self-evident that we are failing to produce the skills that the economy needs, and will continue to do so without government intervention" (Page 58-59).

Resultantly, tensions are created between the State as governor of curriculum change and market forces through their selection of college graduates to join the workforce, in turn creating demand for particular courses. The extent to which student choice is freely operating here is also contentious. It could be argued that these three forces "government", the "job market" and "student choice" are part of an interdependent process. Adult learners have become a higher priority for Government focus and are seen as a resource that can be tapped into to form a national/global workforce. Many initiatives are now available to adult students who wish to return to education either to better themselves personally or to better their

chances of employability. But what is it that impels adult learners to re-engage with education, especially if they have been away from it for as long as many of those in the Access to HE programmes? The answer may lie in the fact that they see there are better opportunities available for them that they are more readily able to realise due to strategic Governmental initiatives and policies. Helena Kennedy QC (1997) recognised:

"The enormous backlog caused by decades of under-achievement in which national strategies for education and training have failed to make significant inroads. The immediate needs of the three out of five adults without qualifications at level 3 cannot be addressed either by schools or by higher education institutions" (Page 29).

The Further Education institution has become an attractive place for the adult learner, and is invested in accordingly by a Government that sees its potential. Here, a case can be made which points to the dynamics of macro – micro policies, where incentives that allow adult students to enter into education with the promise of a brighter and more lucrative future for both Government and the student can be recognised. Although it may not always work out this way, it is alluring for both the learner and Government. This dynamic is demonstrable when considering the Access to Higher Education programme which allows for adults to gain a level three equivalence in education so as to give them a better opportunity to enter universities (although it must be recognised that Access courses do not give certain entry into Higher Education). Universities within the locale are geared up to accept these students once the course has been successfully completed, at the same time as exerting a level of curriculum control as the price for accepting these students. For example, in terms of mathematics provision, the local universities state clearly whether they accept GCSE or 'A' level maths, or whether subject equivalence is acceptable. For those who do not wish to take GCSE's and 'A' levels, the equivalence is able to get them to the same destination, so has to

be provided for by the college. In effect, the transition from Further Education to Higher Education and the allocation of roles within society for the two sectors can be seen to be affected by market forces which guide students toward a particular goal. This viewpoint is reinforced by Haralambos and Holborn (2004) who report the writings of Parsons (1961) in relation to education acting as a means by which a person moves from a pluralistic set of norms that are experienced in family life, to the norms that are required of them by adult society:

"School prepares young people for this transition. It establishes universalistic standards, in terms of which all pupils achieve their status…conduct is assessed against the yardstick of the school rules…schools operate on meritocratic principles [and that] status is achieved on the basis of merit (or worth)" (Page 693).

The questions that need to be explored here are:

- Whose norms are people being educated to conform to?
- Should education be used as a tool towards conformism?

Whose Norms are People Being Educated to Conform to?

As an educator, it is uncomfortably obvious at times that students who enrol onto the Access to Higher Education programme are required to 'jump through hoops' from the point of enrolment through to the completion of the course and beyond. Many of the Access students who I teach question the validity of Pythagoras' Theorem or whether the rudimentary rules of Geometry have any relevance to their chosen routes of Midwifery or the teaching of History, for example. It may well be that this phenomenon is based around the issues of hierarchical control - Higher Education over Further Education and the middle class over the working class.

That the British education system is middle-class in its values and norms and consciously aims to enculture the lower classes to aspire to their norms may be a truism. Perry and Francis (2010) guide us to the fact that:

"Education researchers have drawn attention to the way in which school is a classed institution (Savage, 2003; Archer, 2007) that 'valorizes middle-class rather than working-class cultural capital' (Reay, 2001: 334). For example, Archer et al. (2007a) have claimed that powerful groups such as the middle-classes are more likely to experience a smooth transition between their own 'life-worlds' and the social institutions around them, whereas working-class pupils are more likely to experience disjuncture and alienation" (Page 10).

The fact that a large proportion of the population, especially the working classes, are not consulted nor have they consented to such values and norms does not seem to have deterred the educators, curriculum-providers, policy-makers and other stakeholders. In fact, many of these stakeholders see middle-class values and norms as those that need to be aspired to, not out of any allegiance to class, but because it is the system that they operate within and are comfortable with. Power et al (2003) looks at this through the perspective of the educational researcher when she states that:

"The middle class has tended to appear in educational research as a background against which working class experiences are contrasted...The relative invisibility of the middle class reflects the extent to which it has been 'normalized' within the field" (Page 3).

Consequently, teaching towards these norms via curricula that are based around middle-class values is seen to be acceptable. This phenomenon is articulated via the allocation of 'codes' (Bernstein 1973: pages 1-36) who argued that young children (I would include adults here) make sense of the world through a variety of codes that have been nurtured within the family and through personal experience. It is these codes that they bring into

education, where they have to make sense of their environment, the culture within which that environment operates, and their place within that environment. From my own experience, I regularly find that students enter the college with a different set of norms than they leave with. As Perry and Francis (2010) state in their review of the literature surrounding social class within Education:

"Reay (2001, 2002) has argued that working-class pupils are constructed by the education system in terms of what they 'lack', which often leaves them feeling worthless and educationally inadequate. Consequently, she has suggested that in order for working-class pupils to feel as though they are succeeding within this stratified system they need to 'lose themselves' and perform a more overtly 'middle-class' identity" (Page 10).

This is not to say that they leave with a different set of values, rather that they are more aware of how to behave, operate within, relate to, and subsequently conform to the environment that they find themselves in.

To summarise this section in relation to our emerging research framework –research questions emerging from this review include:

- Do cultural norms and values within Further Education differ from the values of the target group for this research and does this form a barrier to participation?
- Are curricula designed to meet the cultural norms of another sector - Higher Education - and are these norms and values seen as of remote relevance to the target group?
- Are the economic incentives in place necessary or sufficient to encourage students to overcome these barriers?

Should Education be Used as a Tool Towards Conformity?

Thus far, it has been acknowledged that education provides both the knowledge and skills necessary to operate within an increasingly global economy, and could be a focus that

potential students have in mind when making the decision to participate in Further Education – this will be explored further in this research. The reasons why they did not choose to participate in Further Education at an earlier stage in their lives are likely to be complex and various. It may have been that for a variety of reasons they never appreciated that education was a worthwhile pursuit. The reasons could be due to the culture of the family as seen in certain cases in this study, where the head of the family was from a strong tradition of miners who were followed by the younger generation as it was familiar and possibly, even expected. The closure of the coalmines necessitated the need to diversify and upgrade skills. If these people had been guided at an earlier stage about *how* to make alternative choices, then the immediate urgency would have been removed from the equation at this juncture in their lives.

However, it could be argued that it may be in the interests of the Government to perpetuate a vocational hierarchy so as to ensure a resource at the lower end of this hierarchy that can be mobilised when needed. Currently there are many schemes that entice adult learners back into education, and the enticement is invariably financial such as post-19 Access to Education courses being made free of charge if taken full-time within a year and crèche facilities being made available free of charge to facilitate access. This could provide incentive for people to re-skill and re-train, but does this mean that the jobs that these people would move into would be at the lower end of a more highly skilled workforce? It is only when we attempt to understand this tension that it can be realised that 'education' may be actually used as a tool to maintain the status quo. If everybody could have access to and be successful within an education system which would make him or her a doctor, teacher, engineer or other professional, then who would do the more mundane and unskilled work that needs to be done in order to perpetuate society? Harber (2004) observes that:

"Throughout the history of schooling there has always been a conflict between education for control in order to produce citizens and workers who were conformist….and those who wanted to educate for critical consciousness, individual liberation and participatory democracy" (Page 59).

Governance, Politics and the Labour Market

How and why has education come to be seen as a 'political' construct? Whereas historically the concept of lifelong learning may have been perceived as 'knowledge for knowledge's sake', the pace of change both nationally and globally has been so rapid that Governmental need to re-skill and up-skill throughout people's working lives has become an economic imperative. Field (2006) asserts that:

"Lifelong learning...is the new educational reality. All around, politicians and others are repeatedly warning that knowledge is the most important source of future advantage" (Page 9) and moves further to recognise that the 'learning age' "*is characterised not simply by the need for good, old-fashioned investment in skills and knowledge, but by the primacy of knowledge – and this now applies...to our whole workforce"* (Page 10).

From a macro-standpoint, it becomes apparent that education is very much both a tool in the hands of politicians and one that helps generate or reinforce the principles on which the politics of the day are based. For example, Government directly intervenes in producing policy that drives education in the direction required by the social markets of the day. One overwhelming effect of this is the current inordinate amount of testing that pupils have to go through to prove that they are literate and numerate, this being seen as vital to a workforce that has to compete globally. However, in order to gain this idealised workforce, people are *forced* into education so as to achieve higher qualifications for comparable jobs. Politicians

have little consultation with educators during the process of setting up the curriculum. This curriculum has to be delivered in educational establishments by law. The fact is that prescriptive curricula are very difficult to justify educationally, but what choice is afforded to the educator? Government inspections are then put into place to ensure that this curriculum is taught to the required standards. This type of layering effect of politics driven through by policy is recognised by Harber (2004) as being a watered-down version of indoctrination. He argues that:

"Less extreme than indoctrination but more common, and probably more effective, is what can be termed as socialisation…This is what the Italian writer Antonio Gramsci (1977) described as 'hegemonic' ideas, that is the dominant ideas in a society that support the ruling group and which are given far greater credence than other ideas in the media and in the education system" (Page 23).

Looking at the issues of politics and policy from a micro standpoint, it soon becomes apparent that they heavily permeate the institutions themselves. Daniels (2004) points out that:

"Unless we understand the ways in which possibilities for learning are enacted within institutions, we will be frustrated in our attempts to really raise standards" (Page 1).

Politics and policy do not only affect that which is being experienced by the learner at an academic level but also at a holistic level, and the interdependence of politics and the policy which the institution puts into place critically affects the experiences for the learner in reference to *how* they access the opportunities available to them. In the late 1990's importance was attached to the fact that "learning is central to economic success and social cohesion (Kennedy 1997: page 15). Leitch (2006) moved further to assert that:

"Where skills were once a key driver of prosperity and fairness, they are now the key driver. Achieving world class skills is the key to achieving economic success and social justice in the new global economy" (Page 9).

Invariably, the drive towards this change has occurred via the Further Education sector The LSIS (2011) recognised that:

"Further education and skills providers have become adept at reacting to change over an eventful decade. Central government has driven reform and expansion, using the sector as one of the principal 'levers' on which it can pull in order to raise the UK's skills levels" (Page 4).

Resultantly, the Widening Participation agenda has driven initiatives such as Aimhigher, Skills for Life, Train to Gain, etc..., backed up by monetary incentives/schemes including the Educational Maintenance Allowance and Adult Learning Grants aimed at encouraging returning adult participants to better themselves personally, or their chances of employability. The access to these schemes and incentives are critical variables in the interactional dynamic of the student and institution.

From this section it can be seen that the widening participation field needs to establish the extent to which:

- Principles, evident in public rhetoric concerning education, influence curricula design;
- Government policies impact on curricula design;
- Local educators and managers retain a degree of power or control over the design of curricula.

Figure 1 shows some of the contextualised factors emerging from this chapter that are broadly hypothesised to affect both the learner and the learning experience. I will go on to show that these factors form a layering effect that can be seen as the journey from a macro to a micro perspective, as well as being interdependent.

Political factors that are broadly hypothesised to affect the intention to participate in Further Education

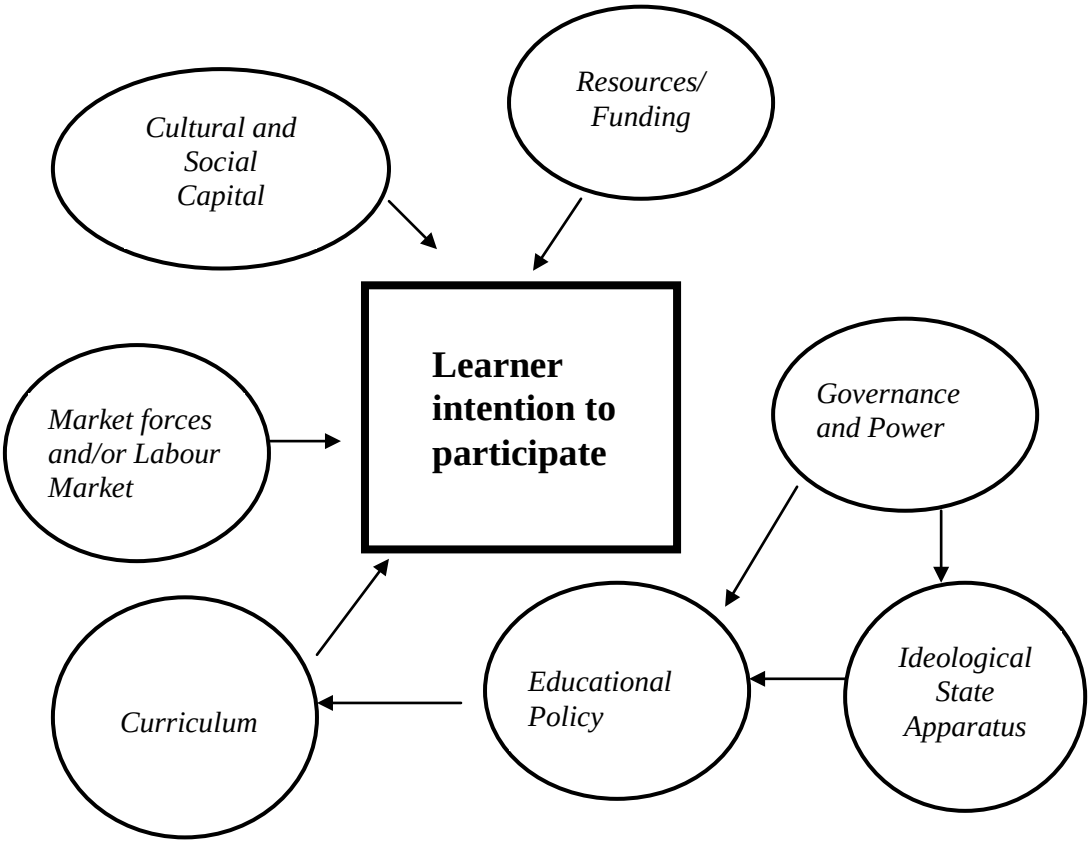


FIGURE 1

Further Education institutions operate on the principles of business where managerial decisions are based on the economic viability of courses and student numbers. The aim of any business is to survive, thus these institutions ensure that only viable courses operate within them. This business-like logic can at times restrict choices that are available to students. For example, a student may decide to take a level 2 course in mathematics via the

traditional GCSE Mathematics route, where other routes such as the OCN Level 2 Mathematics may have been more appropriate as it could act as a softer re-introduction into education, i.e. with OCN Maths there are no external examinations to be taken as well as the fact that much more time is spent on the basics of level 2 maths that could not be taught in the GCSE model due to time constraints. However, the choices are limited due to the fact that Governments measure level 2 maths equivalences against the 'gold standard' of GCSE qualifications and fund accordingly in order to ensure that GCSE's are the courses that are prioritised. The Wolf Report (2011) states that:

"The current funding structure gives all post-16 institutions a very strong incentive to steer young people into qualifications which they can pass easily. Just as the combination of 'equivalencies' and performance measures creates perverse incentives at KS4, so our current qualification-based funding mechanisms create perverse incentives for 16-19 education and training, and tend to undermine both standards and efficiency" (Page 90).

Fewer students are needed to provide a viable course at GCSE level than its OCN level 2 counterparts and Further Education colleges have become very wise to funding issues and increasingly competitive. School-leavers retaking examinations are no longer the main resource into which colleges tap as adult learners are now recognised to be a lucrative market. However, there is a large disparity between Governmental funding in the compulsory education sector compared to the Further Education sector as shown in Table 1, overleaf, even though opportunities for adults to develop skills in Further Education are being improved.

EXPENDITURE BASED EDUCATION WEIGHTS (2000-2009)

Percentages

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Primary Schools	37.6	37.4	37	36.3	35.5	35.2	35.2	35.2	35.2	35.2
Secondary Schools	37.6	37.6	37.6	37.7	37.6	37.4	37.3	37.4	37.4	37.4
Special Schools	6.3	5.3	5.5	4.8	5.3	5.8	5.7	5.8	5.8	5.8
CTC/Academies	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.8
ALL SCHOOLS	**81.7**	**80.5**	**80.3**	**79.1**	**78.8**	**78.8**	**78.8**	**79.2**	**79.2**	**79.2**
Further Education	12.9	13.2	13.3	13.7	14	13.6	12.9	12.6	12.6	12.6
% variation	**68.8%**	**67.3%**	**67.0%**	**65.4%**	**64.8%**	**65.2%**	**65.9%**	**66.6%**	**66.6%**	**66.6%**

Source: Office for National Statistics
http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/search/index.html?newquery=Public+Service+Output%2C+Input+and+Productivity%3A+Education
(Last Accessed 19.11.12)

TABLE 1

Figure 1, page 20, can now be further organised to illustrate how the hierarchical layering of the key players and factors emerge – see figure 2, overleaf, which shows the complex nature of the politic/policy effect on the learner and learning experience in greater detail. From the macro perspective, education can be seen to be a tool that is used to affect an ideological state apparatus that in turn uses power and funding issues to drive policy. From the micro perspective policy is used to dictate the direction of the college, usually through the two avenues of curriculum and funding. In both the micro and macro case, factors affect the learner and their learning experience through the construction of enablers and disablers that the student must navigate in order to succeed. Both the micro and macro perspectives have been reasoned further on pages 28-33 of this thesis, and act to draw out the components in figure 2 in greater detail when reasoning that the overall effect is such that it filters students towards requirements of social climates at any given point in time.

Political factors affecting the intention to participate in Further Education - (with hierarchical layering)

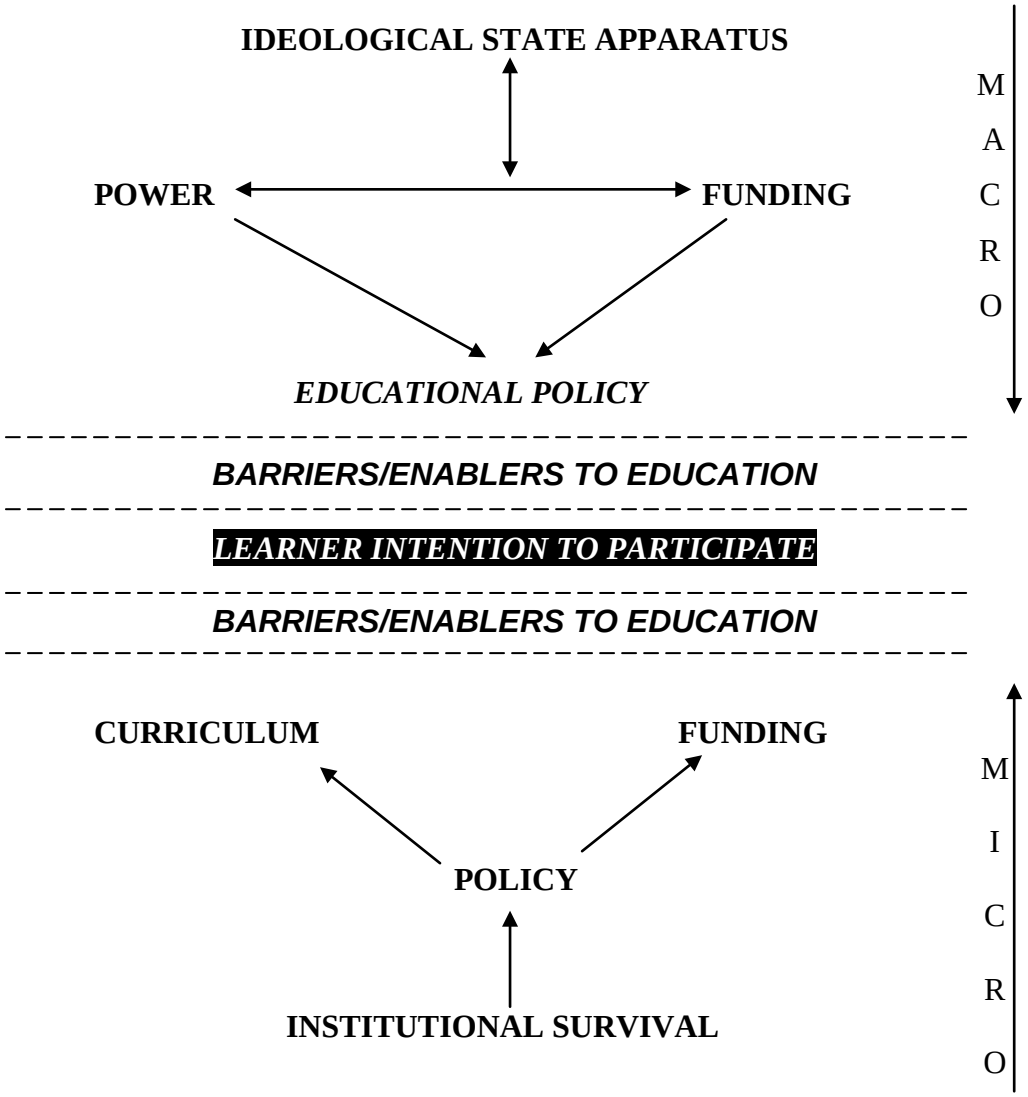


FIGURE 2

Policy and Control of the Curriculum

In terms of economy then, Further Education can be seen as a mechanism that the student can utilize towards a given goal. The need to upskill to maintain employment is a dominant driving force. Courses are set up to cater for diverse needs, usually vocational or academic in nature. What they have in common is that they must operate within the framework of a given curriculum. Young (1999) states that:

"Education is always…a set of cultural choices, some conscious and some unconscious. It follows that the curriculum is always a selection and organization of the knowledge available at a particular time" (Page 60).

And further observes that:

"Those in positions of power will attempt to define what is to be taken as knowledge in society, how accessible to different groups any knowledge is and what are the accepted relationships between different knowledge areas and those that have access to them" (Page 62).

Here, the role of the college itself becomes changeable as 'those in positions of power attempt to define what is to be taken as knowledge in society'. This change is discussed in detail in the literature review, pages 49-55, where the present ethos of the Further Education sector is explored relating to how it has evolved to accommodate the ever more diverse needs of society and why this leads to a lack of cohesion in the tertiary sector.

The curriculum holds a particularly important role within any education system, as it is the bridge by which provision by the educational establishment and the need of wider society is navigated by the student. Curzon (2004) proposes that:

"Syllabus and course design will be shaped by the teacher-manager's individual interpretation of the wider goals of the curriculum for which the college as a whole is responsible…The college… will have decided on appropriate curriculum goals within the broader setting of community demands [and] *the class tutor will translate these goals into instructional programmes"* (Pages 185)

The curriculum is in effect the tool that is used by the Government to disseminate the skills requirements that are necessary in response to market forces as increasingly there is a need for more skilled workers in the global economy. Jarvis (1995) notes that:

"Education is rarely free from the decisions of national and local government…it may be seen that even in a relatively democratic country, like the United Kingdom, government policy can and does exercise considerable control over the curriculum content" (Page 209)

A more contemporary view by Johnson (2007) extols the virtues of 'a local curriculum responsive to community need' and recognises that:

"The most important change of thinking on the part of the Government would need to be its attitude to centralised control [relative to curriculum design and content]. The evidence is overwhelming that in the longer term direct Whitehall control over professional decisions is an ineffective strategy" (Page 145).

It can be rationalised then, that the concept of economy permeates throughout education driven by the fact that education itself is an economic need. Market forces necessitate the need for government, policy makers, curriculum specialists, educational establishments and students/participants to be joint stakeholders in the educational process. All have a vested interest in the production of a workforce that is flexible enough to compete within a global market. The curriculum is the mechanism that is utilised by Government to

enact the above interrelationship and give direction towards the requirements made by the market.

The concept of power is a key part of the mechanisms by which the adult learner does/does not engage with the education system. Boler (1999) suggests that:

"Within education…emotions are a site of social control. Education is a social institution that serves the interest of the nation-state and functions to maintain the status quo and social order [and] *is also a potential site of critical enquiry and transformation, both of the self and of the culture"* (Preface, xvii)

In terms of the concept of power, mechanisms of power, the stakeholders involved and the relationships that bind all of these elements Foucault (1975) observed that:

"[There is] *an extremely complex system of relations which leads one finally to wonder how, given that no one person can have conceived it in its entirety, it can be so subtle in its distribution, its mechanisms, reciprocal controls and adjustments. It's a highly intricate mosaic…The interesting thing is to ascertain, not what overall project presides over all these developments, but how, in terms of strategy, the different pieces were set in place"* (Page 62).

Figure 3 overleaf, attempts to show a hierarchical approach to stakeholders; although it is acknowledged that from the perspective of power it may become too simplistic and may not give the concept its due importance, power can nevertheless be seen to be simultaneously 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' as it cannot be analytically confined to either a macro-approach or a micro-approach due to tensions existing between the two.

Hierarchical Economic need – Stakeholders

STAKEHOLDER	WHY IS INCREASED PARTICIPATION BENEFICIAL?	BENEFICIAL RESULTS
Government/ Governmental Legislators	To produce a more skilled /qualified and better-informed population.	*Afford greater freedom of choice and quality of life to the populace, be it to compete more effectively within a growing global economy, or for the purposes of self-improvement.*
Policy Makers	To interpret legislation in ways that guide or provide incentives to end users or those with responsibility for implementing strategy.	*To better inform stakeholders in order to meet the targets set by Government.*
Qualification/Curriculum Specialists	To cater for the Governmental policy makers and the needs of the participants by providing relevant qualifications and curricula.	*The equipping of participants to be competent and competitive in the workplace.*
Educational establishments (Managers, Educators, Support staff, etc…)	To provide an environment that is conducive to study, and the professional delivery of curricula.	*A well-qualified cohort of students who experience relevance in the qualifications gained.*

BENEFITS TO THE PARTICIPANT AS A STAKEHOLDER

Higher Social Status	*Higher level of Income*	*Prospective progression within chosen job/career*	*Higher self esteem*	*Better level of education and Qualification*	*Empowerment to make more informed choices about life chances.*

FIGURE 3

If a model were therefore to be drawn which charted the power relations between macro and micro levels, the need would arise for a meso-level, that of the tensions between intrinsic and extrinsic perspectives. In effect, this level would be that which would be both a focus point and a point of emergence of power relations at the institutional level. To visualise this approach to power relations, a useful method is to look at 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' perspectives separately before attempting any description of the concept of power as it acts in this research context.

Governance: The Top-Down Perspective

As this research progresses, it will be shown that one of the major reasons that a prospective participant may return to education is the necessity for them to re-skill so as to compete more effectively in an increasingly highly skilled workforce within a global market. Castells (2004) notes that:

"*Globalisation and informationalisation, enacted by networks of wealth, technology, and power are transforming our world. They are enhancing our productive capacity, cultural creativity, and communication potential. At the same time they are disenfranchising societies…People all over the world resent the loss of control over their lives.., their jobs.., their economies.., their governments*" (Page 72).

Consequently, even as an individual becomes empowered by education s/he may see it as an inconvenience in their life that has to be tolerated so as to maintain the status quo. Bell (1978) explains that:

"As the supply of educated labour increases, individuals find that they must improve their educational level simply to defend their current income positions. If they don't, others will... Education becomes a good investment, not because it would raise people's incomes

above what they would have been if no one had increased his education, but rather because it raises their income above what it will be if others acquire an education and they do not" (Page 610).

So, there exists a tension in terms of power which can be seen to be both repressive (as the need to upskill in order to compete effectively becomes a necessity rather than a choice) and emancipatory (as participation within an educated labour market empowers people to compete effectively within an increasingly educated global market). However, is this not a contradiction in terms? How can the concept of power be seen to operate on two different levels at the same time? Brookfield (2005) attempts to clarify this point through the use of Foucault's work when he rationalises that:

"In his [Foucault's] *view repression and liberation coexist to different degrees wherever power is present…it would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of subordination which, by definition are means of escape…Furthermore, the simple classification of power as either good or evil is, for Foucault, hopelessly wrong. Power is far more complex, capable of being experienced as repressive and liberatory in the same situation"* (Page 121).

It would be useful at this point to recognise also in the top-down perspective, the need for surveillance – a kind of constant vigilance in checking the alignment of governmental goals with practice outcomes through mechanisms such as audits that Power (1996) notes are:

"*Usually justified as enhancing the transparency of individual and corporate actions to those parties who have an interest in the nature and effects of those actions. In other words, they are thought to shift power; from professionals to the public, from experts to stakeholders"* (Page 18)

It could be argued that there is a need for this type of surveillance to ensure that a level of professionalism is maintained and that value for money is achieved from the further education sector, so that those who enter into it go through a worthwhile experience as well as exit with skills that can aid in competing effectively within a global market. It is arguable however, as to who these audits really serve. Audits are an inconvenient necessity in today's workplace. It would be a rare student, teacher, manager, principal or even governor who would state that audit trails are pleasant frameworks to work within. Morley (2003) alludes towards compliance to audits when he observes that:

"Performativity involves a damaging process of ventriloquism and impersonation as academics and managers attempt to represent themselves in a language that quality assessors will understand and value…It implies a lack of ideological control over the task" (Page 70).

Performativity in recent years has become increasingly complex to accommodate the changing role of further education (see pages 49-55 where the evolving ethos of the Further Education sector is explored in greater detail). Simmons et al. (2008) concluded that:

"Recent years have seen successive waves of state intervention whereby FE has, in marked contrast to official discourse, been driven downwards. FE now caters for large numbers of socially disadvantaged students; its curriculum has become mechanised, centrally controlled and codified; and FE teachers labour under heavy workloads, close surveillance and multiple performative measures" (Page 615).

And Edgington (2012) moves further to contextualise the discourse of performativity from the contemporary viewpoint of the lecturer as follows:

"On an institutional level, management risk de-professionalising FE lecturers by reducing them to automatons required to 'perform' when instructed. This is a dehumanising

experience that…conflicts with many teachers' personal ideology and is unhealthy for organisations as a whole" (Page 8).

Power is thus shifted from the top-down perspective of the organisation, to the specific agenda required by the need for audits, those of accountability and transparency. These offshoots in the power relationships within education become more complex if we look at education as an institution that can be operated within as well as a source of empowerment for the individual.

Self-Determination: The Bottom-Up Perspective

An important question that needs to be addressed is why a learner would participate in education. From the top-down perspective, it has been argued that the individual is almost forced into education through societal pressures, but this cannot be the sole reason for participation in education. Surely, at least some participants see education as a way of understanding the world within which they live and its complexities – a way of empowering themselves or the acquiring of knowledge for its own sake rather than purely for monetary gain. If so, this shifts power to the individual. Brookfield (2005) argues that power can be perceived as:

"*A Janus-like phenomenon, presenting two contradictory faces – repressive and liberatory…Here the emphasis is on the way that state power is organised to lull people into submission to the dominant order, primarily through its organs of ideological manipulation (including adult education)"* (Page 120)

Education for the purpose of self-realisation and autonomy could be seen as being of greater importance than education as a tool by which an individual can be made to conform to

the demands of society. Demetrion (1998) approaches this point from the aspect of John Dewey by recognising that:

"*Dewey defined the pathway toward such development as growth, the progressive attainment of aspirations within the stream of time where "fulfilment is as relative to means as means are to realization*" (Page 105).

However, by approaching education in such a holistic manner, are the societal needs of competing within the global market not undermined? The complexities and subtleties of intrinsic/extrinsic power tensions need to be appreciated. Dewey (2002) maintained that:

"There are two schools of social reform. One bases itself upon the notion of a morality which springs from an inner freedom…The other school denies the existence of any such inner power, and in doing so conceives that it has denied all moral freedom. It says that [people] *are made what they are by the forces of the environment, that human nature is purely malleable, and that till institutions are changed, nothing can be done"* (Page 9).

Later he states that:

"Here is an alternative to being penned in between these two theories. We can recognise that all conduct is interaction between elements of human nature and the environment, natural and social. Then we shall see that freedom is found in that kind of interaction which maintains an environment in which human desire and choice count for something" (Page 10).

Hence, if power relations are seen in their entirety it would be almost impossible to map their interrelatedness due to levels of complexity, and to show precisely in everyday events and transactions how and where they play out, and with what effects. Nevertheless, it is both possible and more logical to look at how and why power plays a role where it does, and to look at offshoots and their relevancies in their individual terms. Positions of power can

then be seen to contribute to both organisations and individuals. Foucault (1975) provides the following analysis:

"In an apparatus like an army or a factory, or some other such type of institution, the system of power takes a pyramidical form. Hence there is an apex. But even so, even in such a simple case, this summit doesn't form the 'source' or 'principle' from which all power derives…The summit and the lower elements of the hierarchy stand in a relationship of mutual support and conditioning…" (Page 159).

Questions emerging from this section on power therefore include:

- Do participants perceive themselves to be forced into education by economic necessity – the need to re-skill to achieve former levels of income?
- How do participants perceive their own power - and the power of the college, or Education more generally - to change their lives for the better both economically and in relation to their own status or power?

Summary of Chapter 2

To summarise this chapter, the social, cultural and political issues that emerge to frame the design of empirical work are as follows:

- Are the norms and concepts within the culture of Further Education at odds with the class and cultural background of Access to Higher Education students within this college catchment area (as established on pages 3-4)?
- Are curricula designed to meet the cultural norms of Access to Higher Education students within this college catchment area, i.e. are they relevant?

- Are the economic incentives in place sufficient to encourage students to overcome barriers to participation?
- Does government policy impact on curricula design in ways that act as either barriers and/or enablers to participation for Access to Higher Education students within this college catchment area?

The next chapter will look in more detail at these issues and in doing so also consider the psychological or individual factors affecting learning, as well as the meso level organisational and more macro political and economic factors.

CHAPTER 3

A REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

Towards a Rationale for Investigating Reasons for Participation in Further Education.

The aim of this chapter is to review the existing literature in order to identify both general and specific research questions. In particular, the ways in which these factors relate to:

- The widening participation agenda;
- Barriers and enablers to participation;
- The resources and power (including possible limitations on these) that the college is able to draw on to support students returning to Further Education.

Although this research aims to investigate the reasons for participation or the lack of it within Further Education, it is perhaps more important to understand how these reasons might be useful in shaping the policies implemented within Further Education so as to encourage participation and advantage the learner.

Discussion will show that there may be at least 3 distinct sectors within Further Education with different goals, resources, tutor, and student characteristics (The Foster Report 2005), i.e. that the tertiary sector itself lacks cohesion, see pages 49-51 of this thesis. In particular, students vary in maturity, life experience, vocational and personal aspirations, abilities and skills. This can cause the researcher/reader great confusion. There are a plethora of terms used to describe the sector and its subgroups, regulating authorities and institutions together with a confusing array of teaching and learning philosophies and approaches which relate to the problem of engaging these different institutions and groups of learners.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of historical perspectives and the insights that they provide in terms of how and why we have arrived at the Further Education system that

we see today, as reasoned above and on pages 49-51 of this thesis, I have purposefully veered away from them in favour of reviewing research literature which, where possible, contextualises practice. Otherwise, there is a danger of the research becoming a generalised historical and theoretical piece of work that may have little bearing on the students that have been focussed upon in this research and would only add to the lack of cohesion that has been alluded to, rather than work towards its alleviation. More important is the gathering of data/evidence that will focus on answering the detailed research questions that will be set up at the end of this chapter based on a review of the research literature. Blythman and Hampton (2006) give an insight into where data/evidence should emerge from when they state that:

"The student voices inform staff on action needed enabling research to relate directly to teaching and learning" (Page 1).

The guidance given by Blythman and Hampton is that 'student voice' is a key element that can be used in consolidating reform which is receptive to the particular set of circumstances faced by students. However, it is important at this point to attempt to understand what the term 'student voice' means or infers as well as what the literature states in terms of its capture and the conditions under which it should be undertaken, and whether or not 'student voice' work is actually being done in this research. The term 'student voice' is used widely within educational establishments by policy makers, managers and teachers, but it is easy to be cursory about what it is as it is a much used term that can become a rather bland or simplistic mantra and therefore needs to be problematised. What does it mean to do student voice work? Is student voice something that is individually uttered by students or is it collectively done so? Can it or should it be the synthesis of both? Taylor and Robinson (2007, page 6) give some guidance when they assert that 'student voice' is often used to refer to young people in secondary and tertiary education. I would maintain here that the fact that

‘student voice’ is referenced to young people in the tertiary sector should not mean that young people have a monopoly on this term, rather that it could be generalisable across all age ranges within the tertiary sector. Taylor and Robinson (2007) state that:

“The word ‘voice’ also causes some concern as it implies that a pupil/[student] group has only one voice…such a monolingual assumption is illusory. In addition, ‘pupil/[student] voice’ does not simply mean the word spoken by pupils/[students] but includes the many ways in which pupils/[students] choose to express their feelings or views about any aspect of their…college experience. Thus ‘voice’ in its literal sense is the speech of the speaker, and spans inflection, tone and accent, but it is also a representational signifier” (Page 6).

The notion of voice being a ‘representational signifier’ is open to interpretation in terms of there being other possible ways apart from the literal sense of speech that can be utilized to represent opinion. Data collection via questionnaires and the use of descriptive/inferential statistics can be a highly effective tool in canvassing overall opinion from students, before moving to hear the actual voice of students. Katsifli and Green (2010) note that:

“It is important to have a wide variety of mechanisms to obtain feedback and involve students in the decision-making process. However, face-to-face interviews are preferred over surveys as they allow for actual dialogue as well as the exploration of issues. Opinions concerning questionnaire surveys are mixed, but most…believe they have a role in providing robust overall data” (Page 4).

It is interesting to note that Katsifli and Green prioritize the importance of the spoken word, of dialogue, in order to involve students in the decision-making process. Through the use of dialogue with students, the researcher can understand the issues that can ultimately effect change within educational establishments. Taylor and Robinson (2009) discuss radical

pedagogy in which dialogue is not only used to deepen the understanding of issues but also to effect change in relation to those issues. They look to the writings of Freire (1997) who wrote that 'dialogue unsettles established power structures and makes social transformation possible' and the notion of 'communication as dialogue' is argued as follows:

"This model of dialogue, it would seem, promotes a view that where dialogue informs student-teacher relations it will of itself empower students by giving them the opportunity to participate. It is through dialogue leading to consultation and collaboration that change in school [and Further Education] practices may be effected" (Pages 168-169).

It can therefore be surmised that whereas other forms of mechanisms to obtain feedback may be important in terms of collecting student voice, it is the spoken word that holds greatest potency in terms of relaying opinion.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of 'student voice' work, it is also essential to be honest in relation to whether it is actually being researched, or whether an alternative is to be utilised. Seale (2010, page 997) argues that 'implicit in much of the student voice work…is the belief that the student voice is powerful and that student voice work involves harnessing that power' and also notes that student voice projects are based upon a rather superficial notion of what it actually is. Turner (2006) and Scott (2006) are used as examples where 'apart from the inclusion of the phrase 'student voice' in the title of their articles, neither…make explicit reference to the concept of student voice within the text of their articles', and notes the work of McAuley (2003) for whom 'student voice work simply means including small excerpts of quotes from students in reports of evaluation work and labelling these quotes 'the learner voice'. Furthermore, the interpretational dimension would compound the problem in cases such as these. Fielding (2003) states that:

"The very language you use in your description is likely to be saturated with values, frequently your own. No descriptive discourse is, or can be, value-free; advocacy or interpretation is thus, to some degree and inevitably, part of your account" (Page 297).

Basing interpretations around superficial approaches such as those intimated by Seale would be problematic inasmuch as the researcher would have to position him or herself from a more heavily personal perspective to compensate for the lack of actual student voices, rather than looking in depth at what is being said by the students.

It is also noteworthy to examine the conditions within which student voice work should be undertaken, i.e. what should the approach of the researcher be towards collecting student voice, and what type of environment should be created to draw out voice? Lincoln (1995) stated that before student's voices can be elicited, some basic elements must be in place:

"1. Teachers must be willing to hear and honour those voices…teachers must be convinced that listening to student voices is both worthwhile and empowering

2. Teachers must know how to elicit student voices…too little emphasis is placed on eliciting and negotiating student contributions to curriculum and on demonstrating how students can help to structure their own learning experiences. Little attention is given to the problem of simply asking the right questions.

3. Rarely does any reform succeed …without the support of a larger social ecosystem…e.g. teachers committed to the project, district-level and school-level support; It also means teachers must be committed to sharing power in the classroom" (Pages 89-90).

Rudduck and Fielding (2006) guide further as follows:

"The development of student participation in schools/[F.E. colleges] depends on teachers being prepared to 'see' young people/[F.E. participants] differently…Young

people/[F.E. participants] may feel that they have a lot to contribute but they are uncertain about how to proceed and tend to remain silent…Student voice initiatives require that we review our notions of childhood/[F.E. participants]" (Page 225).

Like other researchers, as mentioned above, it is too easy to fall into the trap of thinking that because research is based on the words of the students, it follows that 'student voice' work is being undertaken, however, the literature guides that student voice work can become very cursory if it is not performed within the type of environment that would allow for elicitation of those voices. There must be the commitment to sharing power in the classroom, to the inclusion of the wider community and most importantly to review the notion of how we see the participant. In terms of this research, it is important to note that it wasn't possible to undertake authentic 'student voice' research as established above due to the fact that the perspectives of students are gathered in order to triangulate data, to establish emergent themes based upon that data, and form opinions based on the themes. This does not fit with the underlying premises of 'student voice' which Cook-Sather (2006) consolidates as 'rights, respect and listening' when recognising that:

"Currently, many people are using the term "student voice" to assert that young people [and adult students] have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling, that their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults, and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education" (Page 383).

The direction of this research is situated more in line with the arguments presented by Manefield et al. (2007) as follows:

"Researchers (Fielding 2001; Holdsworth 2005) point to the importance of linking student voice with action, arguing that 'authentic' student voice is not simply to provide data

for others to make decisions, but that it should encourage young people's [adult student's] active participation in shared decision making and consequent actions" (Pages 2-3).

As this research is indeed providing data upon which decisions are made, rather than holding true to the underpinning tenets of 'student voice' work, and due to the fact that avoidance of the trap of a prospective superficial approach to 'student voice' work is highly valued by me as a researcher, on critical reflection the approach to be used throughout this research is one of gathering and analysing student 'perspectives' rather than research based around the discourse of 'student voice'.

Moving on from the 'student voice' debate, it is important that this literature review aids in establishing questions that will give direction to this research. The broader concept of whether education is advantageous or a tool towards conformity will be discussed. This will then lead to focussing on the Further Education sector *per se*, student typologies and enablers/disablers to participation within this sector.

Does Education Advantage Society, or is it a Tool for Conformity?

At this point there is a need to explore the complex area which relates to whether or not education is a necessary good and if it really advantages all. Delors (1996) elevates the status of education by arguing that:

"In confronting the many challenges that the future holds in store, humankind sees in education an indispensable asset in its attempt to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice" (Page 13).

A more economic perspective appears in the rhetoric of political parties in more recent times. For example, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment at the time, Blunkett (1998) suggested that:

"Learning is essential to a strong economy and an inclusive society. In offering a way out of dependency and low expectation, it lies at the heart of the Government's welfare reform programme" (Page 3).

Parry (2005) suggests the need for Further Education provision as a second chance:

"Historically…for many young people and adults, Further Education colleges offered a first or second chance to obtain entry qualifications not available, not attempted or not achieved at school" (Page 1).

The main findings of research undertaken by Gallacher et al (2000) were that Further Education colleges have a key role in the lifelong learning and social inclusion agenda. Worryingly they also found that:

"There is evidence that those who do not currently enter Further Education, or are not able to pursue successful learning careers, are people who often have deep-rooted problems relating to their position in the socio-economic structure". However, *"once engaged with learning, changes in self-perception can occur, including self confidence and increasingly positive attitudes towards learning"* (Page 1).

Collectively, these perspectives all point towards education being a good thing both from an individual and social viewpoint. However, there are compelling counter-arguments from the position of conformity. Fromm (1984) stated that:

"*[Man] has become free from the external bonds that would prevent him from doing and thinking as he sees fit. He would be free to act according to his own will, if he knew what he wanted, thought and felt. But he does not know. He conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his. The more he does this, the more powerless he feels, the more is he forced to conform. In spite of a veneer of optimism and initiative, modern man is overcome by a profound feeling of powerlessness*" (Page 220)

This counter-argument poses both ethical and moral dilemmas. Education should be emancipatory and empowering as Claxton (2002) observed:

"People learn in the process of trying to achieve valued goals. We find ourselves in situations in which we wish to attain something, but are not yet sure how to go about it. So we explore and experiment, and if our learning is successful, we gain the knowledge we desire" (Page 21).

So, a deeper tension exists which originates between education for the sake of self-improvement and education that serves political agendas such as that of having a strong economy and the production of a labour force with skills to match the best in the world. This in turn may lead citizens towards conforming to socially constructed norms. The need to 'put bread on the table' may seem even to blackmail the individual to conform. Freire (1974) expresses this counter-argument as follows:

"If *people are unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the wake of change"* (Page 7).

Although it is acknowledged that Freire speaks from a socio-political context, guidance is nevertheless clearly given to the importance of critical perception of functioning effectively within society at any given time, and leads to the notion of how to operationalise those perceptions.

Student perspectives can be a powerful tool for exploring the counter argument of conformism. Are the needs of the students practical in nature, e.g. ensuring that they study to receive qualifications to gain their desired job, or to move in to a new career and therefore up-skill or learn new skills? Or are the participants there to learn to enhance life skills for more intrinsic reasons?

In order to explore these questions further it becomes necessary to problematise 'individual needs', as there is an assumption that the needs of all can be provided for in education so that it is accessible to all. Logically, this leads to the notion that by accommodating everyone's needs, resources and time would be allocated to cater for all minorities which would not necessarily be needed by the majority. This in turn leads to a position that Norwich (2002: page 483) describes as 'ideological impurity', where it becomes impractical, unworkable and utopian to suggest that any single 'value or principle can encompass all of what is commonly considered to be worthwhile'. Norwich (2002) writes of this as a 'dilemmatic position' which:

"Accepts that choice at whatever level can involve some loss and pain [and]… recognises that what counts as progress and improvement can be problematic and can contain contradictions" (Page 498).

Our own perception of individual needs comes to bear here and whether there is a generalisable format that can be used to describe all individual needs. Norwich (2002) proposes the following scheme which both 'assumes that the language of needs is based on values' and 'takes account of the commonality and individuality of needs':

"A child's [or adult's] educational needs can be considered in this scheme to be made of three elements:

i) Those needs that they share with all others – common needs or inclusive entitlements;

ii) Those needs that they share with some people but not others – distinctive or additional needs relevant to membership of a sub-group;

iii)Those needs that are unique to them as individuals not covered through their membership of common humanity or some sub-group" (Page 498).

Although it is acknowledged that the work of Norwich is based around the agendas of 'Inclusion' and 'Special Educational Needs', schemes such as these are very useful when focusing educators on categorisations of individual needs. There is however, a requirement that before we can understand how to accommodate individual needs, we attempt to understand where those needs arise from. Are they innate within a person, are they socially constructed or is it the case of a synthesis of the two?

The cultural deficit model states that needs are attributed as deficits within and from individual circumstances. Irizarry (2009) argues that:

"*By locating the causes for student underachievement within students and communities, the cultural deficit model fails to examine institutional barriers…that can also potentially influence student achievement*" (Page 1).

Manifestations of this model are apparent in many aspects of the educational process. For example, in most post-compulsory educational establishments, one of the primary points of contact for prospective students is the initial interview. During this interview, the achievements of the prospective student are assessed in terms of their suitability to enrol on their desired course. Plans are drawn up to cater for the needs of the student and where applicable, extra resources via additional support structures are allocated, and all are based on information that students are encouraged to give. Metcalfe (1991) states that:

"If the teacher is to 'know children [and adults] as individuals'…and if schools [and post-compulsory educational establishments] are to be about learning rather than teaching, teachers must become more individually attentive and more skilled at interpreting unconscious messages from the child [adult learners]. If they are to help children [adult learners] 'develop their self concept' they must carry a strong normative sense of how children [adult learners] should develop…[consequently] schools [and post-compulsory

educational establishments] believe they have a responsibility to lead students to avow the truths proclaimed about them in school. Students are encouraged to see, monitor and discipline themselves as the teacher and employer would" (Page 624-625).

Although Metcalfe speaks primarily about children, and although it can be fundamentally argued that normative perspectives may be, for example, more established in adults than children, it is nevertheless the case that the 'normative sense' that is spoken of can only be understood from the perspective of 'self'? To think otherwise would suggest that we have the ability to place ourselves objectively in another's position completely, which is not the case as we are subjective products of our own past. This is in essence the downfall of the cultural deficit model. Harry and Klingner (2007) investigate the manifestation of the cultural deficit model when they state that:

"The deficit model is based on the normative development of students whose homes and communities have prepared them for schooling long before they enter school. Children who come to school without that preparation, and without the continuing home support of family members who can reinforce the goals of schooling, face expectations that they have not had the opportunity to fulfill" (Page 8).

Gutiérrez, C. D., & Rogoff, B. (2003: page 19) attempt to move away from the thinking that "characteristics of cultural groups are located *within* individuals as 'carriers' of culture". Rather, they see individual needs as the way in which people reacts to situations in terms of their own position relative to that situation. This is to say that individual needs do not manifest themselves from *within*; from what a person inherently perceives a problem to be, rather the way that they react to that problem from a socially constructed viewpoint. They argue that:

"It is more useful to consider differences in the children's, their families', and their communities' histories of engaging in particular endeavours organized in contrasting manners. This avoids the implication that the characteristic is "built in" to the individual (or a group) in a stable manner that extends across time and situations, and it recognizes the circumstances relevant to an individual's likelihood of acting in certain ways" (Page 22).

This argument introduces clarity in terms of individual needs from the perspective of my study. It points to the fact that it is erroneous to make generalised statements in relation to the individual needs of students from contrasting classes, ethnicities, communities and cultures. More importantly, we as educators need to think about how we may perceive those individual needs in relation to education, i.e. there is a need to consider the 'situatedness' of people from differing backgrounds in order to establish how they can successfully negotiate the challenges that they face. As Malcolm and Zukas (2001) state very succinctly:

"What makes us human, and what distinguishes one learner from another or one teacher from another, is our very situatedness. Our history and culture precede and construct our self-understandings, our self-consciousness" (Pages 38-39).

Once 'individual needs' practice has been located away from the cultural deficit model, and by examining *how* students perceive, react to and ultimately overcome barriers to education, alternative attributes can be established. For example, Irizarry, J. (2009) reports the work of Tara Yosso (2005) who refers to 'community cultural wealth' as:

"C*haracteristics, such as resiliency, that students of color and poor students often bring to school that should be recognized and built upon*" (Page 1).

Having discussed the perspectives of education for the purpose of self-improvement and the counter-argument of conformity, and having contextualised those two viewpoints from the perspective of individual needs, it becomes clearer that we are all part of a socially

constructed environment which by definition involves us within it and thus requires that we operate within it. Jackson and Sörensen (2007) explain that:

"Everything involved in the social world of men and women is made by them. The fact that it is made by them makes it intelligible to them.... The social world is an intersubjective domain: it is meaningful to people who made it and live in it, and who understand it precisely because they made it and they are at home in it" (Page 165).

This dovetails with Freire's views as discussed earlier, that an awareness of the prevalent needs of society and what this means that people must do to be successful within it, are key to having a pro-active role within that society. In effect this is a way of contributing and belonging. Wendt (1995: pages 73-74) speaks of 'shared knowledge, material resources, and practices' as being three elements to social structure. From the viewpoint of this research, shared knowledge relates to the students' relationship with the situation that they need to address, i.e. they realise that through participation within education they can progress. The resources the institution provides are needed to acquire their goal. Thirdly, through the practice of participation to achieve the goal, the student acts within a social structure which through participation they will perpetuate even if some may feel they have little choice and/or are being forced to conform.

Having explored some of the arguments in favour of participation in the Further Education sector and its claimed benefits, and the counterargument that it amounts simply to conforming to political agendas and ideologies, it remains a goal of this research to gather and interpret student perspectives to explore the reasons they suggest for their decisions to take up education at the tertiary level. Are they guided more by a need to operate within society than an ignorance of political agendas or a desire to conform to them?

The Present Ethos of the Further Education Sector - Accommodating Participation

If there is a need to access Further Education, then how have the institutions evolved to accommodate that need? The distinctiveness of the Further Education system has been heightened in a culture of change that is driven by market forces and the rhetoric arising from it. Lumby (2001) recognised that:

"After decades of near invisibility in political terms, the activities and achievements of colleges have moved, if not quite centre stage, certainly to a position where, along with schools and Higher Education, they are scrutinized because of a belief in their importance" (Page 2).

More recently, the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (2008) found that:

"For several decades, Further Education has played a pivotal status in enhancing national prosperity. Participation rates, quality of provision, learner satisfaction and attainment rates have all improved with significant increases in recent funding, and FE has emerged as a distinctive sector of the education system" (Page 6).

This shift is seen as a necessary step in order to accommodate the needs of a progressively technological age and is a major change in the ethos of Further Education. It necessitates the need that Further Education colleges be seen as a means through which participants up-skill through a process of continued professional development, rather than merely a point of transition between compulsory education and Higher Education.

Progressively, this shift in educational ethos becomes more tapered towards economic health. The Leitch review of skills (2006) suggests that there should be an environment that promotes:

"Embedding a culture of learning" [and moves to recommend] *"ensuring everyone gets the help they need to get on in life: raising awareness and aspiration; making informed choices; increasing choice; and ensuring individuals can afford to learn"* (Page 140).

The findings and recommendations of the Leitch review are equally focussed on raising achievement levels and up-skilling of the adult populace as school-leavers. The Foster Report (2005) explored the various arenas within which participant's up-skilling could be realised by attempting to clearly attribute roles:

"Tertiary colleges should adopt as their primary purpose, improving employability and supplying economically valuable skills…Sixth form colleges should retain their primary focus of academic achievement and progression for 16-19 year olds, and be treated by the DfES and LSC as a distinctive brand…. [and] FE colleges, working collaboratively with Higher Education Institutions, should improve learner pathways to Higher Education to facilitate progression" (Page 81).

These are the three sub-sectors that have been referred to in the introduction to this chapter. Increasingly, colleges find that in order to survive they have to cater for a greater proportion of the population. Resultantly, their role becomes a synthesis of all three sub-sectors discussed above in order to provide a service for all types of students within the locale. This becomes a major logistical problem, as systems that were initially formulated towards one type of provision now have to adapt in order to accommodate all types of provision, in turn increasing confusion and lack of cohesion. It is this lack of agreement regarding what a college is or should be that causes lack of cohesion within the Further Education sector.

Although the role attributed to Further Education by the Foster Report is an important one, i.e. that colleges of Further Education provide directed access into Higher Education, the rhetoric, focus and role of colleges of Further Education have shifted from what was

traditionally perceived as an establishment that provided a stepping-stone between compulsory education and Higher Education, or compulsory education into the world of work through vocational courses and apprenticeships. The Foster Report (2005) noted that:

"*FE colleges are striking in their heterogeneity. They deliver in a wide variety of settings and the range of learning opportunities they present is extraordinary.*" (Page 15).

The roles of Further Education colleges have become much more defined. They are now seen to be providers of both academic and vocational courses that aim to enhance the skills of the workforce. It is important to note at this point that this shift in emphasis of the role of Further Education has by no means been an easy journey or one that is complete as the needs of society are constantly shifting. However, in order to accommodate the survival of tertiary colleges in times of change, they must be underpinned by effective systems of guidance that can be accessed by the students and the students *must* be the central element around which guidance and underpinning ethics revolve. Students should be guided through any course they have embarked upon, by ensuring that:

- They gain a good understanding of the course being taught
- They are taught fairly – without discrimination
- They have a right to confidentiality
- Teaching is a synthesis of student and learning centred practice
- Holistic improvement is as important as academic achievement
- They are given the best guidance in terms of progression in order to maximise life-chances.

The notion of client-centredness and impartiality play a central role here as they prioritise the needs of the learner. Rogers (1998) states that:

"It is most unfortunate that educators and the public think about, and focus on, teaching. It leads them to a host of questions that are either irrelevant or absurd so far as real education is concerned...if we focussed on the facilitation of learning, how, why and when the students learn, and how learning seems and feels from the inside - we might be on a much more profitable track" (Page 207).

Insofar as this user centredness *should* hold weight there must be recognition of the fact that the relationship that the user and the practitioner have with the institution is one where the practitioner brings to the table skills and theories that have been developed through training, whereas the user brings uncertainty and needs. It is this imbalance in power that needs to be addressed through the provision of a coherent system of guidance that will allow the student to progress successfully. Furthermore, it can be argued here that systems of guidance may allude to a hidden agenda in terms of tensions between student experience and institutional need. To clarify, the aim from a managerial perspective to have provision of guidance is to maintain student numbers so as to ensure that funding is not disrupted. This is due to the fact that current discourses, as in the past, are subject to the problematic concept of 'change'. Institutions of education now find themselves at a stage where 'Recruitment', 'Retention' and 'Achievement' are the buzzwords and targets based on these are driven through by funding regimens. The Teaching and Learning Research Programme (2008) found that:

"Our research shows that the audit culture is distorting the priorities of people working in FE....Local community links and second-chance education are being replaced as priorities by cost-effective recruitment, retention and achievement, almost irrespective of the quality of the learning taking place" (Page 29).

The issue of funding has in itself driven the way that education is perceived. No longer is education student-centred rather 'geared towards the needs of the user'; just as educational institutions are now open to market forces which class students as 'units' for which funding can be achieved and also, through their choices, are more able to drive curriculum change. The curriculum itself is used to reinforce these notions as the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (2008) moved further to find:

"A coherent curriculum with clear progression in subject content, knowledge and skills has been replaced with endless prescriptive lists of assessment criteria and competences. There is ever-increasing talk of "evidencing", "tracking and signing off targets", "cross-referencing evidence", "plugging the gaps in the criteria" and "delivering achievement"... As a result, students are "achieving" more but learning less" (Page 11).

There is a tension that needs to be resolved here in understanding *who* the primary and secondary clients are, and it is the medium of guidance that can play an important role in bringing college provision and student needs closer together. These conceptual subtleties should act as drivers that allow the institutions to offer support, guidance and counselling where appropriate so as to enable students to remain within the college and empower managers to keep them there, motivated by the desire for funding streams to remain uninterrupted.

Having discussed some of the issues surrounding the tensions that arise from the somewhat polarized views of guidance from students and institutional perspectives, the key element of the practitioner as the bridge between these can be explored. If guidance is explored from the practitioner perspective, then fundamentally users are seen as people rather than 'units', and approaches are formulated whereby the students' holistic education is nurtured and enhanced. Essentially, the practitioner has a humanistic role that requires a

reflective and reflexive approach to issues presented by the students. Edwards (1998) observes that:

"The critique of the Applied Science Model of professional practice has led to formulations of the notion of the reflective practitioner...professional workers have to be able to analyse and interpret particular circumstances in order to assess how best to respond to them" (Page 23).

In terms of practitioner experience, Edward's view is central to how instruments for guidance must enable rather than present a barrier to the nurturing of academic and holistic improvement. A potent example of this type of reflective guidance is played out within many colleges of Further Education where E2E (Entry to Education) programmes, for example, have allowed for the active enrolment of students categorised as NEETS (Not in Employment, Education or Training). The Learning and Skills Network (2009) state that:

"A number of education and training providers work with young people who have been chronically failed by the education system. A significant number of these participate in Entry to Employment (e2e) programmes, a number of whom have prior attainment little above Level 1. Most have negative attitudes to school, which has proved to be a deeply humiliating experience at a formative stage of their lives" (Page 4).

The fact that NEET students are placed back into an educational environment commonly necessitates the need to approach colleges of Further Education. However, the students return with the same severe behavioural and learning difficulties that they are familiar with and that excluded them from mainstream education in the first instance. The Learning and Skills Network (2009) recognised the need for targeted guidance as follows:

"The NEET problem is complex [and] requires thorough research into disengagement in a local area to tease out the particular demands of the locality. This will pave the way for

an exploration of the capacity of the locale to respond through creative and targeted provision of individual information, advice and guidance" (Preface).

Guidance is given via one-to-one discussion, non-confrontational behaviour, constructive criticism, consistency, continuity, purposeful activity, achievable end results and plenty of positive reinforcement. Without this type of continuous reflection it would be impossible to teach these students and lift them out of an otherwise downward spiral.

Who Participates? – A look at Typology

In order to understand the reasons for participation/non-participation, understanding the typology of prospective participants and their needs is key. Harrison (1993) generalises from research reported in the ACACE report of 1982:

"All the indications show that those...who are in higher social classes, the young, men and those seeking vocational education are consistently better able to take advantage of existing opportunities for continuing education" (Pages 8-9).

James and Nightingale (2005) report that:

"Low self-esteem is also seen in the context of adult learning and according to researchers Lloyd and Sullivan (2003), low self-esteem is widely recognised as a factor that is associated with poor educational attainment and non-participation in education and training" (Page 3).

More recent reports and studies undertaken by Aldridge and Hughes (2012) for NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, state that:

"Opportunities to learn as an adult, however, are not evenly distributed across society. As in previous years, the 2012 survey clearly shows that participation in learning is determined by class, employment status, age and prior learning" (Page 6).

However, the students who participate on the Access to Higher Education Programme for the purpose of the research that I am undertaking, are typically students that both the ACACE and NIACE report found to be *less likely* to participate i.e.:

- Students with average/poor initial education;
- Students with low self-esteem;
- People from a deprived (historically mining) community;
- People who are 'mature' ranging from 20 to approximately 50 years of age;
- Women;
- Those seeking to move on to university to start new careers (therefore less likely to be seeking vocational education).

Therefore, different types of Further Education and the student bodies they attract hinder effective generalisations unless research is undertaken with reference to these differing typologies. Harrison (1993) recognises the limitations of generalising from research by noting that:

"The problem of using social survey research techniques as a way of gaining better understanding of why people do things…is that by using pre-arranged categories…limitations are imposed on the range of experiences which can be recorded…what is questionable is whether they are capable of giving researchers real insight into the …mesh of interrelated attitudes, perceptions and misconceptions which prevent many people from considering education as an option" (Page 12).

The 'mesh of interrelated attitudes, perceptions and misconceptions' that Harrison writes of contributes towards the focus of this research, but it is important to also remember that interrelated perceptions are experienced at individual levels. General themes may emerge, but the interrelatedness of emergent themes cannot be guaranteed. In essence, there are no

absolutes that can be applied to prospective participants due to the complexity of the human condition and our interactions with society. As human beings we are not easily classified in ways that enable the drawing of general conclusions based on typologies. Recognising the possible limitations of typology and that is not an exact science, how useful are typologies in suggesting how programmes might provide a 'best fit' solution to the needs of their students? Lovell (1982) observed that:

"Adults…manifestly differ in their responses to learning opportunities. Some people strive against considerable odds to seek out opportunities for new learning whilst others will avoid the opportunity to learn even when it is to their obvious advantage and few barriers stand in their way. Once they are engaged in education some people will approach it with great enthusiasm and commitment whilst others may just idle along with little evidence of personal involvement" (Page 113).

The question therefore arises as to how best to engage individual students.

What Motivates Students to Participate?

Attempting to understand the underlying interrelated reasons for participation is a major task due to complexity. All students who I teach on the Access to Higher Education Programme will bring their own agendas. For many it is may be their perceived need to up-skill, to move further with their careers, or to establish new ones. For others, the reasons may be monetary in essence; a means to an end; to provide. There may well be those who wish to set a challenge for themselves to achieve success on an academic programme, possibly after a long time away from education. Barbuto et al (2004) categorise these intrinsic motivators as those that are:

"Often used to represent personal satisfaction derived from achievement of goals or tasks. Intrinsic process…is distinct from the classical interpretation of intrinsic motivation by

its emphasis on immediate enjoyment or pleasure during the activity, rather than on the satisfaction that results from its achievement" (Page 12).

They move on to define extrinsic motivators as:

"Externally based when the individual is primarily other-directed and seeking affirmation of traits, competencies, and values. The individual behaves in ways that satisfy reference group members, first to gain acceptance, and then to gain status" (Page 14).

The issue that arises is how we can subcategorise these needs so as to best enable prospective students to participate effectively. Importance is placed on the viewpoint that categorisations in this context must not be seen as generalisations, rather indicators that can be used to enable success for the specific types of students who are likely to enter this college. Courtney (1992) talks of the influence of:

"Cyril Houle (1961) who described the differences between the educational goals of a group of learners to be 'the now famous typology of 'goal-orientated', 'activity-orientated' and 'learning-orientated" (Page 76).

Goal-orientation reflects the idea that most people have some specific purpose or objective in pursuing education. Activity-orientation defines those who seek in education an opportunity to pursue non-educational objectives such as e.g. personal relationships or escaping boredom. Learning-orientation defines those who seek to learn for the sake of learning. This model is useful as a categorisational start point.

At the level of process, a greater understanding of how these categorisations relate to *adult learning* is also critical. Adults necessarily learn in a fundamentally different way from pupils who are engaged in compulsory education. Adults bring life experience and maturity to the table. If educators attempt to teach adults in the same way as students in compulsory education they would be in danger of being patronising and condescending. Paraskevas and

Wickens (2003) assert that adults need specific learning conditions in order to learn and referred to Knowles' work based around andragogy (1973), suggesting:

*"**1.** Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.*

***2.** Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.*

***3.** Adults are most interested in subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life.*

***4.** Adult learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented.…Adults are self-directed and expect to take responsibility for decisions and therefore adult teaching methodology must accommodate this fundamental aspect"* (Page 5-6).

It is acknowledged that there have been many current critiques of Knowles work such as Merriam (2001: page 3) who talks of 'a mosaic of theories, models, sets of principles, and explanations that, combined, compose the knowledge base of adult learning'. Rachal (2002) further highlights the complexities of defining andragogical practice when he finds that:

"Nearly all adult educators would be sympathetic to the view that as much of the spirit of andragogy as possible should infuse adult learning situations. Unfortunately, the studies of the 1980s and 1990s relative to andragogy's effectiveness in both achievement and satisfaction provide mixed results and often "no significant differences" emerging from variegated methodologies, and thus reveal an unstable theoretical foundation upon which to prescribe practice" (Page 224).

Henschke (2011) goes further to conclude that:

"The common thread that runs through all of these critiques is that each one appears to start and stop the discussion on what Knowles did or didn't do with andragogy. There seems to be a woeful lack of a comprehensive understanding of the worldwide concept of andragogy" (Page 4).

This lack cohesion compounds the complexity of participatory research from the perspective of how andragogy is both perceived and practiced by the researcher. However, the researcher has to operate from some perspective and Knowles conditions for andragogical practice are a solid position upon which to do so.

Reasons for Non-Participation.

Having touched on typology and reasons for participation, it is equally important to establish reasons for non-participation. It will be these aspects that I will attempt to explore in greatest depth within this research. Cross (1981) categorises the reasons for non-participation as 'Institutional, Situational and Dispositional'.

McGivney (1993) expanded further by describing situational barriers as 'lack of time' and 'cost' issues. Institutional barriers relate to the 'unresponsive system' and it is argued that the institution is 'one of the principle reasons for non-participation in the education system itself [as] the middle-class character of adult education is a well-documented, international phenomenon'. In terms of dispositional barriers it is contested that:

"Reluctance to engage in education may have more to do with attitudes, perceptions and expectations than with any practical barriers…this problem has been underestimated…because respondents may not recognise, or wish to admit to, negative feelings towards education" (Pages 17-21).

However, these definitions will need to be tightened for the purposes of analysis. I have attempted to do so as follows:

Situational Barriers – Any physical and/or circumstantial effect that may cause non-participation in education. Gibson and Graff (1992: pages 39-51) define these as "those

impediments that arise from the adult's particular circumstances in life at the time, for example, the need to spend time with family members".

The converse of this barrier would be an enabler of freedom to participate, for example, those in compulsory education.

Institutional Barriers – These are policies and procedures within the institution itself, which prevent and/or discourage prospective students from participating in education.

The converse of this type of barrier would be any policy-based enabler that acts to mitigate the initial institutional barrier, for example, crèche facilities and student grants/bursaries, etc…

Dispositional Barriers – A negative perception of self and/or interaction between (a sense of) self and education as experienced in an educational institution. Gibson and Graff (1992: pp 39-51) define dispositional barriers as those that "refer to the student's concept of self as a learner. Low self-concept is one example of a dispositional barrier that may hamper participation and learning".

Dispositional barriers can be seen to be the opposite of intrinsic motivation to participate that needs a sense of self-efficacy.

As reported on page 3, McGivney (1993) moves further to expound these categories and states that:

"Although they have been described as oversimplified, these categories provide a useful starting point for considering the problems of non-participation" (Page 17).

The simplicity of these categories cannot be overstated, and the complex issue of interrelatedness of classifications is a constant problem so it is important that research be positioned from the students' perspectives and how they engage with the institution they find themselves in, in order to attempt to clarify categorisational issues. The ways in which

environmental factors such as class, ethnicity, gender, etc..., and individual personal attributes or values may interact is unclear. For example, Shipp and McKenzie (1981: pages 187-198) explored attributes relating to values, attitudes, interests, and lifestyles. They found that those who were inclined not to participate in adult education tended to have a lesser orientation to future than to the past; had shorter time perspectives; tended more towards an emotional than a rational orientation; were less inclined to take risks; had greater concreteness of thought; had a higher dependency on reference group (family and friends); and were more action orientated. Forsyth and Furlong (2003: page 54) spoke of 'disadvantaged students' and their 'advantaged peers'. They concluded that not only did disadvantaged students face lesser access to post compulsory education due to attainment at school level, but that once they did achieve this access, they faced an array of interrelated barriers which effected their prospects of achieving equity with their advantaged peers.

Fuller and Paton (2007) clarify further as follows:

"Ball et al (2002) argued that those young people with access to rich and diverse forms of social, cultural and economic capital were likely to be 'embedded choosers'. University [Further Education]…was seen as part of a 'normal and necessary' step between school and career. In contrast, the decision-making of young people from less advantaged backgrounds…is contingent on them 'overcoming' a range of difficulties" (Page 3).

The notions of social, cultural and economic capital play a central role in the way that barriers are perceived and addressed. However, if reasons for non-participation are to be generalisable, then an expectation of demographic specificity must play a part, as the research referred to in the previous section allude to. It would be presumptuous to state that those with lesser access to social, cultural and economic capital perceive post-compulsory education from the same viewpoint as those with greater access. More importantly, the institution has a

duty to recognise this as being the case in order to maximise potential uptake as well as improve the learner journey of prospective students.

Along with the sense of attempting to understand student perspectives in terms of barriers to participation, the direction of this thesis must keep in mind that if a useful framework towards widening participation is to be constructed it must be referable to and workable with conditions at this particular college and the identified characteristics of the students attending this college, despite its generalisability. As Malhotra et al (2007) state succinctly:

"Much work needs to be done before the deterrence construct is fully understood… The external validity of [any] *study is quite limited. Results cannot be generalized to all non-traditional learners at private, tuition-driven undergraduate colleges, much less the general population of adult learners"* (Page 88).

Synthesis and Emerging Research Questions

The direction that the research will take is heavily influenced by the literature that has been discussed in this chapter. The underlying driver for the research will be the *students' own perspectives*. Moreover, where student perspective is apparent in the literature, it tends to be explored from one or two specific viewpoints, e.g. economy, identity, gender, etc…rather than a study of the interaction of such constructs and how these interactions are significant for specific cohorts of students, in specific areas in the country, within specific colleges that they have access to. My aim is to attempt to redress this imbalance and to formulate a 'framework for participation' that is relevant *to this college* and its prospective students. Others reading this research must then judge for themselves whether similar conditions might apply in their own contexts and whether there is generalisability via the

probability of transfer to such like cases. Figure 4, below, indicates how the literature has informed the direction of this research.

ENABLERS AND/OR DISABLERS (HOW THEY INTERACT TO INFORM PARTICIPATION WITHIN FURTHER EDUCATION)

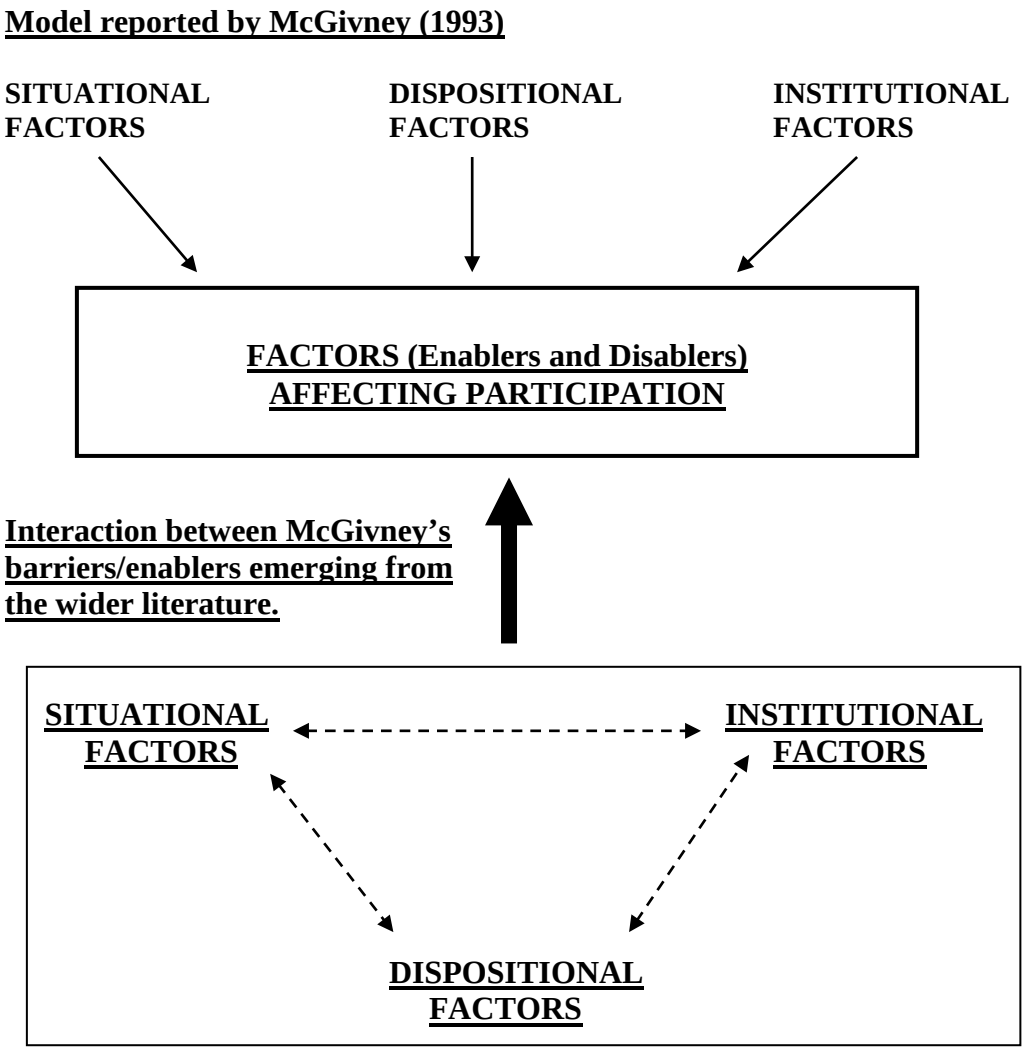


FIGURE 4

The initial model as reported by McGivney is simplistic in its categorisations. As suggested by the literature, barriers and enablers cannot be looked at from a discrete perspective, rather as interactions between each other that combine to inform the decision making process. As will be discussed in the methodology chapter, by keeping the student

perspective central to this research via Focus Group, Questionnaire and M.I.S Data, I will aim to elucidate the complexity of some of these interactions.

Detailed Research Questions

Cross referencing the broad research questions that were set up in Chapter 1, page 5, against current research literature as discussed in this chapter, the detailed research questions that will be addressed are:

From broad research question 1 - When and why do adults return to education?

How do students' perspectives guide towards exploring when and why adults return to education?

- What are the micro- and macro-issues that inform learners' decisions to participate in the Further Education sector?
- How can the influence of perceived or actual barriers be mitigated?

From broad research question 2 – What barriers or enablers do adults typically face in returning to education at different stages in their adult lives and from a range of vocational or personal contexts?

Barriers and enablers that adults face in returning to education at different stages in their adult lives:

- How and why do adult students form the intention to re-enter education and in what vocational and personal circumstances?
- What are the perceived barriers and enablers to participation in adult education?

- For those students who have overcome barriers how does the actual experience of participation in Further Education match with their expectations of it?

From broad research question 3 - What are the implications for the role we can play as educators, managers and policy makers in helping adult learners to take advantage of educational opportunities throughout their lives?

Implications for the role of educators in the formulation of a 'framework for participation':

- What are the issues involved in generating a framework for participation within the college catchment area?
- What type of framework could be implemented not only to assist in widening participation of adult students but also relate to the specific needs of the community within the college catchment area?

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Methodology and Analytical Phases.

A methodology was required that would facilitate the students in expressing their views and experiences. It was also my intention to collect evidence regarding trends in recruitment and withdrawal from college programmes which could be helpful to triangulate with the students views. A pragmatic approach was adopted which I felt lent itself to answering the research questions which were exploratory/descriptive in nature and include 'how' and 'why' style questions that required richer qualitative data collection methods. Consequently, a mixed method approach was selected. The focus of my thinking in relation to this design was *how* triangulation may help to establish the credibility of interpretative accounts and how case examples of student experiences might suggest relationships between factors leading to student decisions to participate. I intended to explore whether patterns and trends emerged amongst factors or types of student and their circumstance. Three methods of data collection were used comprising of collecting student perceptions via a questionnaire (with both closed and semi-open questions) and a focus group; college records kept on college Management Information System (M.I.S.) regarding the Access to Higher Education programme were used to complement the student' perceptual data. More open questions asked in questionnaires and in the focus group are analysed using qualitative methods. Patterns amongst emergent themes were also explored in order to give greater insight into the perception of major/minor issues – both qualitatively in terms of what the students believe has the greatest impact and quantitatively in terms of which issues most frequently affect students. The methodology used is therefore not one that is purely qualitative or quantitative, rather a

mixture of both. Jennifer Mason (2004) described the process of choosing methods as follows:

"Decisions about which methods to use, whether and how to integrate them, and what broad methodological strategy to adopt, all involve anticipating the process of data analysis...So, for example, in thinking about what kind of evidence a particular method is capable of producing, you will be making assumptions about analytical processes through which data might be turned into 'evidence'" (Page 37).

Martinez and Munday (1998) recognised subtle facets to this mixed mode of methodological approach during research into student persistence and drop-out in Further Education. They observed that it was important to understand:

"Relationships between 'hard' data (the where and when of student completion and non-completion) with 'soft' data (student perceptions of college, reasons given for non-completion)" (Page 10).

Figure 5 overleaf shows the structure of the data analysis phase (discussed further in the next section). Ethical issues such as confidentiality, openness, anonymity, participants' rights to withdraw, authenticity and honesty were considered and applied throughout the design method and implementation of the research.

Framework for the Analytical Phase of the Research

Top Layer **THE PARTICIPANTS PERSPECTIVES**

This layer is central to the research.
Participants' perspectives will drive the direction and analysis of data.

The questionnaire moves the participant through closed and semi-open questions. Responses can only be given within these parameters.

The researcher uses semi-structured questions to access participant perspectives. The student is open to express opinion freely.

Middle Layer

QUESTIONNAIRE (n=125)

Consisting of closed and semi-open questions to allow for the emergence of both qualitative themes and quantitative data.

FOCUS GROUP (n=6)

Semi-structured to allow for elicitation of students' personal responses.

THE EMERGENCE OF THEMES VIA THE USE OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE TOOLS OF ANALYSIS AND THEIR INTERCONNECTION

Lower Layer **STATISTICAL DATA (HISTORICAL)**

Taken from the college Management Information Systems (M.I.S).

FIGURE 5

Types of Data Collection Tools to be Used

Figure 5 shows that the three tools of data collection consist of a structured questionnaire, a small focus group discussion and the use of historical data that is on the college M.I.S. systems. The perspective of the student is the upper layer that drives the data collection and subsequent analysis, the rationale being that the questionnaire will provide some hard data and some softer data - through semi-open questions - and the focus group will provide further soft data that will complement each other so as to give a fuller picture of student perceptions. The lower layer consists entirely of data collected from the college M.I.S. The aim is to compare the data that arises from each of these sources to establish emerging themes guiding subsequent analysis. By collecting data using this approach it is expected that a fuller picture regarding the core research questions will emerge. In each of the three data collection stages, I have been aware of the following issues that will be discussed in greater detail:

- Generalisability/transferability
- Validity/ credibility
- Ethical considerations and reflexivity

Generalisability/Transferability

The issue of generalisability is problematic from the outset. Will I be able to state with any confidence that the results that have been achieved by this research can be used in a general forum?

Jenifer Mason (2004) states that:

"Key forms of generalization….are clearly contingent on your having sampled in certain ways, and on understanding the implications of your sampling strategy...Your

sampling strategy may provide the key to how you should understand numerical patterns in your data, as well as what significance you should grant to the 'discovery' of what you think are pivotal cases or examples" (Page 199).

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for the college catchment area (2010) shows that at the time of data collection the target participants could be seen to be atypical for the purpose of generalisation in the sense that they are from a deprived area -see table 2, below) which is established via the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) as follows:

"The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 (IMD 2007) is one way of identifying deprived areas. The IMD 2007 measures deprivation in its broadest sense by including 37 indicators which assess income, employment, health and disability, education, skills and training, barriers to housing and services, crime and living environment at a Lower Level Super Output Area (LLSOA) level." (Page 21)

IMD & LLSOA DATA FOR THE COLLEGE CATCHMENT AREA.

	Index of Multiple Deprivation Scores (2007)					
	National Quintile					
	1 (Most deprived)	2	3	4	5 (Least deprived)	All quintiles
The College Catchment Area	Number of Lower Level Super Output Areas (LLSOA's)					
	8	18	15	13	6	60
	Population (based on 2008 Lower Level Super Output Areas (LLSOA's) estimates)					
	11100	28500	24300	20900	10000	94800
	Proportion of Population					
	12%	30%	26%	22%	11%	100%

(Note: Figures may not add precisely due to rounding)

TABLE 2

Although in terms of formulating a framework for widening participation within *this specific college* and others like it, these students become typical, it is also acknowledged that

there may be problems in generalising to all colleges in the Further Education sector that arise from this research due to an atypical population.

Validity/Credibility

Methodological triangulation was used in order to gather data as it is recognised as a means of strengthening validity. McNiff et al (2005) advise that the researcher should:

"Aim *to triangulate data; that is obtain data from more than one source to use as evidence to support a particular explanation, and show how the data from these different sources all go towards supporting the explanations you give of your situation"* (Page 69).

There is always the possibility that two or more competing methods of data capture may actually lead to contradictions rather than complement each other. Bloor (1997) argued that:

"While triangulation is relevant to validity, it raises both logical and practical difficulties, e.g. when findings collected by different methods differ to a degree which makes their direct comparison problematic" (Page 38).

I would argue at this point that it is by finding contradictions and tensions that the researcher is prompted to probe further. This may point to a previously hidden or unconsidered variable or local contextual factor or unique characteristic of the participants. It may therefore be necessary to go through the research loop on more than one occasion, or to bring in other methods to capture data relating to hitherto unconsidered variables and further use these in the triangulation process to give a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding the main research question. Therefore, triangulation can be used as not only a tool for improving validity but also as a method of deepening research insights, e.g. when using techniques that code data according to identified patterns or themes, it may be argued that unavoidable subjectivity may play a part. By outlining how themes have been arrived at via

the process of coding the perspectives of the participants to illustrate those themes, credibility and transparency are also more likely to be achieved.

Ethical considerations and reflexivity

Many ethical considerations need to be considered whilst undertaking this research, arising from a variety of aspects. DeLaine (2000) observes that:

"Staging and performing fieldwork rests on a foundation of negotiations with various parties, each with their own interests and expectations (sponsors and funders, gatekeepers, colleagues and subjects), which may or may not clash and could give rise to conflict" (Page 120).

The following ethical issues have been considered during this research:

Openness: Ensuring that the primary stakeholders (including student participants and the college management) are aware of how and why I am gathering and using information and opinions from students.

Confidentiality: As part of this commitment, to use data ethically. Also, by keeping in mind responsibilities under the Data Protection Act, data were stored independently of identifiers.

Anonymity: Assurances are given that every attempt is made to ensure participants remain anonymous throughout the research, unless agreed with the participant to the contrary.

Participant right to withdraw: The participant has the absolute right to withdraw from questioning or discussion at any point during the data collection process. Furthermore, if the participant wishes for his/her information up to that point not to be used subsequently and prior to publication, that those wishes are respected.

Keeping a good standard of professional and academic conduct at all times. This ethical consideration is possibly the most important. The way in which the researcher conducts

him/herself during that period must be professional in order to give validity and credence to the final outcome.

Researcher – Practitioner Reflexivity Issues

The issues surrounding the fact that I am both researcher and teacher of some of the participants - particularly the asymmetry of power - needs to be addressed at this point. It may be perceived that the student teacher relationship may not be conducive to fair and honest data collection – that those students who I teach would be more inclined to give the answers that they feel I would want them to give, rather than those that they would more honestly give if I were not their teacher. A number of steps have been taken in order to try to counteract these issues.

Anonymity of questionnaire respondents was given high priority at all times. All respondents were aware of this throughout the data collection phase.

All respondents were made aware that this was not part of any grading exercise by me - that they were not the subject of evaluation, rather it was an opportunity for them to express their own experiences of barriers and enablers– i.e. it was an opportunity for the college to be given respondent-driven direction rather than the student being given direction in relation to their studies…the tables are turned. All respondents were made aware that this research was important due to the impact it could have on the college's understanding of the needs of future cohorts (see the three broad research aims that have been set up in the introduction to this research on page 1, in particular 'to arrive at a 'framework for participation' - a model based on the findings of this research which could serve to help the community via targeted support'). Students were given freedom to express their own perceptions of barriers and enablers from their own perspectives through semi-open questions and the focus group.

In terms of the Focus Group, the issue of non-anonymity at the point of data collection comes to bear as it has to be acknowledged at this point that anonymity cannot be guaranteed completely due to the threat of third party disclosure via other members of the group collectively knowing who participated and who said what. There was also more opportunity for authenticity of utterances being skewed due to the fact that the group could perceive that they are talking to a teacher rather than a researcher. In order to minimise this effect, the majority of students who were picked for the focus group were those whom I did not teach personally, although they were aware that I was a lecturer on the Access to Higher Education Programme. The issue of my being both evaluator and teacher to some respondents is acknowledged as problematic. In some ways the problem is minimised by showing as many examples of actual student utterances as possible and triangulating interpretations of these with data from M.I.S. data and questionnaire findings. However, this does not detract from the issue that I may interpret the data in accordance with my own perceptions rather than those of the respondents – some subjectivity is unavoidable.

It is my aim to reflectively and reflexively approach interpretation through the adoption of a systematic approach for arriving at themes that is transparently explained. This will include describing issues that emerge in coding and my responses to them, and careful checking the selection of example responses reported to establish how representative they are, whilst also including contrary views or unexpected counter-trends.

Sampling Considerations

As established in chapter 1, pages 3-4, the respondents for this research are drawn from participants on the Access to Higher Education Diploma and are all based within the same Further Education college. With reference to Appendix 1 (page 219), the questionnaire sample size was 125 with an aim to ensuring that enough data was collected to allow for

analysis to be undertaken in such a way as to arrive at conclusions that showed statistical confidence.

The questionnaire was handed out to two cohorts of students in academic years 2006 and 2007 being administered over a 2-week period towards the end of each academic year. This allowed for micro and macro influences which would naturally fluctuate on a year-to-year basis and could impact on cohorts to produce variations such as (but not limited to) age ranges, gender, issues of perception, funding issues, unemployment statistics.

In terms of the focus group, the size of the group was quite difficult to decide upon as I felt that if it was too small there may not be enough people to generate a meaningful discussion and that a strong character within the group could lead the discussion. However, if the group was too big, the amount of information produced could become unwieldy and the possibility of weak voices not being heard could become an issue. Faulkner et al (1991) advise that:

"A group should number no more than eight people. You need to consider whom you invite to participate. You may wish to ask people who are likely to have different points of view, as such interviews are useful for exploring issues"(Page 49).

Alternatively, Robson (2002) reflects that:

"Opinions vary on the optimum size of the group. Figures of eight to twelve are usually thought suitable (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990), although smaller group sizes have been used [and moves on to recognize that perhaps the most limiting factor about a focus group is that] *the number of questions covered is limited, typically fewer than ten major questions can be asked in an hour"* (Page 285).

The primary advantage of running a small focus group according to Stringer (1999) is that it can:

"Enable participants to describe their situation. The process not only provides a record of their views and perspectives but also symbolically recognises the legitimacy of their views" (Page 68).

Taking all these viewpoints into consideration along with the typological backgrounds of the students, the decision was made to have 6 participants within the focus group.

Structured Questionnaire Design

The main considerations regarding the choice of using a questionnaire to collect data have been discussed above including the desire to collect both qualitative and quantitative data as indicated in the 'framework for the analytical phase of research' shown in figure 5 (page 69). In the following section specific issues relating to the design of the questionnaire itself and the questions it contained are elaborated upon. The avoidance of leading questions and the need for them to be answerable quickly, unambiguously, and inoffensively/unobtrusively was given priority.

Decisions were therefore made concerning:

- The structure of the questionnaire so as to allow for accurate, ethical, easy and thorough administration;
- Types of question to be used (closed, semi-open, open or a syntheses of these types of questions);
- The inclusion of attitude/rating scales for personal preferences;
- How to administer the questionnaire e.g. by post or handed out in-situ.

Cohen et al (2004) comment in terms of questionnaire structure that:

"The larger the size of the sample, the more structured, closed and numerical the questionnaire may have to be, and the smaller the size of sample, the less structured, more open and word-based the questionnaire may be" (Page 247).

More importantly, in terms of administration and completion of the questionnaire, they go further to observe that:

"The questionnaire will always be an intrusion into the life of the respondent, be it in terms of time taken to complete the questionnaire, the level of threat or sensitivity of the questions, or the possible invasion of privacy. Questionnaire respondents are not passive data providers for researchers; they are subjects not objects of research" (Page 245).

The construction and role of the questionnaire, see Figure 6 overleaf, should allow for:

- the collection of specific data relating to the cohort of students;
- the collection of attitudes relating to reasons for non-participation;
- the collection of attitudes relating to reasons for returning to education;
- the collection of experiences of the college itself.

The intention was to explore the data provided by the participants in relation to Veronica McGivney's reported initial barriers in order to ascertain whether the barriers students suggest all fall into these categorisations, or whether there are other factors that come to bear. It could be argued that these students are participants and should not therefore be asked for reasons relating to non-participation. However, the fact that these students are currently participating did not mean that they had always done so and the aim was to attempt to establish their reasons for non-participation before re-entry.

Revisiting the results obtained from this questionnaire is paramount throughout the research, as results were not intended to stand-alone but rather to be interpreted in triangulation with other methods of data-collection. To elaborate, if we look at Figure 5 on page 69 - the framework for the analytical phase of the research - themes should begin to emerge from the responses to the questionnaire.

Question Structure and Types of Data they will Yield.

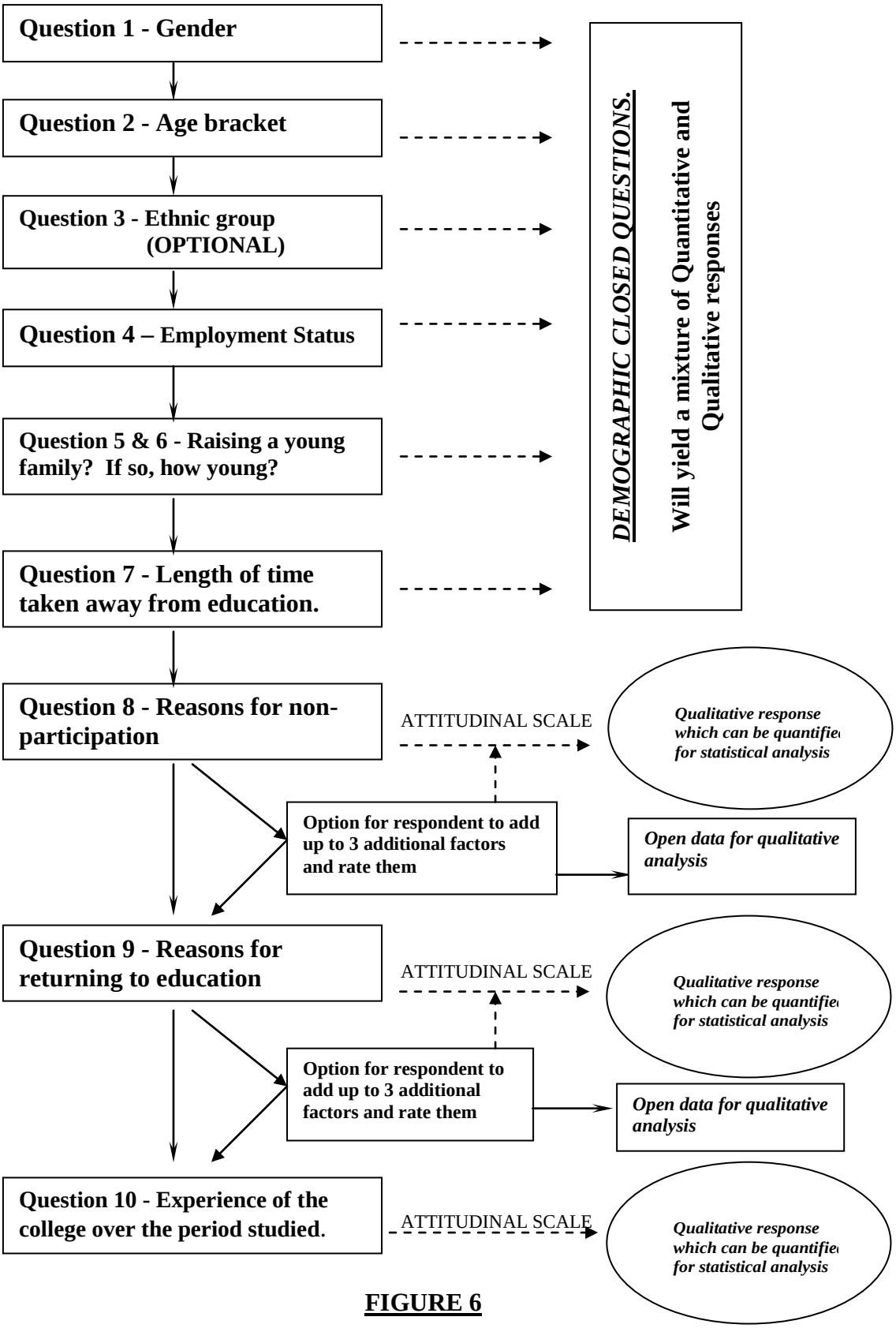


FIGURE 6

As the aim is to access participants' viewpoints from two directions, namely questionnaire and focus group discussion – both methods will include open responses which require interpretation using a qualitative methodology that looks for emergent themes. Responses from the questionnaire will developmentally serve to inform the design and direction of discussion in the focus group. That is, emerging themes of interest in the questionnaire data will be followed up through subsequent discussion in the focus group. The questionnaire - Appendix 1 (pages 219-221) - is mainly composed of closed questions to be analysed quantitatively including factual information as well as attitudinal data. This will be triangulated with data collected from the College M.I.S database with the aim of reinforcing the accuracy, validity and credibility of each whilst highlighting any discrepancies between the pictures emerging from each method.

When deciding the types of questions to be used in the questionnaire, it was important that the respondents were not only answering questions within parameters that I had set, rather that they also had some opportunity to express their own views inasmuch as the structure of the questionnaire would allow. From the questionnaire it is seen that all of the questions are closed in construction with the exceptions of questions 8 and 9 which although mainly consisting of a set of statements which participants could signal the extent to which they agreed with, also included the opportunity to add up to three additional reasons or statements of their own. This aspect was deliberately devised to include an open question element – see Figure 6 (page 79).

McNiff et al (2005) observe that:

"Open questions allow the respondent to express a broader range of ideas [than closed questions]... However, even an open question closes off possibilities because it sets boundaries for possible answers" (Page 123).

This viewpoint informed the decision as to *how open* the open questions would be. I felt it was important to gain a 'reason' and scale it according to the respondent's attitude, and for that reason to be a point of entry in the focus group discussion phase so that students could elaborate through the spoken word rather than having to write large amounts of prose.

Attitude/Rating Scales

Attitude/Rating scales are an effective method of encapsulating broad views so as to make them measurable in order to ascertain correlations between attitudes/perceptions. Cohen et al (2004) maintain that:

"[attitude] rating scales are widely used in research, and rightly so, for they combine the opportunity for a flexible response with the ability to determine frequencies, correlation and other forms of quantitative analysis. They afford the researcher the freedom to fuse measurement with opinion, quantity and quality" (Page 253).

Analysis of the questionnaire responses aided in attempting to answer the question of whether all emerging barriers and enablers to participation, from reasons for participation and non-participation and experiences of college life, are categorisable within situation, disposition and institution as would be expected, based on the work of McGivney. From the same perspectives, I will also be asking whether patterns of response are found in relation to gender, ethnicity and social class. An important question will be whether other factors emerge from open questions that cannot be classified using McGivney's categories. By using attitude scales in order to make the strength of opinion concerning these reasons measurable, and by cross referencing findings from attitude scales with coded responses in open replies from focus group discussion, it was expected that emergent themes would surface that would form part of the framework that can be used to help widen participation within the college. Looking at Appendix 1 (pages 219-221), it is seen that questions 8, 9 and 10 have all been

constructed to accommodate the measuring of attitude via the use of Likert scaling. Questions 8 & 9 have deliberately been constructed to have four categories whereas question 10 has five. In questions 8 and 9 the aim was to find specific reasons why students remained away from college and then why they decided to return. In question 8, four possible factors are used against which a response is required so as to facilitate respondents to think about their own reasons, i.e. I did not want to exhaust possible factors for non-participation by looking at them from my own perspective, rather aimed to establish reasons for non-participation from the student's perspective via the 'other' section of this question. In question 9 however, there were eight options initially listed as respondents were only asked to circle appropriate responses, rather than to rate all responses so as to allow for greater *personal* choice before moving on to the 'other' section. In the case where a respondent decides not to address one of the given responses in question 9, it would be treated as not being of relevance to that respondent. A four-point forced-choice response scale was chosen because a neutral response is not helpful here - I wanted to know if the factor was a reason affecting the decision, and if so, how important. For example, if a participant were to state a reason for non-participation as being a 'lack of confidence', then it has to be assumed that it was an 'important' or 'very important' reason for non-participation, as s/he would not have stated it as a reason otherwise. At other times, e.g. question 10, where the participant's opinion regarding college experience is sought, there may be some areas which are irrelevant to the experience of the student, e.g. crèche facilities would not be needed by somebody who has no child and is not the guardian of a child and capturing this as a neutral response was important. Each question will be discussed in greater detail together with its findings when the questionnaire results are analysed in Chapter 5. It is important to note at this point that the responses given in questions 8 and 9 would not be counted into the response given for the rest of the question as

it could compromise the frequency comparability of the given responses from the question. Responses to 8e and 9i would be looked at separately in order to establish any interrelatedness between questionnaire responses and focus group responses as well as to establish extrinsic and intrinsic enablers/disablers.

As established in the sampling considerations on page 75, the questionnaire was handed out to two cohorts of students in academic years 2006 and 2007. The questionnaires were administered over a 2-week period so as to allow, as much as possible, for all students on the course to be accessed. The questionnaire was filled out with me in situ in all cases as there was a great deal of advantage in doing so. In the first instance, it was important that the students were placed in a position where they could flag up any difficulties with words or phrases in the questionnaire if they needed to do so. Only difficulties with words and phrases were broached as they can mean different things to different groups of people, but in all cases, the respondents were encouraged to answer the questions from their own perspectives, i.e. answer according to how they read the question rather than asking me what I wanted from that question. Secondly, had this questionnaire been posted, I would only expect a proportion to respond. Thirdly there was a great saving in time, effort and cost as the students were already in the college and therefore very accessible. If, however, this was a larger scale survey with a greater geographical spread, the reverse would probably be true.

The downside to the *in situ* questionnaire is my own presence as a researcher. Will the students give responses that they feel I would want them to give? Will they attempt to second-guess me? Should the questionnaire be handed out so that participants are away from peers so as to ensure that responses are anonymous? How can anonymity of questionnaires be ensured? A fine line had to be navigated here which was grounded in ethical consideration - for the purpose of this research the practical advantages outweighed the disadvantages of the

in situ process and in attempting to minimize the possible detrimental effect of the highlighted issues on participant responses, the ethical issues of confidentiality, anonymity and participant right to withdraw were expressed to all participants before the questionnaire was handed out. An alternative would have been to give the students the choice of whether they wanted me present, however on this occasion, and for the reasons outlined, this was felt to be more detrimental to the data collection process than advantageous.

Focus Group Design

The aim of the focus group was to give an opportunity to the participants to elaborate on the specific attitudinal responses they gave in the questionnaire. Six students were invited (see sampling considerations, pages 75-77) from those respondents who gave answers to the open questions. Questionnaire participants were made aware that a focus group discussion was to be held and that if they had responded to the 'other' sections in questions 8 and 9, they were eligible to be in the group. Students were made aware that I would be the moderator on the day and that the discussion would be based around enablers/disablers to participation. Places were filled on a first come first serve basis whereby four students approached me who I had never taught and the other two, I had. When the students that I had taught came forward, I gave them the option to immediately drop out if they felt that they could not talk openly within a group if I were there, but on the day they all decided to proceed and contributed fully.

The specific questions that were asked of this focus group can be seen in Appendix 2A (page 222). The questions were deliberately chosen to relate to those themes emerging from the optional ones added by participants when answering the questionnaire. The participants were initially also given a 'response sheet' see appendix 2B (page 223), onto which they were

able to jot down ideas relating to the questions that were to be discussed, as well as it acting as a 'prompt' if a train of thought was lost. Cohen et al (2004) explains that:

"Focus groups are contrived settings, bringing together a specifically chosen sector of the population to discuss a particular given theme or topic, where the interaction of the group leads to data and outcomes" (Page 288).

Another decision to be made about the focus group was that of researcher intervention. It was imperative that I did not drive discussion so as to lead opinion, but at the same time that the focus of the discussion was not lost. The dialogue should be both open-ended yet to the point. Robson (2002) states that:

"A balance between an active and passive role is needed. The moderator has to generate interest in and discussion about a particular topic...without...leading the group to reinforce existing expectations or confirm a prior hypothesis" (Page 287).

Resultantly, one small focus group was structured as follows:

Who participated?	Students who gave responses to the 'other' sections in questions 8 & 9 of the questionnaire.
How were they chosen?	By invitation – Maximising the number of students who were not taught by me but were students on the Access to Higher Education Diploma, thus minimising issues related to the researcher versus practitioner tensions discussed in this chapter.
How many students?	Six
Duration of the focus group?	Forty five minutes
How many questions were explored?	Ten (See Appendix 2A – page 222)
How often did the researcher intervene?	Only to bring discussion into focus if/when the participants went off on a tangent.

The following running order was put into place so that I could ensure the smooth step-by-step management of the focus session:

The Focus Group – Organisation

- Thank all participants for their time, and in advance for their efforts
- Make students aware of the ethical considerations that have been given to this discussion
- Give the participants the option to opt out at any point during the focus group
- Ask the participants for permission to record the interview by VCR
- Hand out the 'Questions for the focus group' sheet – see appendix 2A (page 222)
- Discuss definitions for the words 'Situation', 'Institution' and 'Disposition'.
- Give the students a response sheet – see appendix 2B (page 223).
- Give the students instructions and time to fill out the response sheet. It is critical to ensure that the students are aware that the definitions for 'Situation', 'Institution' and 'Disposition' are there to assist in categorisation if needed...that they can and should use the 'other' section if these categorisations do not fit with their own perceptions.
- Leave the room whilst the students discuss and fill out response sheet
- Re-enter and discuss the questions with the students
- End session by thanking students and collecting all written evidence of the discussion.

The mode of recording was a tripod mounted VCR recorder which was used to record the entire session, both completion of the response sheet and the discussion phases. The main reason for this choice was that there would be a need for voice recognition and changes in tone of voice if an audio recorder was solely used. However, a video recorder would solve

this problem. Guidance for video-recording responses is given by Faulkner et al (1991) who point to the following considerations:

- *"Video cameras are more intrusive than audio-cassette recorders*
- *A video camera is highly selective; it cannot pick up everything that is going on in a large room*
- *Video recorders with built-in microphones don't always produce good sound."* (Page 83)

The following decisions were made to alleviate the three problems listed above:

Problem 1 – Ensuring that potential participants for the group discussion were made aware of the fact that they would be video-taped prior to the focus discussion. This would empower prospective participants in terms of giving them choice to decide whether or not to participate, e.g. if they had any issues with being filmed.

Problem 2 - The choice of room was critical. Students were given a medium sized class with very little external noise. The video recorder was set up to focus on only the table where the participants sat.

Problem 3 - Sound was thoroughly tested before the onset of the focus interview through trial tests using male and female voices, and setting the VCR at various distances from the table that was to be recorded.

Transcription, Analysis and Interpretation Issues.

Transcribing utterances of a focus group poses technical problems in terms of the accuracy of utterances to be transcribed. Should every word be transcribed? Faulkner et al (1991) suggest that:

"Detailed transcripts are useful if you wish to look at how talk is structured…If your interest is more in the content of what people say, you...can make a rougher transcript" (Page 87).

However, if it is the case as with my own research, that I need to understand content rather than explicit structure, would there be a danger that during the transcribing stage I would bring into play my own standpoint of the direction that I feel the discussion is going in? In other words, how can I be sure that I have transcribed accurately enough to eliminate the bias of *self*? Ball (1993) states that:

"I believe that the differences between my analysis and yours typically would be small...The differences would be matters of orientation, rather than in the story being told. The complexity and the 'becomingness' of social life belies the possibility of a single, exhaustive, or definitive account…we should expect different researchers to pick their way through fieldwork differently" (Page 43).

The issue of objectivity at the point of interpretation of the transcription is problematic. How can I ensure that the utterances of the focus group are interpreted in the spirit that they were actually spoken? Would I not again bring my own standpoint into the mix? Mason (2004) argues that:

"A major challenge for interpretivist approaches centres on the question of how you can be sure that you are not simply inventing data, or misinterpreting your research participants' perspectives…different qualitative approaches offer different solutions. For an ethnomethodologist, this is precisely the problem with reading 'beyond' data, and researchers from this perspective should concentrate on utterances and recorded interactions" (Pages 76-77).

Although it is recognised that linking every statement to an individual is not necessarily essential in a focus group context, it was considered important that during the transcribing process utterances were written down accurately as this would aid considerably at the point of contextualised interpretations. If the focus group interview had been recorded in an audio medium only, this would further aggravate the issue of potential misinterpretation whereas a video-audio medium would aid in lessening the possibility of this type of problem arising due to student's body language and facial expressions being contextually helpful – although it is acknowledged that ambiguous body language could themselves lead to misinterpretation. My goal as a researcher is to strive for objective interpretation; however, there is always the possibility of some subjectivity being brought into interpretations exacerbated by the fact that any medium for recording the spoken word have its advantages and disadvantages.

Consideration will now be given to the *process* of analysis for the data generated from the focus group. The main obstacle is the sheer volume of data that presents itself. It is important to visit the data through more than one complete run/phase, each time asking more involved questions so as to ascertain and apply emergent themes. This is one of the main ways in which reflexivity is operationalised within this research as set up on page 7 of this thesis, so that each phase is informed by the previous one in order that the data tells the story rather than bringing my own opinions and preconceptions to it. A three-phased method has been applied that can be generally overviewed as follows:

Phase 1

- Define and Establish codes
- Two raters apply one initial code to appropriate transcribed utterances – The initial codes being Institution, Situation or Disposition [S, I, D]
- Application of Inter-Rater Reliability – using Cohen's Kappa Statistic

The use of Cohen's Kappa Statistic has been rationalised by Berry and Mielke (1988) as follows:

"A number of statistical problems in educational and psychological research require the measurement of agreement...between two or more observers. One of the most popular indices of agreement was introduced by Cohen (1960) as a reliability index for measuring chance-corrected agreement between two observers employing nominal scales" (Page 921).

- Reflection on 'goodness of fit' via the use of Cohen's Kappa statistic.

Phase 2

- Two raters apply initial [S, I, D] and subsequent[S, I, D] codings to utterances to establish possible 'layering' of barriers.
- Application of Inter-Rater Reliability – Cohen's Kappa Statistic
- Reflection on 'goodness of fit' via the use of Cohen's Kappa Statistic.

Phase 3

- Identify, Define and Establish emergent themes
- Application of emergent themes to utterances
- Reflection on 'goodness of fit'

Issues of Validity

The process of application of initial codes and that of extracting and applying emerging themes is problematic inasmuch as the researcher needs to ensure that these themes are applied in a contextually sensitive way that is as faithful as possible to the speaker's intent. Recognition of the possibility that I may bring my own interpretations to the utterances of the participant's in thematic analysis, aids in prioritisation being given to the perspectives of the participant rather than my own. However, to provide a further check on this subjective aspect and to prevent bias as far as possible it will be a case of checking and re-checking the coding. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) turn to Schutz's theories (1930's) regarding 'valid' methods of research in order to attempt to combat this problem and observe that:

"Schutz's second postulate of subjective interpretation is in line with preserving the participant's subjective point of view and acknowledging the context within which the phenomenon was studied…Interpretive rigor requires the researcher to demonstrate clearly how interpretations of the data have been achieved and to illustrate findings with quotations from, or access to, the raw data…The participant's reflections, conveyed in their own words, strengthen the face validity and credibility of the research" (Page 3).

The advantages of Schutz's approach for the focus group analysis are as follow:

- The participant's perspective guides the allocation of initial codes and the identification of emergent themes;
- Deviation from the context within which the utterances were spoken is minimised due to participant's reflections being conveyed in their own words;
- The cross-referencing of both of these advantages with 'quotations from, or access to, the raw data'.

Problems of Generalisability

Codes that are to be established and applied to participant's utterances cause a knock-on effect for the problem of generalisability. The cohort of participant's for this focus group are peculiar to the area from which they originate and all the social constraints that are applicable to that area. One example is that of the ethnicity breakdown of students within this college and those on the Access to Higher Education programme. 95.97% of the students that enter this college are from a white background and only 1.98% non-white. Within the Access programme, the percentages are 98.41% white and 1.59% non-white. In comparison figures from inner cities show ethnic minorities are a much higher percentage of the population and in some cases, the dominant percentage. Schofield (2002) alludes to this lack of comparability when observing that:

"Practically speaking, no matter what one's philosophical stance on the importance of generalisability, it is clear that the numerous characteristics that typify the qualitative approach are not consistent with achieving external validity as it has generally been conceptualized". (Page 173).

It therefore becomes a case of recognising that the emerging themes and resultant outcomes of the research relate to the area from which a cohort is drawn specifically, in the first instance, but that certain aspects may apply to other populations. Schofield (2002) reports that:

"*Guba and Lincoln write: 'It is virtually impossible to imagine any human behaviour that is not heavily mediated by the context within which it occurs' (1981)* [and that]… *'Generalisations are impossible since phenomena are neither time- nor context-free' (1982*)

[Given that this is true, Guba and Lincoln call for replacing the concept of generalisability with that of] *"fittingness"* (Page 178)

This notion of fittingness has been adopted within the research as one that points to generalisability. 'Goodness of fit' – informed by the application of the Kappa statistic for Inter-Rater Reliability - will form the last step of each phase and will guide the direction of the next phase.

Ethical Considerations with the Focus Group

Ethical considerations are highly important within any methodological framework. During the participant selection procedure, great importance was placed on the fact that a full overview about the purpose and uses of participants' contributions was given. Once selection had been achieved, the group was given a full and detailed explanation of how the data would be handled once it had been collected from them. This included:

- Why the data was to be collected and how the data was to be gathered (VCR);
- Who would be able to view the taped focus group discussion – myself and a professional transcriber only;
- What the purpose of collecting this data would be – Giving direction to the research and the emergence of themes that would be outside those under the headings of 'Disposition, Situation and Institution';
- Making participants aware that once their views had been embedded within the research, that they would be accessible to other research communities.
- Honesty was an expected ethical consideration throughout.
- Participants should not be pressurised to speak.

A particular ethical issue to be considered was the handling of sensitive material and confidentiality given that there would always be more than one participant in the group. From

the outset importance was given to the need to clarify that each participant's contributions will be shared with the others in the group as well as with the researcher. DeLaine (2000) states that:

"Questions that reflected negatively on [participant's] self-worth, social/mental competency or moral stature are linked with 'anxiety scenarios' or 'discomfort-laden' encounters…Probing such matters can constitute [the researcher] in the role of 'moral entrepreneurs', who are custodians and enforcers of mainstream societal modalities" (Page 173).

This highlights a particularly difficult consideration as some issues may not wish to be shared by the participants, even though they may be the most compelling reason for non-participation. However, it is ethically appropriate to make participants aware of confidentiality for those who do wish to divulge sensitive issues. Similarly, it is important that as a researcher, I do not set myself up to be a 'custodian and/or enforcer of mainstream societal modalities'. Participants were encouraged to respect confidentiality during the focus group. As a further precaution it was my responsibility to ensure that anonymity was afforded to the group and individuals within it as far as possible. Where serious and sensitive issues emerged I had a responsibility both to the individual, should they need additional support or advice, and to me and the wider group/community should any criminal or dangerous activity emerge as part of discussions. In the event this was not an issue.

Throughout the initial phase of code development and the application of those codes to utterances, and mainly due to the fact that the initial themes of disposition, institution and situation had been established through McGivney's work, the ethical considerations needed to arrive at these codings were somewhat mitigated. However, this does not detract from *how* these codes were applied and how subsequent emergence of themes was handled so as to

ensure ethical reflection. Boyatzis (1998) highlights the ethical deliberations that need to be applied to the analysis of the participant's own spoken word when he maintains that:

"The raw data or information collected for studies using thematic analysis is a person's own words or actions…This often results in relatively more "sensitive" raw data than are usually obtained from questionnaires or surveys. The increased sensitivity requires a high degree of thought and caution regarding the subject's informed consent, protection of confidentiality, protection against abusive use of raw or coded data, and protection against abusive application of the results of the study" (Page xii).

Special consideration needs to be given to the process of coding and emergent themes. The research becomes unethical if it attempts in any way to mould student responses to the views held by the researcher. The data must be allowed to tell its own story.

The Case for M.I.S Data

The justification for the use of M.I.S. data was that value lay in the fact that it may provide further insight into or confirm interpretations through triangulation with analysis of primary data. The fact that the data existed and had already been subject to auditing processes presented an opportunity to establish if trends occurred in relation to emergent themes. The use of data from M.I.S was problematic in terms of its secondary nature, its biggest failing being that the researcher lacks control over how and why the data was collected in the first place and therefore its meaning may be taken out of context or its categories lack specificity. In order to enhance data credibility, it was important to establish confidence in its relationship to the participants' standpoints. Therefore, MIS data was only interpreted once the questionnaire had been administered, the focus group held, and its credibility established through the use of inter-rater reliability in terms of emergent themes, and only data relating to

the Access to Higher Education programme was used, otherwise it had no sense of relevance to the research.

How Was the Data Collected and Who Collected It?

The data on the college M.I.S system originated from the college-wide documentation that is used when any student leaves the course upon which they have enrolled – see Appendix 7 (page 236). The reason for its use is that it is the most effective data that relates to non-participation that is kept as part of the college's regular auditing process - in this case recording lack of retention. The document consists of 27 categories – See Appendix 7 (page 236) for coded categorisations - one of which should be identified by the tutor/lecturer to show the main/key reason for withdrawal. Davies (1999) points to methodological problems when he states that:

"College-based information systems sometimes demonstrated serious deficiencies in data collection on student withdrawals. Reasons for withdrawal were recorded for by no means all courses….More seriously, the common methodology for recording reasons for withdrawal was flawed" (College Information Systems: Paragraph 1)

This flawed methodology is one of *who* records the reason for leaving. If it is not the student's own hand or voice that is recorded then it is open to the interpretations of the administrator, adding layers of subjectivity. For example, if a student were to leave a course due to illness, does the fact that the withdrawal form has a tick box for illness fully record the reasons that s/he may have left? There are support structures in place that could allow students to study at home, for work to be provided for them, and in today's technological age, for lessons to be bought to their bedside if needed via virtual learning environments. It may have not been the illness itself that necessitated self-exclusion.

Thomas (2005) suggests that:

"Overcoming the barriers to participation in post-compulsory education is complex. In particular, there is not a single barrier to be identified and rectified, but a whole range of issues that face different groups of potential students in different ways" (Page 208).

Had these issues been recorded and discussed at the point of exit they may not have resulted in the student leaving. Even if the student did leave, the recording of underlying issues could assist in improving future exit policy. The shortcomings of the withdrawal form and policy of ticking only one box now becomes clearer. It is erroneous to attribute withdrawal to one or two main factors, when, in fact, student withdrawal is normally due to a range of factors. Some issues affecting withdrawals are within the college's control and some are within the student's control, and recognition of this is imperative. Therefore, M.I.S data can only be used to supplement the research rather than providing the main source of data for answering research questions. Robson (2002) observes that:

"There are clear advantages and disadvantages associated with such data [M.I.S data]. It is possible to tap into extensive data sets, often drawn from large representative samples, well beyond the resources of the individual researcher…The disadvantages flow from the fact that even those surveys carried out for research purposes are unlikely to be directly addressing the research question you are interested in" (Page 360).

It was decided that a 10-year period (1999/2000-2008/09) would be used to establish any trends in relation to emergent themes via triangulation with data collected from the questionnaire and focus group.

Information on the college M.I.S system was not initially in the format required (see sampling considerations, pages 75-77). It needed to be organised in order to ascertain

whether it could substantiate issues highlighted by participants based on analysis of questionnaire and focus group. The aim was to look at M.I.S. data from two perspectives:

- Does the data give rise to unanticipated issues that had not been expressed by questionnaire respondents and/or focus group participants?
- Can/Does the data corroborate the participants' views in relation to emergent themes?

Both perspectives were analysed through establishing trends from the M.I.S data. Corroboration by the M.I.S data is of as much importance as the themes that arise from the students' perspectives in order to form a fuller picture in terms of reasons for non-participation. It is not enough to approach this research from interpretation of questionnaire responses and focus group outcomes - there is a need to establish whether there is evidence that the college data is working alongside student perspectives. Only then could it be surmised that student perspectives are being accounted for from an institutional perspective.

Summary of Chapter 4

In summary, it was of critical importance that the methods used would permit maximisation of the student perspective by allowing as many gateways for the perspectives to be heard as possible. Just as important was the need to allow for interpretation of the data to be as objective as possible, whilst acknowledging the fact that a certain amount of subjectivity is inevitable due to the fact that any researcher would be unable to be completely removed from all of the layers of underlying issues within the research that s/he were undertaking. In terms of chronological structure, it was decided that the order of data collection would be Questionnaire to Focus Group to M.I.S data. The reason for this was that each stage could act as a catalyst for the next, i.e. questionnaire responses to open questions would inform the design of the focus group, and the discussion from the focus group would in turn inform the questions that needed to be asked of the M.I.S data systems.

It is now possible to see how data collected via the above methods impacts on the diagrammatic representation of how enablers and/or disablers interact to inform participation within further education that was set up at the end of chapter 3 in Figure 4 (Page 64). Figure 7, below, shows that the data acts to develop an extra layer to the earlier diagram namely the three methods of data collection. As with the notion that situation, institution and disposition are interrelated, and do not acted discretely as contributors to enablers/disablers to participation, so it has been shown in this chapter that data captured from the questionnaire, focus group and M.I.S will not act discretely to establish a sub-layer to situation, institution and disposition, rather interact with each other to do so.

A REVISED DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION SHOWING HOW THE DATA INTERACTS WITH ENABLERS AND/OR DISABLERS TO PARTICIPATION IN FURTHER EDUCATION

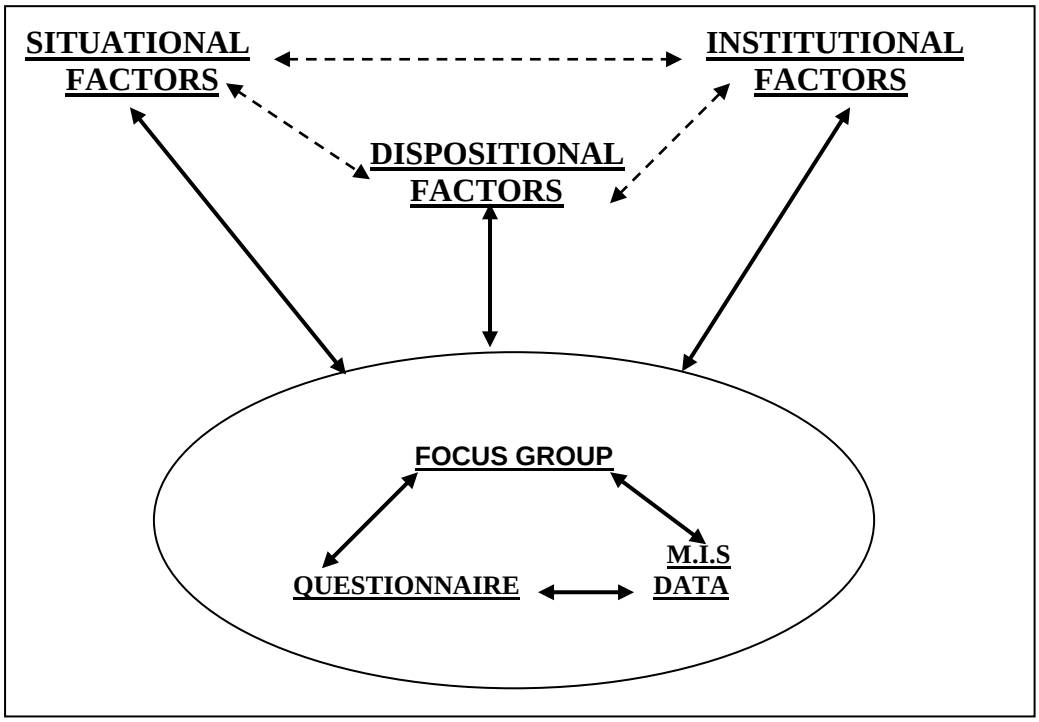


FIGURE 7

CHAPTER 5

QUESTIONNAIRE - ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS.

It is useful at this stage to justify the use of Descriptive Statistics and Inferential Statistics in analysing questionnaire data. Descriptive statistics help to describe features of data by making them easily accessible through graphs, charts, tables and summaries. Counts and percentages are an excellent way of exploring themes and/or phenomena and are easily converted into recognisable and quickly interpretable diagrams, charts and tables. In essence they enable the researcher to organise, summarise and describe observations (Ary et al. 2009: page 101). The aim is to analyse the data so as to avoid unnecessary overcomplication at the same time as putting forward a reasoned case for a particular interpretation of data. Inferential statistics also have a valuable role and will be used when attempting to ascertain conclusions that are beyond the reach of descriptive analysis - defined by Ary et al. (2009) as follows:

"[Inferential statistics] help determine how reliably researchers can infer that phenomena observed in a limited group – a sample – are likely to occur in the unobserved larger population…in other words, how accurately you can employ inductive reasoning to infer that what you observe in the part will be observed in the whole" (Page 101).

The initial hurdle to analysing the results of the questionnaire was how to collate the results. In chapter 4, page 76, it was established that the questionnaire was handed out to two cohorts of students in academic years 2006 and 2007 being administered over a 2-week period towards the end of each academic year. The success rate in terms of completed questionnaires was 83.3% (being 125 respondents out of a possible 150 over the 2-year period).

Of the 25 students who did not respond, 9 questionnaires were incomplete so could not be used. The remaining 16 possible respondents could not be contacted due to one or both of the following reasons:

- Non attendance during the last 2 weeks of the academic year
- They were not able to be contacted, e.g. wrong phone number on the system; changed mobile number; change of address.

As can be seen from Appendix 3 (page 224-225), the collated table shows total responses to each of the questions from the 125 respondents, and more importantly shows the total percentages for each of the questions that aids in giving a quick overview of responses to each question as well as helping the reader to see links between items. In the next section observations derived from descriptive statistics will be reported.

Extrinsic Versus Intrinsic Factors Leading to Respondents Returning to Education

Attention is now turned to the responses from question 9 in the questionnaire which relate directly to reasons for returning to education (see overleaf).

A simple first analytical run through the responses could be to tabulate the results according to whether the respondents have indicated intrinsic or extrinsic value in re-engaging in education. This categorisation is based upon whether the factor in question can fairly be initially interpreted as more extrinsic/macro/economic or intrinsic/micro/personal in nature, as discussed in chapter 3. The aim is that analysis should offer a rational and consistent case for interpretation of the data.

9.	**What are your main reasons for returning to education?**				
	(Please circle the appropriate responses)				
a)	*To increase promotion prospects*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
b)	*To gain intellectual stimulation*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
c)	*To meet people*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
d)	*To update your knowledge*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
e)	*To increase your skills at work*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
f)	*To obtain a first degree*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
g)	*A change of income*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
h)	*A change of career*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
i)	*OTHER*				
	Please state up to 3 reasons and rate them				
.		*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
.		*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
.		*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*

The steps taken to maximise the validity and reliability of the qualitative data as established in the methodology section of this thesis (pages 72-73 and page 80) remain the cornerstone of this part of the data collection process, however, it has to be acknowledged that this is not the only interpretation of the data, rather a reasoned one as qualitative inferences made via data are open to subjectivity. For example, if we look at reason a) 'To increase promotion prospects', it would be fair to suggest that this is initially a more extrinsic reason for re-entry, even though perceived subsequent effects such as possible increased earnings leading to a better quality/standard of life, and a possible increased feeling of well-being, which are more intrinsic in nature, may well result. Questions 9a-9h are based upon this simple categorisation with a view to question 9i providing other responses that were not anticipated in questions 9a-9h. The percentage breakdown in Table 3 overleaf, using collated figures in Appendix 3 (pages 224-225), gives a start-point in terms of insight into the

emerging complexities of why students re-engage with education. [It is acknowledged that reporting frequencies and cross-tabulating for interpretations could be a way of presenting the data, however, the aim here is to make the interpretations more explicit in terms of extrinsic/intrinsic categorisations in order to establish the difficulty and possibility of high levels of subjectivity in attempting to categorise factors purely one-dimensionally].

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivators and their ratings, by all respondents

	EXTRINSIC FACTORS					INTRINSIC FACTORS		
RATING ON ATTITUDINAL SCALE	**Increase promotion prospects (Q 9a)**	**To increase skills at work (Q 9e)**	**To obtain a first degree (Q 9f)**	**A change of income (Q 9g)**	**A change of career (Q 9h)**	**To gain intellectual stimulation (Q 9b)**	**To meet people (Q 9c)**	**To update knowledge (Q 9d)**
Irrelevant	**33.6%**	**16.8%**	**15.2%**	**22.4%**	**11.2%**	**7.2%**	**24.0%**	**4.8%**
A factor	**15.2%**	**21.6%**	**6.4%**	**11.2%**	**13.6%**	**21.6%**	**41.6%**	**18.4%**
Important	**22.4%**	**30.4%**	**24.0%**	**24.8%**	**12.0%**	**40.8%**	**24.8%**	**38.4%**
Very Important	**28.8%**	**31.2%**	**54.4%**	**41.6%**	**63.2%**	**30.4%**	**9.6%**	**38.4%**

TABLE 3

The results are very interesting in the picture they portray if we look at the modal percentage responses in each case (highlighted). In terms of extrinsic factors, there is only one case which the modal percentage of respondents stated was 'Irrelevant' – that of the need to increase promotion prospects (33.6%). For all other extrinsic factors, the *same respondents* rated these factors important or very important. This would suggest that change of career,

change of income, increasing skills at work and obtaining a degree are all powerful drivers for re-entry to education. But what of the learner who wishes to experience education for intrinsic reasons? Surely it would be a narrow education system that merely catered for the needs of those who wish to participate for only one outcome - employment. From Table 3 above, it is interesting to note the proportion of participants (71.2%) who cited intellectual stimulation and learning for its own merits as powerful factors for re-entry to education, by judging it to be either important or very important. The results go further to suggest that a total proportion of 76% of the participants re-entered education due to the element of socialising and meeting new people. Therefore, it can be surmised that the decision to re-enter into education is not purely reward driven and that there are other subtler yet important factors that drive that decision.

In order to further understand these underlying reasons, attention will now be turned to the responses that were given for the semi-open question 9i, which allowed the respondent to put forward factors that were not mentioned in questions 9a-9h, but which they felt were a cause of their re-entry to education – see Table 4 overleaf. The factors in this table were taken from exact wording used by respondents so as to give a comprehensive though not exhaustive table of 'other' factors, as it is acknowledged that other respondents who did not form part of this research may have suggested different factors. These factors have then been categorised in accordance with the same criteria as established for Table 3, i.e. based upon whether the factor in question can fairly be initially interpreted as more extrinsic/macro/economic or intrinsic/micro/personal in nature.

On a few occasions, categorisation was quite difficult due to high levels of subjectivity, for example, 'To fulfil my dreams'. In cases such as these it was decided to

categorise factors as both extrinsic and intrinsic, as without asking the respondent the context within which s/he made the comment, it would be almost impossible to surmise.

Extrinsic and intrinsic responses given to the semi-open question (9i) in the questionnaire.

FACTOR(S) GIVEN IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION 9i	Extrinsic	Intrinsic
To fulfil my dreams	✔	✔
To become a teacher	✔	
To learn more		✔
Wanted to better myself	✔	✔
Wanted a better way of life for myself and my children	✔	✔
Needed a new direction in life	✔	✔
My child is older. It's my turn now		✔
Boost self-esteem		✔
Have something to work towards		✔
For fun		✔
To challenge myself	✔	✔
Self-Actualisation	✔	✔
To gain an education that school never provided me with	✔	✔
To avoid returning to a career I didn't enjoy	✔	
Flexible job prospects in new career (to suit family needs)	✔	✔
To get out of the poverty trap	✔	✔
Personal Achievement. Only got E's at school		✔
Because I like to learn and student life attracts me		✔
To enhance my chances of accessing a university course	✔	✔
To show my children the right way	✔	
To earn a better income	✔	
To allow me to emigrate	✔	✔
My children are now in school or have childcare	✔	✔
RESPONSE (COUNT)	16	19
PERCENTAGE RESPONSES	45.7%	54.3%

TABLE 4

It is interesting to note that through this type of simplistic approach to categorisations, the respondents provide a higher percentage of intrinsic drivers (54.3%) for re-entering education than extrinsic (45.7%). This concurs with the inference that although the main reasons for returning to education may be employment based as seen in Table 3, intrinsic motivators are also significantly important factors and furthermore that factors affecting the decision to participate in education are not simply single-faceted, rather they are multi-faceted.

It is useful at this stage to take this analysis one step further by cross-referencing the factors respondents gave in Table 4 in response to question 9i, with those that they cited in questions 9a-9h as being either important or very important. Analysis of statistics in Table 5, overleaf, shows that in virtually all cases there is another/secondary tier of needs which the participants cite to be important and can therefore be seen to be an interdependent tier, in order to achieve the primary aim. For example, if we look at the response 'To become a teacher', the respondent obviously has a primary extrinsic reason for re-entering education. However, this same respondent also rates intellectual stimulation, updating knowledge and meeting people as being important or very important. Therefore, it can be interpreted that prospective students approach re-entry to education with a variety of needs, and require that the institution cater for these needs in such a way as to complement their primary aim rather than act only to satisfy the primary aim. Furthermore, these needs are multi-layered based upon the life-position that the prospective returnee finds him/herself to be in, which needs to be acknowledged and built into the college experience if students are to be attracted into Further Education.

Table showing interdependency of intrinsic and extrinsic needs.

(From the response given to Question 9 on the questionnaire).

			EXTRINSIC FACTORS					INTRINSIC FACTORS		
FACTOR(S) GIVEN IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION 9i	**Extrinsic**	**Intrinsic**	**To increase promotion prospects**	**To increase skills at work**	**To obtain a first degree**	**A change of income**	**A change of career**	**To gain intellectual stimulation**	**To meet people**	**To update knowledge**
To fulfil my dreams	✔	✔		✔	✔			✔	✔	✔
To become a teacher	✔				✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
To learn more		✔			✔			✔	✔	✔
Wanted to better myself	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔			✔	✔
Wanted a better way of life for myself and my children	✔	✔			✔	✔	✔	✔		✔
Needed a new direction	✔	✔			✔		✔	✔		✔
My child is older. It's my turn now		✔			✔	✔	✔	✔		✔
Boost self-esteem		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔		✔
Have something to work towards		✔			✔		✔	✔		✔
For fun		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔		✔
To challenge myself	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Self-Actualisation	✔	✔			✔		✔		✔	✔
To gain an education that school never provided me with	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔			✔
To avoid returning to a career I didn't enjoy	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔
Flexible job prospects in new career (to suit family needs)	✔	✔	✔		✔			✔		✔
To get out of the poverty trap	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔		✔
Personal Achievement. Only got E's at school		✔			✔			✔		✔
Because I like to learn student life attracts me		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔		✔
To enhance my chances of accessing a university	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔		✔
To show my children the right way	✔				✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
To earn a better income	✔				✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
To allow me to emigrate	✔	✔			✔		✔			
My children are now in school or have childcare	✔	✔		✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
RESPONSE (COUNT)	**16**	**19**	**9**	**9**	**21**	**14**	**16**	**19**	**9**	**22**
PERCENTAGE RESPONSES	**45.7%**	**54.3%**	**18.0%**	**18.0%**	**42.0%**	**28.0%**	**32.0%**	**38.0%**	**18.0%**	**44.0%**

TABLE 5

The intrinsic/extrinsic analyses from questionnaire responses can only go this far at this point due to the danger of further analysis being based on overly subjective categorisations and criteria. The need arises to contextualise responses. In Chapter 6, this is achieved by talking to respondents and analysing response from the spoken word where the results of the focus group discussion are examined.

Issues of Gender

It can be clearly seen from appendix 3 (pages 224-225), that the vast majority of the participants who enter onto the Access to Higher Education Programme at this college (88.8%) are female. This statistic requires further analysis.

The statistics in Table 6 overleaf show a 10-year average profile of all enrolments on the Access to Higher Education programme at this college. It is seen that the ratio of female to male participants is 86.52 : 13.48 which is approximately 13 : 2. National Statistics, adapted from 'Key Statistics' published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2011), are gathered as gender explicit information in Table 7 overleaf. The trends suggest that more females than males attend Access to Higher Education programmes nationwide although the national ratio is approximately 3 : 1 compared with 13 : 2 for this college. Interestingly, in relation to participation in Further Education as a whole, the Office for National Statistics summaries (2006) explains that:

"In 2004/05 more women than men in the U.K. were awarded National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ)…at all levels. This was most noticeable at level 3 where nearly two thirds of NVQs/SVQs awarded were to women." (Page 4).

Profile Table -Gender- constructed using college M.I.S. system.

ACADEMIC YEAR	Enrolments (Net - Year End)	MALE (Count)	MALE (%)	FEMALE (Count)	FEMALE (%)
1999 - 2000	*46*	*4*	*8.70%*	*42*	*91.30%*
2000 - 2001	*42*	*4*	*9.52%*	*38*	*90.48%*
2001 - 2002	*47*	*6*	*12.77%*	*41*	*87.23%*
2002 - 2003	*54*	*4*	*7.41%*	*50*	*92.59%*
2003 - 2004	*57*	*13*	*22.81%*	*44*	*77.19%*
2004 - 2005	*66*	*13*	*19.70%*	*53*	*80.30%*
2005 - 2006	*90*	*13*	*14.44%*	*77*	*85.56%*
2006 - 2007	*60*	*6*	*10.00%*	*54*	*90.00%*
2007 - 2008	*47*	*6*	*12.77%*	*41*	*87.23%*
2008 - 2009	*36*	*6*	*16.67%*	*30*	*83.33%*
10 -Year Averages	**54.5**	**7.5**	**13.48%**	**47**	**86.52%**

TABLE 6

National Participation by Gender on

Access to Higher Education Programmes (1999/2000 to 2008/9)

	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Female (%)	*72%*	*73%*	*74%*	*73%*	*75%*	*76%*	*76%*	*75%*	*73%*	*75%*
Male (%)	*28%*	*27%*	*26%*	*27%*	*25%*	*24%*	*24%*	*25%*	*27%*	*25%*
Percentage difference (In favour of Females)	**44%**	**46%**	**48%**	**46%**	**50%**	**52%**	**52%**	**50%**	**46%**	**50%**

SOURCE: Adapted from the annual 'Key Statistics' information available at website URL: http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/partners/statistics/

TABLE 7

So, the discrepancy in gender may in fact occur due to course provision arising from the relationship between the college and the workplace, i.e. there may not only be a discrepancy between the genders at the level of participation, rather a discrepancy at the level of course provision within colleges of Further Education.

The technical supplement to the white paper for Further Education (2006) noted that:

"In contrast to the gender split seen in FE, 57% of people in work-based learning were male, and 43% female" (Page 15).

So, the relationship that males have with colleges of Further Education may be from the position of being within the workplace and needing not so much to qualify in order to take a first job, rather to update existing skills whilst remaining in employment. They may be part of a workforce which is being advised to update skills by management, realising that a specific qualification could lead to operating more effectively within a current position or lead to improved promotion prospects. Information in Table 8 overleaf, is compiled to show economic activity - defined as a person who was working or looking for work in the week before the census - of prospective participants by gender taken from the last census date. This data points to the fact that the vast majority of males, 74.25%, who are economically active are in full-time work within the college catchment area in comparison to the female's percentage of 49.68%. Similarly, if we explore the gender comparison in part-time employment, we see female percentages at 37.20% and the males at 3.61%, and further analysis of those who are in full-time employment or are self-employed, shows percentages of males to be at 89.49% and females at 54.84%. In all three cases there are significant discrepancies between gender participation within the workplace.

TABLE TO SHOW ECONOMIC ACTIVITY – Gender Comparisons
(National and Regional Statistics at last census date)
Area: [The college catchment area] (Local Authority)
Period : April 2001

	[The college catchment area]		West Midlands		England	
	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%
All Males aged 16-74	33404	100.00%	1870363	100.00%	17489977	100.00%
All Females aged 16-74	33734	100.00%	1910421	100.00%	18042114	100.00%
Males aged 16-74 : Economically active	25487	76.30%	1373581	73.44%	12969059	74.15%
Females aged 16-74 : Economically active	20795	61.64%	1118232	58.53%	10787648	59.79%
Males aged 16-74 : Economically active: Employees Part -time	920	3.61%	58755	4.28%	588867	4.54%
Females aged 16-74: Economically active: Employees Part -time	7735	37.20%	393032	35.15%	3607174	33.44%
Males aged 16-74: Economically active: Employees Full-time	18924	74.25%	972080	70.77%	9055504	69.82%
Females aged 16-74: Economically active: Employees Full-time	10330	49.68%	551768	49.34%	5443737	50.46%
Males aged 16-74: Economically active: Self-employed	3884	15.24%	208495	15.18%	2159232	16.65%
Females aged 16-74: Economically active: Self-employed	1074	5.16%	71136	6.36%	795756	7.38%
Males aged 16-74: Economically active: Unemployed	1220	4.79%	91847	6.69%	746976	5.76%
Females aged 16-74: Economically active: Unemployed	886	4.26%	50935	4.55%	441879	4.10%
Males aged 16-74: Economically active: Full-time student	539	2.11%	42404	3.09%	418480	3.23%
Females aged 16-74: Economically active: Full-time student	770	3.70%	51361	4.59%	499102	4.63%

Original URL's: (Last accessed 23/06/2012)
http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=7&b=6269137&c=WS11+1UE&d=14&e=15&g=484650&i=1001x1003x1004&m=0&r=0&s=1340527011096&enc=1&dsFamilyId=71

http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=7&b=6269137&c=WS11+1UE&d=14&e=15&g=484650&i=1001x1003x1004&m=0&r=0&s=1340527011096&enc=1&dsFamilyId=23

TABLE 8

If these percentages are converted to actual counts of people then the relationship of the college with gender could be seen to contribute to some of the causalities related to gender

issues, although it would need further investigation via contextualised participant utterances for purposes of validity. For example, it could be surmised that the Access to Higher Education Programme operates on the premise of allowing children to be dropped off at school and picked up at the end of the day.

Incentives such as this may appeal to the female population who see greater opportunity to access these types of courses whilst bringing up young children, and working part-time. Collins et al. (2006) go further to link the gender imbalance in favour of females with a necessity to upskill in order to obtain employment, when they report on the research of Armstrong (1997) as follows:

"Armstrong utilises a "discouraged worker" explanation. In the face of difficulties in securing employment, it is argued that these students feel that they need "extra" qualifications in order to compete effectively in the labour market" (Pages 21-23).

The percentages in Table 8 which point to a higher proportion of males than females in full-time employment may well be due to the fact that females find it more difficult to secure employment, however it is acknowledged that there is a danger of over-simplifying underpinning dynamics if consideration is only given to a one-dimensional perspective.

Research related to how males perceive the value of post-compulsory education also needs to be addressed at this point. Research into factors that influenced participation within Further Education colleges by Wiseman et al (2004) found with regards to gender differences that common influences that came to bear were:

"[Those of] a higher incidence of males in full-time work, [and] males being more likely to occupy higher roles in the workplace" (Page 41)

If males are in a position where they already occupy higher roles in the workplace, and if, as the statistics state in Table 8, there is a higher incidence of male employment than females,

then from a purely extrinsic monetary based perspective it becomes clearer as to why males would be less likely to engage with Further Education; and more importantly, why females would see participation as an opportunity. Currently, the Higher Education Academy (2011) state that:

"Evidence suggests that a university [and/or further education] course may be perceived to represent a greater risk, and a disruption to a solid, post-school work trajectory, for men than for women (Archer at al. 2001; Cleary 2007). Research also suggests that such considerations are more alive for working class than middle class boys, because the latter have historically perceived university as a natural step on their pathway to professional level work whereas the former have not (Archer et al. 2001; Aimhigher Midlands 2007)" (Page 7).

Although it is clear to see that there are issues of gender imbalance and participation, it would be far too simplistic to state that these imbalances operate discretely from each other. As discussed earlier when analysing intrinsic versus extrinsic reasons for participation, prospective students need to consider many interrelated issues before they take the step of making a lifestyle change which would include education within it. As an example, if we look at the gender issues mentioned above, it might be true that there are a large number of female students who have entered onto certain courses within colleges, but what are the factors that have allowed them to do so now, when they did not do so previously? How does the mother of young children who may well be working part-time, find the time to study on the Access to Higher Education Programme? One avenue that can be explored to help answer this question is the institution itself. Colleges have become very good at marketing courses to portions of the population that were excluded in the past. In order to explore this further, responses given to question 10 in the questionnaire will be analysed, as they focus specifically on Institutional factors that may influence participation via the 'college experience'.

Institutional Issues

Table 9 below, shows response totals for question 10 which have been used to establish the following emergent trends:

Table to show questionnaire response totals to Institutional Factors – Question 10

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
INSTITUTIONAL FACTOR	Do students see the curriculum as having personal relevance?	*1.60%*	*2.40%*	*17.60%*	*55.20%*	*23.20%*
	Do students receive a high quality of education?	*0.00%*	*6.40%*	*9.60%*	*51.20%*	*32.80%*
	Are students able to fit the course around their daily lives?	*0.00%*	*3.20%*	*13.60%*	*53.60%*	*29.60%*
	Are students able to access adequate crèche facilities?	*10.64%*	*2.13%*	*67.02%*	*10.64%*	*9.57%*
	Do students feel that publicity/advertising of courses are of an adequate standard?	*2.40%*	*31.20%*	*51.20%*	*15.20%*	*0.00%*
	Do students have a high quality of guidance:					
	At Entry?	*0.00%*	*0.80%*	*27.20%*	*55.20%*	*16.80%*
	During the course?	*0.00%*	*6.40%*	*13.60%*	*55.20%*	*24.80%*
	At Exit?	*0.00%*	*3.20%*	*36.00%*	*48.00%*	*12.80%*

TABLE 9

There was a small percentage (4%) of all students who felt that the college did not provide relevant courses. However, if we consider the fact that the student sample is taken from the Access to Higher Education Programme, the expectation of irrelevance of course would be expected to be low due to the fact that the majority of these students (78.4% - see response to question 9f in Appendix 3), have re-entered education specifically for the purpose of moving on to university to obtain a first degree.

A high proportion of students (84%) also felt that the quality of teaching and therefore by inference the subject specialism of lecturers, was of a high standard. The proportion of students who claimed that the course could be better fitted into their daily lives was quite small (3.2%), although it does point to a clear example of the importance of support and guidance structures to fine tune course provision. The evidence also points to peripheral provision such as crèche facilities causing significant problems. Of the 94 students who responded to question 10e due to the fact that it was relevant to them, the proportions that claimed to be dissatisfied with this service amount to 12.77%. However, on closer inspection we see that there are 63 out of the 94 respondents (67.02%), who give a neutral response to this question. The neutral responses here skewed the data so a truer picture could only be arrived at once they were not counted. The non-inclusion of neutrals shows the percentage of students who were dissatisfied as 38.7% (12 out of 31) which points to a clearer account of these figures with approximately two in every five users/prospective users of the crèche facilities being dissatisfied, which is an unacceptable statistic.

One of the greatest failings that were reported by the respondents was that of publicity. 84.8% of students responded with neutral or unsatisfied with this aspect of course provision. This figure suggests that there is value in using targeted publicity to ensure that the local populace are made aware of courses offered by colleges.

Guidance at entry, during the course and at exit, all show high levels of neutrality, with between 60%-70% recording high or very high satisfaction. Converting ‘neutrals’ to ‘satisfied’ would impact positively on widening participation as all students should feel that they are given targeted and relevant guidance, not only at the beginning of a course, but throughout their journey with that college. One third of respondents felt that they did not have

adequate access to effective guidance procedures. Hall (2001) encapsulates the findings of Martinez and Munday through recognition that:

"These findings would tend to show the importance of pre-course guidance, continuing advice and support to enable students to integrate, and good quality teaching" [Martinez and Munday note however, that reasons for drop out are] *"complex, multiple and inter-related. The students tend to weigh the cost of college attendance against the benefits and withdraw when the costs outweigh the benefits"* (Page 18).

Issues of Ethnicity

The findings by the Office for National Statistics (2001) regarding the catchment area for this specific college are shown in Table 10 below - adapted from the local authority profiles & population pyramids.

Table to show population of the college catchment area, grouped and ranked by ethnicity.

Population (White)			
Percentage at census 2001			
West Midlands	Value	Percentage	Regional Ranking
[College catchment area]	90872	98.6	10
Population (Ethnic minority)			
Percentage change in population from 1991-2001			
West Midlands	Value	Percentage	Regional Ranking
[College catchment area]	2800	3.1	16

Source: Office for National Statistics. http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/census-2001-local-authority-profiles/local-authority-profiles/west-midlands.pdf, pp.37-41. (Last accessed 30/01/2013).

TABLE 10

The table shows that at the census date of 2001 the ranking of the white indigenous population of this area was 10 - meaning that as a percentage, the college catchment area was the 10th highest ranked in terms of proportions of white indigenous population versus ethnic minorities within the West Midlands. However, more telling is the fact that there seems to be a drift towards an influx of ethnic minorities into this region. The percentage change of ethnic minorities moving into this area is from 1.4% to 3.1% from 1991 to 2001. Even though this is a fairly small percentage, it is still one that has more than doubled and should be seen as significant.

The make-up of students on the Access to Higher Education programme is 98.41% white and only 1.59% non-white (see appendix 3). Although the 'white' group can be further broken down into white indigenous and white other, the evidence points to a proportional mismatch in terms of ethnicity in the student population of the college against an increasing population of ethnic minorities within the college catchment area. Institutions need to ensure that they cater for the specific and culturally diverse needs of ethnic minorities and thus, ensure that they do not disadvantaging any particular social sector in relation to access to education and life chances.

Issues of Age

Figure 8, overleaf, shows that the majority of students are aged between 19-39 years (85%) with the ceiling at 60 years. At the lower end of the 19-39 year age bracket, students may naturally transfer onto college courses as a result of not having been out of the educational establishment for too long. As we move towards the upper end of this age bracket prospective college participants will either be in the process of bringing up young families or will have done so to the stage where the children are in the structured environment of school.

For this age range the government incentives such as adult learning grants and tax credits when combined with institutional incentives such as crèche facilities and convenient timetabling of programmes around the rearing of young families may all impact to increase participation.

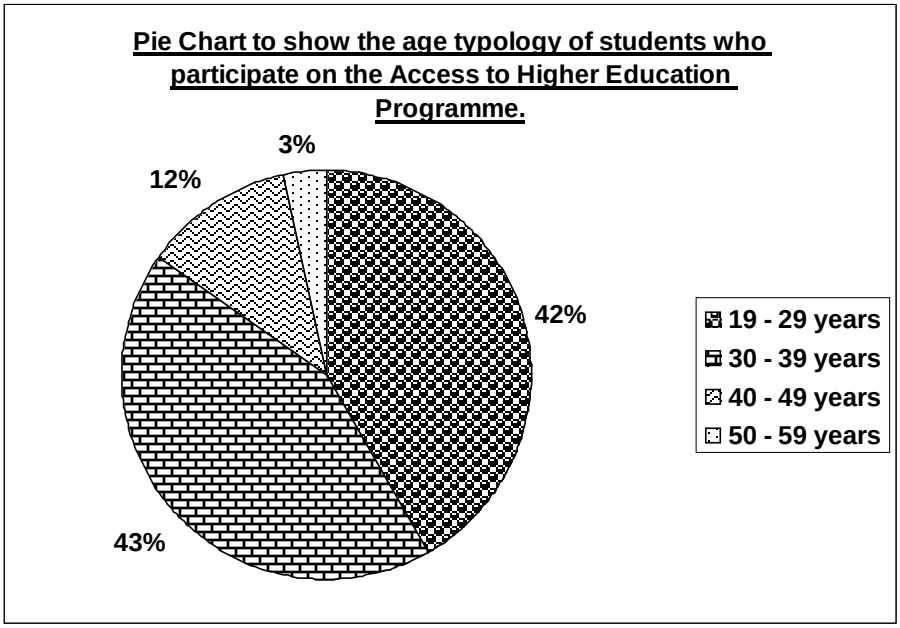


FIGURE 8

However, as this data shows considerable diversity in the ages of participants, it is just as important that institutions cater for the needs of students who make up smaller percentage populations as for those in the majority brackets in order to become wholly inclusive.

Issues of Time Taken Away from Education.

Time taken away from education often leads to the problem that prospective student's fall out of the habit of study. The issue of learning *how* to learn again comes to the fore. Figure 9 overleaf, gives an indication of the number of years students on this course have been out of education, and therefore the diversity of levels that need to be catered for:

Although the largest proportions of students fall into the 1-5 year category (36%) there is subsequently little difference in the next three categories which constitute a significant proportion - with 55% having been away for a 6-20 year interval. This implies that it is more likely that a student who is on this programme will have been out of education for 6-20 years than for 1-5 years.

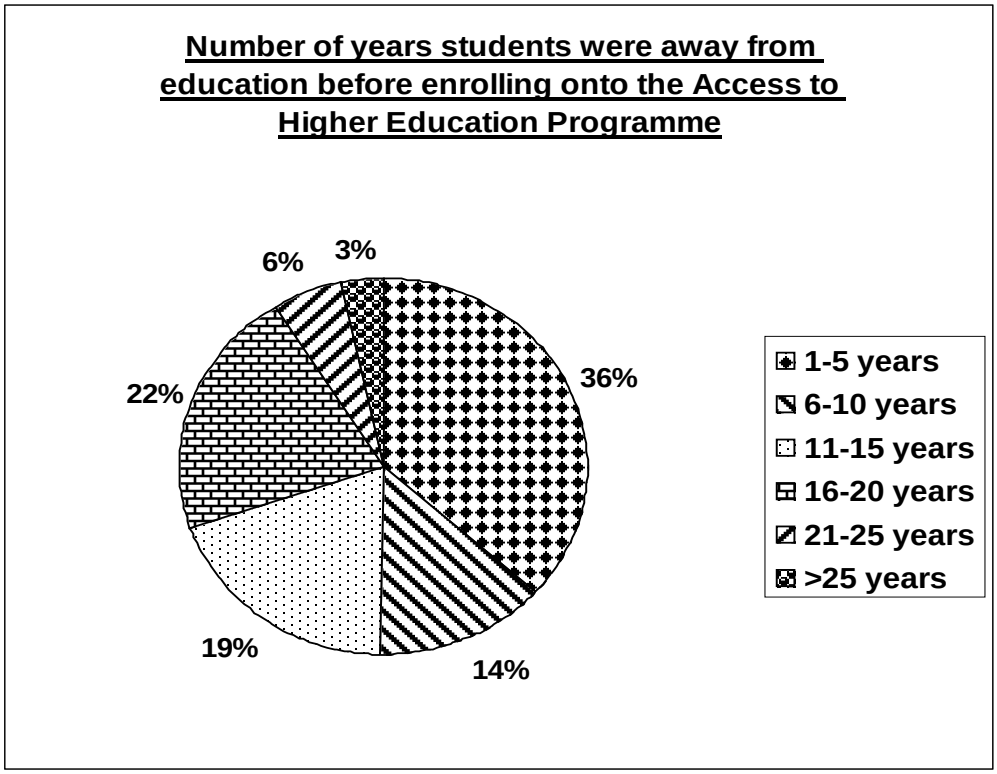


FIGURE 9

Issues of induction, guidance and counselling, tutorials, curriculum planning and content, class sizes and relevance all come to the fore here when attempting to ensure that all students are catered for responsibly and effectively to ensure a successful outcome to their educational experience.

Throughout the analysis of the questionnaire results I have been keenly aware that responses should not be taken at face value. Whilst the questionnaire may be a good starting

point and may require the students to think of the most important factors in their decision to participate in education, it is also one-dimensional. There is inevitably, much that the students were unable to communicate due to the closed questions that were used. This became very evident on further analysis of the semi-open questions 8e and 9i, where respondents gave a substantial variety of 'other' reasons for staying away from and retuning to education. In Table 11 overleaf, the responses given in question 8e have been categorised against the three barriers of Situation, Institution and Disposition as reported by McGivney (see Literature Review, Chapter 3, Pages 60-61). The possibility arises for a further emergent barrier of 'opportunity'. For example, if we look at the factor 'cost was too high', although it can primarily be seen to be a situational issue, it also diminishes opportunity. Similarly, the factor 'courses were not relevant' can be seen to diminish opportunity as the institution should offer greater provision to attract more students and more effectively open up the college to the catchment area. In this way, it can be seen that whilst the vast majority of barriers faced by the participants are either situational or dispositional, nearly one third of the responses given (31.43%) can be attributed to lack of opportunity to a certain degree. The descriptive statistics reported so far in relation to the semi-open responses in question 8e and acknowledged for question 9i are, however, insufficient alone to answer the main research questions. The aim is to ascertain specific causalities that in turn can be used to establish a hierarchy of emergent themes, which when further discussed verbally through the focus group allow the underlying perspectives of participants to emerge more clearly and fully.

TABLE TO SHOW IMPACT OF THE THEME OF 'OPPORTUNITY' ON RESPONSES TO QUESTION 8e

FACTORS GIVEN IN QUESTION 8e	Situational	Dispositional	Institutional	Opportunity
Worry I would be at the bottom of the class		✓		
Cost was too high	✓			✓
Worry I had forgotten all I had learned at school		✓		
Scared of going back to education		✓		
Courses were not relevant			✓	✓
Life ran away. 30 before I knew it'.	✓			✓
Uncertainty of direction in life		✓		✓
Already have a well paid job	✓			
Very busy at work	✓			✓
Already educated to the level I needed		✓		
School left me feeling very unconfident with education		✓		
Didn't know about the Access to Higher Education Programme			✓	
Bad Health	✓			✓
College did not seem accessible			✓	✓
Anxious. Fear of the unknown		✓		
Not sure if I could succeed		✓		
Happy as a full time mum	✓			
Didn't feel I could cope		✓		
My children are now at school	✓			✓
Didn't feel clever enough		✓		
Primary carer for disabled relative	✓			✓
Work commitments	✓			✓
Problems with travel from remote village	✓			✓
Unnecessary		✓		
Already Employed	✓			
RESPONSE (COUNT)	**10**	**11**	**3**	**11**
PERCENTAGE RESPONSES	**28.57%**	**31.43%**	**8.57%**	**31.43%**

TABLE 11

In conclusion, the salient points that have emerged from the analysis of the questionnaire responses are:

- During the decision-making process, the evidence points to a greater emphasis on intrinsic reasons for participation than extrinsic;
- The evidence suggests that gender imbalance in favour of females on Access to Higher Education programmes may be related to course provision and relevance, i.e. males may approach participation from the position of being within the workplace and needing not so much to qualify in order to take a first job, rather to update existing skills whereas females may find it more difficult to secure employment in the first place;
- The evidence points to peripheral provision such as crèche facilities being the cause of significant problems when considering participation;
- Participation rates are affected by effectiveness of publicity. It is imperative that targeted publicity be available to ensure that the local populace are made aware of courses offered by colleges;
- Guidance at entry, during the course and at exit, are central to ensuring participation;
- It is important to address the issue of provision for ethnic minorities within Access to Higher Education programmes so as to avoid a proportional mismatch against populations within college catchment areas;
- The age diversity of participants necessitates that institutions cater just as effectively for the needs of students who make up smaller percentage populations within a college, as for those in the majority age brackets in order to become wholly inclusive;
- Time taken away from education often leads to the problem that prospective student's fall out of the habit of study. Guidance and support structures need to be put into

place to contend with the issue of ‘learning *how* to learn’ once a student has been away from education for a substantial proportion of time.

It is acknowledged that there is a danger of over-simplification at this point if consideration is only given to a one-dimensional perspective. The next stage then, is to analyse the findings from the questionnaire in triangulation with the data from the focus group discussion to gain a fuller picture.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS OF THE FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT.

The aim of the focus group as outlined in the introductory chapter is to complement quantitative/closed question data that arose from the implementation of the questionnaire and analysis of the subsequent results, with the views of a sample of the participants so as to give a fuller interpretation of phenomena that existed. However, as soon as analysis of the spoken word is introduced into the research it throws up some fundamental concerns that need to be addressed, primarily, that a framework is needed for the analytical setting of the focus group. How can the transcribed words be analysed in such a way as to maintain both the integrity of the research and the context within which the words were spoken? A useful foundational start-point would be to build upon the definitions of barriers and enablers that were established in Chapter 3, pages 60-61. The problem is *'how'?* Sub-layers of coding are necessary to remove the oversimplification of the initial codes as alluded to by McGivney in chapter 3. Again, *how can this be achieved as objectively as possible?* Issues surrounding coding and interpretational process need to be addressed in order to allow for the generation of emergent themes. Each of these areas will be discussed further.

Issues of Coding

If the previously established definitions regarding situation, disposition and institution are applied to the utterances of the focus group participants, a table can be compiled to show classifications undertaken by 2 raters – Rater 1 being myself and rater 2 being a colleague who teaches on the Access to Higher Education Programme - See Appendix 4 (pages 226-228). Due to the fact that the initial codings have already been set up by McGivney as

situation, disposition and institution, the issue of researcher acting as a rater is negated as the exercise at this point is purely one of allocation to utterances. Although there is occasional disparity amongst barrier allocation, on the whole it is clear to see that barriers are classifiable by these definitions and resultantly, they can be used as initial coding. Ryan and Bernard (2000) observe that:

"Williams et al (1990) and Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that researchers start with some general themes derived from reading the literature and add more themes and subthemes as they go" (Page 781).

Codings of this type are invaluable to produce an initial fix on the data so as to generate direction within the context of the analysis as without this focus the data feels directionless – it has no story to tell. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that:

"*When we say that we are coding, we mean that we are coding on the basis of concepts and how they vary according to their properties and dimensions…we are opening up our minds to the range of possibilities, which in turn might apply to, and become evident, when we sample other cases*" (Page 88).

Although it is acknowledged that codings other than McGivney's could have been used dependent on the viewpoint of the researcher, it was felt that the effectiveness of emergent themes and the integrity of the research would have been compromised if this path were taken as the purpose of the research is to explore the 'oversimplification' of situation, disposition and institution as alluded to by McGivney. Miles and Huberman (1994) observe that:

"*Coding is analysis. To review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesised, and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of*

analysis. This part of analysis involves how you differentiate and combine the data you have retrieved and the reflections you make about this information" (Page 56).

However, if the codings that are used and the subsequent interpretations that are made due to these codes are done so by the researcher, how can s/he guarantee that issues surrounding validity, generalisability and ethical considerations have been adequately catered for? How can the researcher be sure that analysis is undertaken rationally and that utterances are coded according to the context within which they were spoken, rather than those that fit the codings from the researcher's viewpoint?

Method of Interpretation

The process of analysis for the data from the focus group can now begin. As established in the Methodology chapter (pages 89-90), it is important to visit the data through more than one complete run/phase, each time asking more involved questions so as to ascertain and apply emergent themes. This will be achieved through a three-phased approach established in the Methodology chapter as follows:

Phase 1

- Define and Establish codes
- Two raters apply one [Initial] code to appropriate transcribed utterances
- Application of Inter-Rater Reliability – Cohen's Kappa Statistic
- Reflection on 'goodness of fit' via the Cohen's Kappa Statistic

Phase 2

- Two raters apply initial and subsequent coding to utterances.
- Application of Inter-Rater Reliability – Cohen's Kappa Statistic
- Reflection on 'goodness of fit' via the Cohen's Kappa Statistic

Phase 3

- Identify, Define and Establish emergent themes
- Application of themes to utterances
- Reflection on 'goodness of fit'

I will now look at each phase in detail and discuss pertinent issues accordingly.

Phase 1

- Define and Establish codes
- Two raters apply one [Initial] code to appropriate transcribed utterances (See Appendix 4, pages 226-228)
- Application of Inter-Rater Reliability – Kappa - Statistic
- Reflection on 'goodness of fit'

The main aim of this section is to reflect upon application of situational, institutional and dispositional barriers as initial coding and to establish whether these codings would give significant results – in the statistical sense – that could be used for purposes of validity and generalisability. I have used the Kappa statistic for inter-rater reliability to explore if the application of codes to utterances is a credible rather than a random process.

This exercise consisted of coding utterances that I interpreted to be definite Institutional, situational and dispositional barriers – see column labelled 'Rater 1 (Me)' in Appendix 4 (pages 226-228). A colleague who had been given the aforementioned definitions of these barriers but was not privy to my codings then coded these same utterances. The second rater was then asked to apply these codings to the utterances.

KEY **S :** ***Situational Barriers***

I : ***Institutional Barriers***

D : ***Dispositional Barriers***

The Kappa Statistic for inter-rater reliability is calculated below to show the level of concurrence between the two raters.

Inter - Rater Reliability – Initial Barrier Coding (Phase 1)

(Simple unweighted Kappa Statistic - Cohen's Kappa)

KEY **S :** ***Situational Barriers***
I : ***Institutional Barriers***
D : ***Dispositional Barriers***

RATER 1 (Me)

RATER 2

	S	I	D	TOTALS
S	***14***	***0***	***3***	**17**
I	***0***	***16***	***0***	**16**
D	***5***	***5***	***17***	**27**
TOTALS	**19**	**21**	**20**	**60**

$$P_0 = \frac{14+16+17}{60} = \mathbf{0.7833}$$

$$P_E = \frac{(17)(19) + (16)(21) + (27)(20)}{60^2} = \mathbf{0.3331}$$

$$K = \frac{0.7833 - 0.3331}{1 - 0.3331} = \mathbf{0.68}$$

In terms of interpretation, the Kappa statistic has been traditionally informed by the classifications given by Landis and Koch (1977) as follows:

Value of Kappa (K)	Interpretation
< 0	***Poor Agreement***
0 – 0.20	***Slight Agreement***
0.21 – 0.40	***Fair Agreement***
0.41 – 0.60	***Moderate Agreement***
0.61 – 0.80	***Substantial Agreement***
0.81 – 1.00	***Almost Perfect Agreement***

However, I find these classifications to be rather vague in terms of slight and fair, and have therefore opted for the classifications given by Altman (1991), which are a variation on Landis and Koch, but at the same time seem to be more definitive, as below:

Value of K	Strength of Agreement
< 0.20	***Poor***
0.21 – 0.40	***Fair***
0.41 – 0.60	***Moderate***
0.61 – 0.80	***Good***
0.81 – 1.00	***Very Good***

Altman (1991) goes further to acknowledge that:

"The reduction of the data to a single number inevitably yields an answer that is not terribly meaningful without examination of the table of frequencies. In practice, any value of k much below 0.5 will indicate poor agreement although the degree of acceptable agreement must depend on circumstances" (Page 405).

Reflection on 'Goodness of Fit'- End of Phase 1

Through the use of Altman's interpretation it is seen that the level of agreement for coding between the two raters is 'Good' with a value of 0.68. I would venture further to suggest that out of the 60 possible utterances that could have been agreed upon, 47 did so which constitutes 78.3%. This is a high level of agreement that shows that there is some validity to the initial codings. However, in order to understand the mechanisms behind the phenomena of non-participation, it would be more beneficial to attempt to understand the occasions where agreement between raters did not occur, which happened on just under a quarter of possible instances, 22.7%.

My contention here is that the initial codings do not do the data justice if looked at discretely – that there is a layering process/effect to be considered, namely that there are interactions between the *initial codes themselves* that need to be identified in order to give a clearer picture. This is the route that will be used in Phase 2. At this point it would be prudent to acknowledge that once layered barrier effects are used, statistically there should be less agreement between raters simply due to the fact that there will be a higher level of perceived subjectivity.

Phase 2

- Two raters apply an initial and one subsequent coding to utterances.
- Application of Inter-Rater Reliability – Kappa - Statistic
- Reflection on 'goodness of fit'

The process used in phase 1 is now repeated using the same two raters and the same utterances, but the second phase necessitated the 'layering of barriers'. It would be naive to think that McGivney's barriers were mutually exclusive and operated discretely from each other, as 22.7% non-agreement in phase 1 would suggest. In fact, during phase 1 of the analysis it was a very difficult task to classify utterances according to just *one* barrier. The table in Appendix 5 (pages 229-231) shows the three barriers coded by the two raters as layers rather than discrete entities. For example, if we consider utterance number 60 at the beginning of the table, it can be surmised that childcare is predominately a situational barrier, but the inclusion of a crèche facility within the educational institution would cause it to be less of a barrier. The non-inclusion of a crèche facility would only exacerbate the problem, rather than reduce it. Utterance number 60, therefore is code as ***S, I*** – situational in the first instance but dependent on an institutional intervention to alleviate the problem.

The Kappa Statistic from the table in Appendix 5 is now calculated (overleaf).

Inter - Rater Reliability – Layered Barrier Coding (Phase 2)

(Simple unweighted Kappa Statistic - Cohen's Kappa)

KEY **D :** ***Dispositional Barriers***
I : ***Institutional Barriers***
S : ***Situational Barriers***

RATER 1

RATER 2

	S	I	D	S, I or I, S	D, I or I, D	D, S or S, D	D, I, S (any order)	TOTALS
S	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
I	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	8
D	0	1	3	0	5	1	3	13
S, I or I, S	0	1	0	6	0	0	0	7
D, I or I, D	0	0	0	0	13	1	0	14
D, S or S, D	3	0	1	0	2	6	1	13
D, I, S (any order)	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
TOTALS	5	10	4	7	21	9	4	60

$$P_0 = \frac{2+8+3+6+13+6}{60} = \mathbf{0.6333}$$

$$P_E = \frac{(2)(5) + (8)(10) + (13)(4) + (7)(7) + (14)(21) + (13)(9) + (3)(4)}{60^2}$$

$$P_E = \mathbf{0.1706}$$

$$K = \frac{0.6333 - 0.1706}{1 - 0.1706} = \mathbf{0.56}$$

Reflection on 'Goodness of Fit'- End of Phase 2

As expected, the Kappa statistic for inter-rater reliability shows less agreement than in phase 1 due to an increase in subjective application. Interestingly though, the Kappa statistic still shows 'moderate' verging on 'good' inter-rater agreement. Therefore it can be surmised that the perception of factors contributing to non-participation are agreed with to a significant extent between those who are concerned with the education of prospective participants. Building on my conclusion after phase 1, I would move forward at this point to suggest that that factors affecting non-participation are a complex interaction between many layers rather than just 1 or 2, and that interaction between those layers and the people that the layers affect, are themselves multi-faceted. Therefore, the use of the Kappa statistic for inter-rater reliability becomes less meaningful as layered categories are applied, due to it necessarily weakening because of a higher degree of subjectivity.

As a direct consequence of phase 2, the association of barrier effects with those of how and why the prospective participants react to those barriers needs to be explored. How can emergent themes be used as criteria to be applied against perceptions and consequently direct actions of prospective participants? The determination and establishing of emergent themes will therefore form the basis of the third run through the focus group utterances.

Phase 3

- *Identify, Define and Establish emergent themes*
- *Application of themes to utterances*
- *Reflection on 'goodness of fit'*

Generating Emergent Themes

Formulating themes is acutely problematic inasmuch as the researcher has to remain as objective as possible within a highly subjective arena. Dey (1993) suggests that:

"When we devise a category [theme], we are making decisions about how to organize the data in ways which are useful for the analysis-and we have to take some account of how this category [theme] will 'fit' into this wider analytic context…. In generating categories [themes], *therefore, we have to think systematically and logically as well as creatively"* (Page 103).

The danger of organising the data in this way is that the researcher may fall into the trap of interpretation towards a subjectively pre-determined end. There are also difficulties surrounding the issues of validity, generalisability and ethics that are faced when generating emergent themes. How can I ensure that any theme that I feel to be valid is in fact so? Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) acknowledge this issue by pointing to emergent themes becoming increasingly abstract, when they state that:

"Factors emerging from [initial] analysis [are named] meta-themes, which represent themes at a higher level of abstraction than the original emergent themes" (Page 375).

But is it not the case that this higher level of abstraction would rely increasingly heavily on the viewpoint of the researcher?

In order to negate these issues it is highly important that *the words of the participants guide the thinking of the researcher*, rather than the thoughts of the researcher being used to manipulate the participant's utterances. In attempting to achieve this ethical and empirical balance, the method of 'portraiture' has been adopted as discussed by Shavelson (2003) who writes that:

"Portraiture is a qualitative research method that aims to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they [the researchers] are studying, documenting their [the research participants'] voices and their visions" [and moves further to suggest that] *"the standard for judging the quality of portraiture is authenticity…when empirical and literary themes come together for the researcher, the actors and the audience, we speak of the portrait as achieving authenticity"* (Pages 75-76).

Therefore, by keeping the participants utterances at the heart of the process and relating them to 'empirical literary themes' as mentioned by Shavelson, it is my aim to ensure that emergent themes are generated through the most ethical routes possible.

Emergent Themes

Through the use of Shavelson's method of Portraiture as discussed above, the following themes have become apparent and will be discussed in greater detail:

- Opportunity
- Gender
- Apathy / Non-Aspiration
- Culture
- Age
- Conformity
- Perception
- Relevance
- Reputation and Marketing
- Guidance

Opportunity

Utterance Number	Participant perspectives (see appendix 11)
58	*"Yeah, money problems."*
60	*"There was no childcare for my littlest one"*
71	*"Because of having children"[Not necessarily childcare issues, but 'being a parent first']*
82	*"I had problems with regards to medical problems"*
141	*"It was like work and stuff, and not having any money"*
235	*"When you're in a relationship as well…" [family commitment as a barrier]*

Opportunity is *the* main contender as an emergent theme from focus group utterances - see sample of utterances above. Money problems, childcare issues, time constraints, medical issues and lack of family support, constitute just a few of the reasons given as contributing to non-participation. Each of these problems in itself could be seen as situational in the first instance but by their nature they deny access in quite a stark way – they limit opportunity in a way that does not seem to be captured by McGivney's initial definition of the situational category alone. In essence, the situation does not necessarily preclude participation, rather leads to a lack of opportunity, which does. Roemer (1998) discusses the need for equalizing opportunity imbalance in terms of a 'non-discrimination principle' in which he states that:

"*In competition for positions in society, all individuals who possess the attributes relevant for the performance of the duties of the position in question be included in the pool of eligible candidates*" (Page 1).

The question that we need to ask is *why?* Is it not a utopian view to strive towards equality of opportunity for all? Where there is intrinsic added value to individuals, in the workplace, or society in general why not strive to increase such opportunity to participate?

McPherson and Schapiro (1991) make the link between what the benefit to the individual and to society from educational opportunity is when they recognise that:

"A college degree remains a very important credential regulating access to the professions and to influential positions in public life. The value of economic and social opportunity argues strongly for making access to these favoured careers as wide as possible. Moreover, advanced education is an important good in its own right, opening an individual's personal and intellectual horizons" (Page 3).

Gender

Gender is an area that is so inextricably interrelated with all other emergent themes, that it would be impossible to extract it as a separate factor. All themes intrinsically focus on self, and extrinsically the relationship of self with the outside world. Gender is central to a sense of the individual's interrelationships with other aspects of society, the home, the workplace and educational institutions. For individuals, these may be perceived from differing and sometimes competing viewpoints in relation to their gender, thus moulding the individual's intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for re-entry into education. For example, the theme of opportunity discussed above, pointed to the fact that it is not a straightforward aim to achieve opportunity for all. Relating this point to gender within *this* college we can see from Appendix 3 (pages 224-225) that the percentage uptake of the Access to Higher Education programme shows a female: male ratio of approximately 8 : 1. From Table 12 overleaf, which looks at national participation rates by gender 1999/2000 to 2008/09 (also discussed in the questionnaire analysis as Table 7), we see that the most recent available statistics show a female : male ratio of approximately 3 : 1. Although the figures show a higher female uptake in Access to Higher Education programmes nationally, it is far from the

8 : 1 ratio shown within this college. It can therefore be surmised that there are other factors that are in play that are forcing the issue.

National Participation by Gender on
Access to Higher Education Programmes (1999/2000 to 2008/9)

	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Female (%)	*72%*	*73%*	*74%*	*73%*	*75%*	*76%*	*76%*	*75%*	*73%*	*75%*
Male (%)	*28%*	*27%*	*26%*	*27%*	*25%*	*24%*	*24%*	*25%*	*27%*	*25%*
Percentage difference (In favour of Females)	**44%**	**46%**	**48%**	**46%**	**50%**	**52%**	**52%**	**50%**	**46%**	**50%**

SOURCE: Adapted from the annual 'Key Statistics' information available at website URL: http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/partners/statistics/

TABLE 12

By considering gender specific comments made by the focus group, see overleaf, inferences can start to be made as to what these other factors may be. Statistics discussed in chapter 5 show that there are a much higher proportion of males in full time work (74.25%) than females (49.68%) which is an approximate ratio of 3 : 2. In terms of part time employment, the female percentage (37.2%) is in high contrast to those of males (3.61) approximate ratio of 10 : 1. A simplistic inference is that females have more time available to them in order to re-enter education in comparison with males. However, the relationship between gender, cultural norms/expectations/identity, opportunity and institutional provision,

can in turn lead to a skewing of the relationship between college and gender. The utterances below bear out the complexities of cultural norms, expectations and identity.

Utterance Number	Participant perspectives (see appendix 11)
137	*"Oh yeah, of course it is"* [In response to a direct question: Your mates down the pub…is it the case of them taking the rip out of you a bit?]
150	*"It* [returning to education] *was quite good for me, because my husband actually started washing up and things when I asked him"*
152	*"I was supported because he* [husband] *would bring in a cup of tea if I was stressing, or he would say 'Oh I'll put a load of washing in'. "*
199	*"19 year old lads* [want to] *play football. They think it's quite feminine* [to go to college]*"*
201	*"some courses are directed at women intentionally"*
204	"[The prospectus] *says Midwifery, Nursing, Primary teaching…, which are like female dominated areas"*
264	*"I think the man would have to feel twice as secure* [in terms of earnings coming into the house, before he decided to re-enter education]*"*
269	*"My husband was bought up very old school, women stopped at home and cooked and cleaned, and the men went out to work"*

For example, the more women decide to access college and the more men are reluctant to give up work to go to college, the more college will be perceived as a feminine thing to do. Resultantly, colleges cater for the courses that hold the greatest profit - those that appeal to women which in turn may in part be governed by norms concerning the careers that are 'suitable' for women to enter and which are easy/easier to pursue part-time or around child caring responsibilities. Alternatively, starting from the premise that males are in more highly paid and valued full time jobs which the females cannot get because of childcare commitments, the next best thing they can do part time is to get some college training that will make them more competitive in the job market later, when the children are at school. If

females are not in full time work, then they can have more access to training opportunities than full time male counterparts, but is this not already at the cost of them not putting in those full time hours to climb the promotion ladder and get the full pensions and the top jobs men get? They have already made that sacrifice to have children. The issue is a complex multifaceted one. In today's age there is no reason for the males not to stay at home and rear the children. Why don't they? Do they feel that they have more to lose in terms of catching up on their financial losses in relation to the proportionate loss that females would make?

Apathy / Non-Aspiration

Titmus (1993) identified that:

"There appears to be a hard core in British Society, for whom it may be outside the realms of practical policy to offer outcomes sufficiently attractive to bring them into adult education" [and concluded that] *"a common cause for non-participation was lack of sufficient desire to change, whether because of contentment, resignation or apathy in one's present lot, or the belief that no more attractive alternative was available, or that the attraction of change was outweighed by its uncertainty"* (Page 81)

These traits are highly apparent in the utterances of the focus group as can be seen from the sample overleaf. Although these students did eventually all re-enter education, their utterances give a strong impression that apathy is not so much a lack of care or effort but a problem with self-esteem or confidence in themselves and their power to change the future course of events. The students in the focus group were of diverse ages and a few had worked in low-paid employment with little or no prospects, a participatory factor being that they were in familiar surroundings and change by nature is problematic. There is also a danger of apathy once the student has enrolled onto a course. This relates to the student not being

challenged enough, not engaging with his/her studies and not responding to specific teaching styles. Walkin (1990) suggests that:

"Student apathy and lack of effort are not necessarily a matter of mere laziness. Often they are healthy reactions by normal people to an unhealthy environment – created all too commonly by unsound teaching practices and policies" (Page 4).

Utterance Number	Participant perspectives (see appendix 11)
61	*"I wasn't sure if I was able to do it…It was like 'You dropped out of school and won't be able to take it."*
62	*"I didn't think I would be clever enough"*
64	*"I worked in a shop and thought that was all I could do"*
73	*"I wasn't sure. That was my main problem."*
144	*"I already had a brilliant job, nice cars and nice holidays"*
157	*"There's like a step as well as a transition…"*
159	*"It never felt right"*

The focus of this research is on reasons for deciding to attend the college and reasons for not deciding to attend prior to making this decision. Issues with teaching practices at the college whilst on a course have not emerged as an important theme, and while this may in part reflect that specific questions of this nature were not asked or that there is a desire amongst students not to be identified with negative opinions of teaching staff, either way, we cannot conclude from the data that it is a major factor in this case.

Culture

Bruner (1996) defines culture as follows:

"It is culture that provides the tool for organizing and understanding our worlds in communicable ways. The distinctive feature of human evolution is that mind evolved in a fashion that enables human beings to utilise the tools of culture" (Page 3).

and moves further to state that:

"Nothing is 'culture free', but neither are individuals simple mirrors of their culture...Life in culture is...an interplay between the versions of the world that people form under its institutional sway and the versions of it that are products of their individual histories" (Page 14).

Cultural influence on participation is a critical theme. Decisions made by prospective students originate from their perceived place in society and perceptions of alternative positions to be from that place. Bourdieu (1996) define this concept as 'habitus' which is:

"*A generative schemata of classifications and classifiable practices that function in practice without acceding to explicit representation and that are the product of the embodiment, in forms of dispositions, of a differential position in social space*" (Page 2).

So, habitus can be seen as an approach that explains how persons make choices in life in ways that conform to their perception of how they are expected to act, in turn acquired through socialisation at a formative stage. From the selection of focus group utterances overleaf, there is support for such differential positions. The questions to ask are 'why do students feel such social and cultural constraints?' and 'where did these constraints originate?' Gorman (1998) provides an answer to both questions (particularly in relation to the working-class) via the concept of resistance:

"To think that resistance to schooling takes place exclusively at schools misses an institution equally important for social reproduction: the family. The attitudes of parents towards higher education have the potential to influence their children's attitudes towards higher education…and their own chances of returning to school" (Page 40).

Although the family can be seen centrally in relation to cultural constraints, the family itself operates within wider social circles and classes. From the perspective of working-class students who make up the majority of the prospective students at this college, it is important to understand how *their* culture plays a role in the perceptions and approaches that they have towards participation in Further Education. Thomas (2005) argues that:

"People from lower socio-economic classes may be perceived not to value education as highly as other groups, and so be less willing to forfeit other activities (including employment) in preference to education…or they may simply have no experience of it" (Page 119).

Utterance Number	**Participant perspectives (see appendix 11)**
68	*"Just scared really of what to expect. What was expected? What would happen?"*
93	*"I've got several friends that backed away when I started this [course]"*
156	*"It's such a step from leaving something you are quite familiar with, outside of your comfort zone, throwing it all away"*
212	*"I thought I wouldn't fit in…just me the granny, and that I ain't going to make friends"*

Whilst acknowledging that Thomas describes a perception here, I would argue that out of necessity prospective students may find the need to prioritise paid employment over the need to re-enter education and more importantly, they may perceive the relationship between

education and paid employment from a different perspective than those from other class backgrounds. Gorman (1998) states that:

"Working-class parents…whose self-esteem has been battered by the world of the college-educated, white-collar worker…do not always respond to the vagaries of the economy…These parents still insist their children can be successful by pursuing traditional blue-collar occupations and using a little common sense" (Page 37).

Furthermore, I would disagree that the working-class may not value education as highly as other groups. It has been my experience throughout my teaching career that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to place education on such a high pedestal that they feel it is out of reach, that somehow they are unworthy of re-entering education. This can be seen to be a classic self-fulfilling prophesy in terms of non-participation that serves to maintain the social and cultural status quo. Research by Kintrea et al. (2011) showed that:

"While many in [the white working-class community in the region researched] aspired to go to university and have professional jobs...a larger number of young people were interested in traditional roles, with boys aspiring to trades and girls to care occupations" (Page 6).

These findings are supported by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) who talk of:

"Extremely sophisticated mechanisms by which the school system contributes to reproducing the structure of the distribution of cultural capital and, through it, the social structure to the historical view that society reproduces itself mechanically" (Page vii).

It can be surmised then that cultural capital is a product of education and that the institution of education is a principal stakeholder in its formation, perpetuation and use. There is therefore a two-way process that becomes apparent - that the forces of culture are not only extrinsic. Culture is not only imposed upon people within societies, rather the people

themselves act as a force to maintain their place within that society. As Bourdieu (1984) explains, the extrinsic/intrinsic interaction that imposes cultural constraints upon prospective participants arises:

"Through the economic and social conditions which they presuppose, the different ways of relating to realities and fictions, of believing in fictions and the realities they simulate, with more or less distance and detachment, [and that these] are very closely linked to the different possible positions in social space and, consequently, bound up with the systems of dispositions (habitus) characteristic of the different classes and class fractions" (Page 6).

Age

Within the focus group, a regularly cited emergent theme for lack of participation was that of age. The self-perception of the prospective student that s/he is 'too old' to re-enter into education is one that can be seen to be purely dispositional. However, there are many interrelated issues that come to bear. Why does the student feel too old? Is it due to cultural/societal pressures and therefore an issue of conformity? Can it be down to the institution itself and the lack of provision of courses that would be relevant to the needs of the more mature students? Does the student feel that education would not benefit intrinsically or that Further Education is for the young? The sample of focus group utterances overleaf shows some of these aspects to be true. If these utterances are read alongside tabulated age ranges of questionnaire respondents as shown in Table 13 overleaf, the emergences of a trend towards lack of participation in older students becomes clear. The vast majority (85%) of the students who enter onto the Access to Higher Education programme at this college fall in the age range of 19-39 years of age.

Utterance Number	Participant perspectives (see appendix 11)
191	*"I thought it was something for young people"*
194	*"Prospectus states 'This course starts at 19'…I thought I would be a granddad…older than the teachers"*
199	*"19 year old lads think it's quite feminine…to do a course like this"*
208	*"I think that the age level is a big thing"*

Research by Gilchrist et al (2003) showed that:

"*Participation plans of those outside HE are linked strongly to age, with the 16-18 year olds showing greatest interest and over 50% indicating they plan definitely to enter HE. Interest falls away in the older groups with…30% for 18-20 year olds, declining to only 22% among the older 21-30 group"* (Page 84).

Gilchrist's research dovetails highly with students in the Further Education sector. Interest and therefore participation becomes markedly diminished as the age of students increase. This falls in line with national statistics which are presented in Table 14 overleaf. (Due to the reporting of age statistics not being uniformly categorised throughout the 10 year period that this research is based upon, values from Table 14 were taken from the last two age bandings to corroborate the findings in Table 13).

Age ranges of questionnaire respondents (See appendix 3 – page 224)

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
19 - 29 years	**52**	**42%**
30 - 39 years	**54**	**43%**
40 - 49 years	**15**	**12%**
50 - 59 years	**4**	**3%**
60 years and over	**0**	**0%**

TABLE 13

National Participation by Age on

Access to Higher Education Programmes (1999/2000 to 2008/9)

AGE	1999 - 2000	2000 - 2001	2001 - 2002	AGE	2002 - 2003	AGE	2003 - 2004	2004 - 2005	2005 - 2006	AGE	2006 - 2007	2007 - 2008	2008 - 2009
<21	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	<20	1.0%	<21	12.1%	14.2%	16.0%	<20	10.0%	14.0%	12.0%
21-25	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	20-29	45.0%	21-25	27.8%	27.2%	27.0%	20-24	32.0%	33.0%	34.0%
26-35	41.0%	42.0%	42.0%	30-39	36.0%	26-35	35.7%	34.6%	34.0%	25-29	19.0%	19.0%	19.0%
36-45	23.0%	24.0%	22.0%	40-49	14.0%	36-45	19.7%	19.4%	19.0%	30-34	14.0%	12.0%	13.0%
46-45	5.0%	4.0%	6.0%	50-59	3.0%	46-45	3.7%	3.5%	3.0%	35-39	12.0%	11.0%	11.0%
56-65	3.0%	2.0%	2.0%	60+	1.0%	56-65	0.8%	0.8%	1.0%	40-44	7.0%	6.0%	7.0%
>65	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%			>65	0.2%	0.3%	0.0%	45-49	3.0%	3.0%	4.0%
										>50	3.0%	2.0%	
TOTALS	100%	100%	100%		100%		100%	100%	100%		100%	100%	100%
> 45	4.0%	3.0%	3.0%	> 49	4.0%	> 45	1.0%	1.1%	1.0%	> 45	6.0%	5.0%	4.0%

SOURCE: Adapted from the annual 'Key Statistics' information available at website URL: http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/partners/statistics/

TABLE 14

Conformity

Many of the utterances by focus group participants relate to the question of conformity and how the pressure to conform can act as a barrier to participation. This is just as important before the process of embarking on a course as it is once the student has enrolled. The following table shows some of the utterances that give an insight into this issue:

Utterance Number	Participant perspectives (see appendix 11)
91	*"You realise that some people don't like you doing anything"*
113	*"It was a big joke at first [Others' perceptions]"*
199	*"19 year old lads think it's quite feminine…to do a course like this"*
204	*"Yeah, it [prospectus] says Midwifery, Nursing, Primary Teaching…which are like female dominated areas"*
212	*"I thought I wouldn't fit in…just me the granny, and that I ain't going to make friends"*

The issues of conformity prior to re-entry within education are a mix of gender, social class and family constraints and perceptions of what awaits. Forsyth and Furlong (2003: page 2) allude to this phenomenon as one of *"cultural isolation...[and]...missing out on youthful social activities"*. It would be unwise to underplay the importance of this phenomenon as my own experiences have shown that it takes a great deal of courage and character to deal with. It is useful to note here that utterance 212 was made by a 50+ year old student who was immensely popular within this cohort intake. But this does not detract from the importance of issues of conformity, be they real or perceived, to the decision to participate. Titmus (1993) talks of a culture of participation and the differences of this culture in Sweden and Great Britain.

"[Sweden has] *a culture in which post-initial education has become the norm" [and goes on to recognise that if such a norm could be create within British society] "it would bring in some non-participants, because they would be under social pressure to conform"*. He concludes *"social approval might be a useful incentive for our disaffected to change their stance"* (Page 82)

So, the environment that perceives Further Education to be outside of the norm of behaviour is one in which the prospective participant may have to contend with potential isolation from those groups with whom they associate themselves, and the formation of new alliances with like-minded people.

Perception

In terms of recruitment and retention within Further Education, it is important that perceptions that students bring to the table are recognised. Curzon (2004) suggests that:

"The determinants of older people's perceptions include their values, beliefs, attitudes, needs and self-experiences. Their feelings concerning their preferred way of life…will affect their perception of their present environment" (Page 255).

Perception-based reasons for non-participation are highly complex and bring into play the interaction of many of the emergent themes that have been previously discussed, as a sample of students utterances given in the table below illustrate:

Utterance Number	Participant perspectives (see appendix 11)
62	*"I didn't think I would be clever enough"*
71	*"Because of having children"[Reason for non-participation and lack of information regarding crèche facilities]*
73	*"I wasn't sure. That was my main problem*
93	*"I've got several friends that backed away when I started this. Two of them were jealous" [Societal pressures]*
156	*"It's such a step from leaving something you are quite familiar with" [Perceptions of change and unfamiliarity]*
191	*"I thought it was something for young people" [Perception of the further education sector]*
216	*"Scared, scared of learning"*

If we turn our attention to utterances 62, 73, 156 and 216, we see that the problems of perception are both extrinsic and intrinsic. To an extent, extrinsic perception is much easier dealt with than intrinsic, as the latter alludes to the changing of attitude towards 'self'. Kowalski (1988) observes that:

"A key factor in the public perception of adult education is the nature of adults' attitudes towards their continuing ability to learn throughout life. The nature of this attitude, in turn, affects such significant elements as the availability of adult education resources and actual participation levels" (Page 179).

Although it becomes necessary to be aware of issues of perception, a great deal still rests on the shoulders of the prospective participant to actually take that first step to participate. To a certain extent the college can aim to make itself a more attractive place to learn, but if cultural pressures and apathy/non-aspiration – as discussed earlier – from the learner cause non-participation, then any amount of effort may not be enough. As Campbell (1977) states succinctly:

"The educator of adults must understand the conditions under which adults learn, their motivation for learning, the nature of the community and its structure. Underlying all of these, and essential, is the understanding of oneself, undergirded by a sustaining personal philosophy" (Page 254).

Relevance

If a prospective student cannot see any value to re-entering education, then this is a powerful reason for lack of participation. This is directly alluded to by the following utterances which suggest that relevance of courses and the content within that course are seen to be of high importance in the hierarchy of the decision making process:

Utterance Number	Participant perspectives (see appendix 11)
73	*"It has to feel right"*
244	*"When I was at school, all the lads wanted to do was leave here and go down the pit for money"*
269	*"My husband was bought up very old school, women stayed at home and cooked and cleaned, and the men went out to work…It's still very much like that…he wouldn't go back to college"*
342	*"I don't think it's wide enough you know [provision of educational courses]. And that's one thing I was unsure about before I came here"*
343	*"There's an awful lot of hairdressing, those types of courses, not so much academic courses"*

Stock (1996) suggests that:

"The insistence by course sponsors or purchasers upon what will be often perceived as arbitrary or irrelevant externally imposed learning goals and objectives…will only achieve minority success, as indicated by high drop-out rates, failures in required competency and loss of confidence." (Page 21).

In terms of the specific group of students who formed this focus group, the perceived barrier of lack of relevance is focussed on the perceived impact that re-entry into education would have on their established lives. The need for the student to feel that they will be taught skills needed to move them on to the next stage of their journey is of paramount importance and irrelevant material only acts as an added complication. Taking these complexities into consideration, it would be useful to explore why the young adult, for example, should decide to do anything else but 'work down the pit' when, as an extrinsic motivation it is a tried and trusted method of earning potential and intrinsically perpetuate a lifestyle that s/he would be comfortable with? In this sort of situation it is a case of 'better the devil you know' and an understandable reluctance to upset the status quo. Alternatively, there is the student who may have decided that s/he *will* make a change and may have decided on a specific profession to work towards. Lack of perceived relevance and its bearing on lack of choice, as suggested by utterance numbers 342 and 343 in the above table could be the reason for non-participation, as s/he may not be able to study in an alternative college due to situational reasons. These potential weak links to encouraging participation need to be considered by stakeholders if the ideals of widening participation and lifelong learning are to be truly achieved.

Reputation & Marketing

A great deal depends on the way a college markets itself to its potential catchment area(s). There is a need for well-targeted advertising campaigns that offer courses that are relevant to that catchment area. The educational establishment should not merely list courses and student requirements but give a 'feel' for the ethos of the college. Gibbs and Knapp (2002) reinforce this aspect when they say:

"Education has very complex programmes and products. Defining the role of an institution is not just a simple matter of identifying and attributing value-producing activity. The activities of higher and further education often involve highly intangible matter"(Page 3).

The utterances below relate to the importance of marketing and the perceptions that it can communicate to the prospective student.

Utterance Number	Participant perspectives (see appendix 11)
33	*"Not every college does it like this" [Induction process and course structure]*
43	*"[Named college] has got a lot worse reputation"*
46	*"[Named college] check for your English and Maths" [Initial Testing]*
194	*"When I looked into it [prospectus], it said this course starts at 19. I thought that was quite young for a mature student"*
278	*"When I came in I didn't know there was an Access course or anything. I came in and said 'I need to sit my GCSE's' "*
305	*"[This] college is very much that; it keeps itself in [this area]...it's not broadly advertised is it?"*
342	*"I don't think it's wide enough you know [breadth of educational provision]. And that's one thing I was unsure about before I came here."*
343	*"There's an awful lot of hairdressing, those types of courses, not much academic courses."*
346	*"If I'd have seen the prospectus, actually I'd have thought 'Oh no! Do they really do the academic side of it then?'…I wouldn't have known; You just follow what sort of prospectus you're given."*

These utterances relay a sense of the way that a college is perceived through marketing. Furthermore, the reputation of the college and its provision seems to be communicated via deeper reasoning, which is just as powerful as the marketing process itself; this is word-of-mouth – see utterances 43, 278, 305. Field and Spence (2000) talk of:

"Word-of-mouth recommendation amongst learners, rather than conventional methods of advertising, as a means of attracting people into further education" and move further to portray its importance (by relating it to previous research), when they state that "*the significance of word-of-mouth recommendation mirrors the findings of another project in the ESRC Learning Society Programme, which showed that the majority of young people considering further education in one London suburb relied very heavily on local family-friendship networks for information and advice"* (Page 39).

Guidance

The issue of guidance is one that is central in terms of a way of rebalancing any mismatch between the expectations from the participants of the college and that which is actually offered by the college. Guidance is central throughout the duration of student contact with the college, i.e. from first impressions all the way through to exit polls. The utterances overleaf demonstrate the need for guidance, and how it plays a vital role in connecting seemingly unrelated factors and the diverse nature of the utterances point to the need for students to be guided at critical points of contact with the college. These critical points are more effective or less effective dependent upon where they fall in the college journey, and how individual students react to them

Utterance Number	Participant perspectives (see appendix 11)
66	*"I was shocked when I came to the induction day, and you were going around saying 'What do you want to be?' "*
69	*"I didn't think I'd be able to cope time-wise"*
73	*"I didn't want to start it and not complete it" [Access course]*
141	*"It was like work and stuff, and not having any money" [Reasons for non-participation]*
159	*"It never felt right. I felt I had too much guilt for the kids."*
216	*"Scared, scared of learning"*
278	*"When I came in I didn't know there was an Access course or anything. I came in and said 'I need to sit my GCSE's' "*
331	*"You've got children at home, and night-time is their time, so that's very awkward [studying part time in the evening]"*

As an illustrative example, the first utterance (number 66) shows a lack of insight into the provision on offer and entrance requirements for those provisions. Language such as *"I was shocked…"* indicates the decisive need for guidance at that point. Subject specialist teachers need to be in contact with such students as quickly as possible, time needs to be organised, and correct preparations need to be made. The alternative would be to enrol students onto a course that they may find irrelevant or one that does not meet the needs of their future plans. This in turn may lead to disenchantment and prospective withdrawal/non-participation. As a second example, utterance number 216, *"Scared, scared of learning"* is one that all teachers/lecturers will be familiar with. It alludes to the diversity of roles that need to be played by the educator. Huddleston and Unwin (2002) note that:

"The teacher will have a central role to play in other aspects of learning support, for example through guidance and counselling, both on entry to a programme and throughout its duration. Returning learners may also need support not just in the subject being studied but in how to study it" (Page 32).

This is an issue that is crucial to that of guidance and ultimately, retention of participants – the role of the teacher is not just to teach a subject but to guide, counsel,

motivate and ultimately prepare students adequately for the next step of their journey. Our own college provides study skills sessions for Access to Higher Education students to prepare them in areas such as how to take and organise notes, how to organise time, presentations, filling out UCAS application forms, interview techniques, etc… as a process of imparting skills that will contribute to the technical, academic and holistic improvement of the student. Lecturers undertake this work, as they are the people with whom the learners are most au fait. Harkin et al (2001) crystallises the importance of the teacher as a central point of contact for guidance when they state that:

"The capacity of the teacher to respond, sensitively and flexibly, to individual need is irreplaceable…teachers are sensitive to mood, to the social dimensions of learning, and to the subtleties of giving feedback" (Page 24).

The reasons for lack of participation are numerous but well-timed and professional guidance can aid in reducing the instances of withdrawal as alluded to by both Huddleston and Unwin, and Harkin et al.

Reflection on 'Goodness of Fit'- End of Phase 3

The main concern at this point, having generated emergent themes, is establishing if there is a relationship of these themes to the initial codings that were used – i.e. situation, disposition and institution. In order to ascertain this point, the *process* of allocating emergent themes is explained in the next section and it is important to recognise that until the themes were generated, this type of analysis could not be contextualised. It is the emergent themes that inform this section hence this process is a natural progression from the 3-phased approach to focus group analysis that was introduced in the methodology chapter. Appendix 6 (pages 232-235) lists all the utterances, their initial coding based on categories reported by McGivney and any additional coding of emergent themes - see examples 1 and 2 below.

How were emergent themes allocated to utterances?

Shavelson's method of portraiture, as discussed at the start of phase 3 (pages 134-135), plays a central role in the allocation of themes. As directed by Shavelson, an attempt to 'record and interpret the perspectives and experiences' of the participants, within constraints of 'authenticity' is adhered to as rigidly as possible. The aim is to build upon where we left off in phase 2. Resultantly, the table in Appendix 5 (pages 229-232) showing application of layered coding by 2 raters is used as a start point here.

Example 1 : In Appendix 6, the first utterance is "Yeah, money problems" – utterance number 58. This utterance, and *the context within which it was spoken*, which is the critical element, had been initially coded as situational in Appendix 5. In terms of assigning emergent themes, 'money problems' create a tension between paid employment and college attendance. The opportunity to enter into education and the relevance of the education - centrally, the potential to lead the individual out of money problems - are in tension with the immediate need for income. Therefore, the utterance is initially coded as situational, with opportunity and relevance being assigned as themes that would inform the prospective participant's view in relation to participation.

Example 2 : In Appendix 6, utterance number 73 – "I had to feel it was right" – was spoken in the context of 'why the student decided to re-enter education', and 'the catalyst for change'. This utterance is intentionally used as an example as it posed great difficulty in emergent theme allocation. The fact that the student uses the words "I had to feel…" opens up greater nominal barrier allocations than would be otherwise relevant. In effect, an attempt had to be made to understand the participant's notion of 'feel'. This poses the additional problem of a

complex level of empathy, thus requiring greater focus on the context within which the question was posed and the response spoken.

"I had to feel it was right"

↓

Initial Codings

Dispositional

- Perception of 'self' in relation to educational participation.

Institutional

- Fear of the unknown.
- The ability to re-engage with education at an institutional level.

↓

Allocation of emergent themes

Opportunity

- Does the student 'feel' that opportunity lends itself at this point in his/her life? Will s/he allow barriers to come into play? (Time, Children, Family, Money, etc…)

Perception

- How does the prospective student 'feel' about the educational journey s/he is about to embark upon?
- How does s/he perceive the institution within which s/he is to study?
- Perception relating to relation with family, community and cultural 'norms', etc...

Relevance

- Is education relevant at this point in the prospective student's life?
- Is the course relevant to his/her needs?

Cultural

- Will re-entry into education be culturally acceptable?
- Moving outside ones 'comfort zone' and into an arena that may be too culturally alien.

Conformity

- Taking an alternative path that will affect the prospective student's relationship with cultural norms, friends, family, etc…
- Peer pressure may be too difficult to resist.

Reputation/Marketing

- Does the college cater for the needs of the prospective student.
- Reputation of the college/Word of mouth
- How is the college marketed?
- Does the marketing and provision in the college have a positive impact on the prospective student' perceptions?

Guidance

- How can the prospective student receive guidance?
- Does the college feel approachable?

This utterance was initially coded as dispositional and institutional, according to McGivney's definitions, but the phraseology indicated many possible deeper themes that were contextually attributable as barriers to participation.

The allocations of themes in Appendix 6 were then used to analyse interrelatedness between the themes themselves - see Table 15 overleaf. For example, if we look at the emergent theme of 'Opportunity' we can see that it stands alone on just 1 occasion (utterance 234). Opportunity shows interrelatedness with one other theme on 3 separate occasions; with two other themes on 4 separate occasions; with three other themes on 7 separate occasions, and so on… In this way, by giving equal weighting to all emergent themes, a picture can be built up as to which prospective barriers are more prone to be interrelated with other barriers rather than to stand alone as barriers in their own right. An example of how calculations were undertaken to establish totals for interrelated themes is as follows:

e.g. How many initial themes were found to interrelate with 2 other emergent themes?

$(4+10+3+1+6+5+7+9) \times 2 = 90$

One of the major inferences that can be drawn from this table is that of the 243 possible counts of interrelations that could occur, there were only three counts (1.23%) that related to barriers being stand alone, i.e. there was one occasion where lack of opportunity was cited as a potential barrier to participation in its own right, and only two occasions where relevance was deemed to be so. In terms of analysing the area of breaking down barriers to participation, this statistic can be interpreted as a huge positive as it points definitively to the fact that potential participants do not see access into Further Education as purely one-dimension. Further investigation shows that by far the most commonly cited barriers were those that related to perception, reputation and marketing, and guidance. From the perspective of counts, these three areas contributed 126 out of 243 (51.9%) of cited potential

barriers. The data therefore points to the fact that perception is the key element that can influence participation, however through professional marketing and an established reputation, the barrier of perception is somewhat negated. Once students enter Further Education, lack of guidance on the journey through their studies is a substantial perceived barrier to remaining there.

Table Showing Inter-relatedness of Emergent Themes

INITIAL EMERGENT THEMES		NUMBER OF INTERRELATED THEMES								TOTALS
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
OPPORTUNITY	Count	1	3	4	7	4		1		20
	%	5.00	15.00	20.00	35.00	20.00		5.00		100
APATHY/NON-ASPIRATION	Count				6	4	1		3	14
	%				42.86	28.57	7.14		21.43	100
PERCEPTION	Count		4	10	10	9	6	3	3	45
	%		8.89	22.22	22.22	20.00	13.33	6.67	6.67	100
RELEVANCE	Count	2	1	3	6	3	2	2	3	22
	%	9.09	4.55	13.64	27.27	13.64	9.09	9.09	13.64	100
GENDER	Count			1		1	3	1	4	10
	%			10.00		10.00	30.00	10.00	40.00	100
CULTURE	Count			6	2	6	6	3	3	26
	%			23.08	7.68	23.08	23.08	11.54	11.54	100
CONFORMITY	Count			5	2		5	3	3	18
	%			27.78	11.11		27.78	16.67	16.67	100
REPUTATION & MARKETING	Count		5	7	11	6	6	3	3	41
	%		12.20	17.07	26.83	14.63	14.63	7.32	7.32	100
GUIDANCE	Count		1	9	11	7	6	3	3	40
	%		2.50	22.50	27.50	17.50	15.00	7.50	7.50	100
AGE	Count					4	2	1		7
	%					57.14	28.57	14.29		100
TOTALS (NOMINAL COUNTS)		3	14	45	55	44	37	20	25	243
TOTALS (ALL INTERRELATED THEMES)		0	14	90	165	176	185	120	175	925

TABLE 15

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA COLLECTED FROM M.I.S

M.I.S. Data Credibility (In light of the emergent themes established in chapters 6 and 7)

Guest et al. (2008) observe that:

"Methodological problems and issues of data credibility… [can lead to]…serious problems for consistency of data collection and management, thus compromising data integrity. Potential for error is amplified when protocols are complex…" (Page 192)

Issues with the use of M.I.S. data are acknowledged, e.g. the process of recording data on withdrawal forms is open to human error and the training of staff to record data systematically is important. However, the data exists and has been audited and most importantly, relates to reasons for non-participation from Access to Higher Education students within this college. The caveat is, as mentioned previously, that it should be viewed from a complementary perspective rather than as a complete story in its own right. The question to ask then is *how* should the data be used? Polit et al (2004) point to research conducted by Lincoln and Guba as follows:

"Credibility involves two aspects: first, carrying out the study in a way that enhances the believability of the findings, and second taking steps to demonstrate credibility to consumers" (Page 430)

So, for the purposes of demonstrable credibility, it was important to first establish concurrence between the M.I.S data and themes established through the use of questionnaire and focus group data. Three raters were therefore tasked with recording their perceptions in relation to how the M.I.S withdrawal data collection sheet related to the emergent themes established in the previous two chapters (the categories labelled 'Enrolled on course twice',

‘No reason’ and ‘Never Attended’ were intentionally omitted as enrolment onto a course twice could be attributed to human error and nothing could be concluded from the other two concerning reasons for withdrawal). The three raters are teachers of the core subject areas of Mathematics, English and Science, and all three teach on the Access to Higher Education programme so were familiar with student typologies. The task used nominal counts to quantify opinion. The set brief was:

- For each reason for withdrawal given on the college withdrawal form, which of the emergent themes would you perceive to be the primary factor?
- Once the primary theme has been established, tick any other themes that you perceive to have underpinning value.
- Do you feel that the established emergent themes are exhaustive? If not, please mention alternative perceived themes that could explain withdrawal/non-participation.

The results of this task have been summarised overleaf in Table 16 – also see Appendix 8 (pages 237-239) for the rater tables in which the primary theme for each category has been shaded in grey. Once this theme had been established, the end column shows how many other themes were perceived to have been interrelated or underpinning the initial primary theme. It is these nominal counts that have been summarised in Table 16.

It was interesting to note that the raters did not identify any other emergent reasons for withdrawal. This is by no means to suggest that the list of themes is exhaustive, rather that they proved sufficient to pin down reasons for withdrawal/non-participation from the viewpoint of the raters themselves. Table 16 shows that there were only three occasions where it was felt that there was only one factor that related to withdrawal, and there were no other interrelated reasons.

Table to show nominal counts of perceived interrelated themes underpinning reasons for withdrawal, from 3 raters.

Number of perceived Interrelated Themes	Frequency (Rater 1)	Frequency (Rater 2)	Frequency (Rater 3)	TOTALS	%
0	0	3	0	3	4.17%
1	4	8	1	13	18.06%
2	7	7	4	18	25.00%
3	7	4	8	19	26.39%
4	5	1	4	10	13.89%
5	1	0	5	6	8.33%
6	0	1	2	3	4.17%
TOTALS	24	24	24	72	100%

TABLE 16

In the majority of cases (51.39%) the raters felt that there were three or four interrelated themes that could underpin the initial reason for withdrawal. Further interpretation of the results show that there was 95.83% agreement between raters that one or more interrelated themes could underpin the initial reason for withdrawal. This points to high credibility from the perspective of the emergent themes established in the previous two chapters. However, the issue of interpretive credibility requires greater scrutiny than purely nominal counts. Ian Dey (1993) suggests that:

"While the analyst remains responsible for summing up the analysis …it is the 'jury' which ultimately assesses the value and credibility of the analysis…Our jury may be composed of a variety of different audiences, and it is a sad but inescapable fact of life that their response to our analysis may be dictated as much by its style as its content" (Page 244)

The data might therefore demonstrate even greater credibility, if it could be shown that in the majority of cases the three raters agreed on the *primary* theme that underpinned

withdrawal/non-participation. Fleiss' kappa statistic for inter-rater reliability was used to attempt to establish this agreement (values taken from Table 17 overleaf), due to the fact that more than 2 raters were used in this case.

Inter-Rater Reliability (Fleiss' Kappa) - Emergent Themes

3 Raters	***n* =**	***3***
24 Subjects	***N* =**	***24***
10 Categories	***c* =**	***10***
Sum of all cells (24 X 3)		***72***

$$\mathbf{P_0} = \frac{1}{24} \times 17.333 = 0.722$$

$$\mathbf{P_E} = 0.431^2 + 0.069^2 + 0.056^2 + \ldots\ldots = 0.257$$

$$\mathbf{K} = \frac{0.722 - 0.257}{1 - 0.257} = \mathbf{0.63}$$

Interpreting Fleiss' Kappa

Value of *K*	Strength of Agreement
< 0.20	***Poor***
0.21 – 0.40	***Fair***
0.41 – 0.60	***Moderate***
0.61 – 0.80	***Good***
0.81 – 1.00	***Very Good***

Table to show Inter-Rater Reliability (3 raters) between categories on the college withdrawal form, and perceived primary underpinning emergent themes.

CODED M.I.S. BASED REASONS FOR STUDENT WITHDRAWAL (See Appendix 7 for Key)	EMERGENT THEMES										
	OPPORTUNITY	APATHY/NON-ASPIRATION	PERCEPTION	RELEVANCE	GENDER	CULTURAL	CONFORMITY	REPUTATION/ MARKETING	GUIDANCE	AGE	P_i - Extent to which raters agree for the *i*-th category
ANFE	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
CLSE	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.333
COMM	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
CONF	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
COST	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
CRCH	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0.333
DETH	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0.333
DHSS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1.000
EMPL	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
EXAM	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
EXPL	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	1.000
HARD	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0.333
LOST	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1.000
MOVE	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
PATR	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
PEER	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	1.000
PERS	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.333
PREG	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
SICK	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0.333
TIME	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.333
TRAN	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.333
WKLD	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0.333
WORK	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
WRNG	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.333
TOTALS	31	5	4	5	3	0	6	2	16	0	17.333
P_j - Propn. of all assignments to the *j*-th category	0.431	0.069	0.056	0.069	0.042	0.000	0.083	0.028	0.222	0.000	

TABLE 17

Fleiss' kappa statistic shows good strength of agreement between raters (0.63) indicating a good correspondence between categories of themes developed from previous qualitative analysis and analysis of primary reasons for withdrawal in the M.I.S data. This in turn consolidates strength of reliability and credibility in using the M.I.S data for the purposes of inference, direction and guidance in relation to the emergent themes formulated in the previous two chapters and the link between the systems used, data collected and emergent themes are strengthened.

Questions to be asked of the data (In light of the emergent themes established in chapters 6 and 7)

As expected, the data from M.I.S was initially not in a format that enabled direct analysis in relation to this research, but as established in the methodology, value lay in the fact that it could provide further insight into or confirm interpretations through triangulation with analysis of primary data. As established in the methodology section, the following two questions were asked of the data:

- Does the data give rise to unanticipated issues that had not been expressed by questionnaire respondents and/or focus group participants?
- Can/Does the data corroborate the participants' views in relation to emergent themes?

These questions will be discussed in detail via inferential data analysis.

Does the data give rise to unanticipated issues that had not been expressed by questionnaire respondents and/or focus group participants?

Appendix 9 summarises the reasons for withdrawals from the Access to Higher Education programme over the 10 year period (1999/2000 – 2008/09) – see Figure 10 below. The data points to a large proportion of the data showing reasons for withdrawal as 'Never attended' or more worryingly 'No reason given'. This was unanticipated and therefore posed immediate cause for concern.

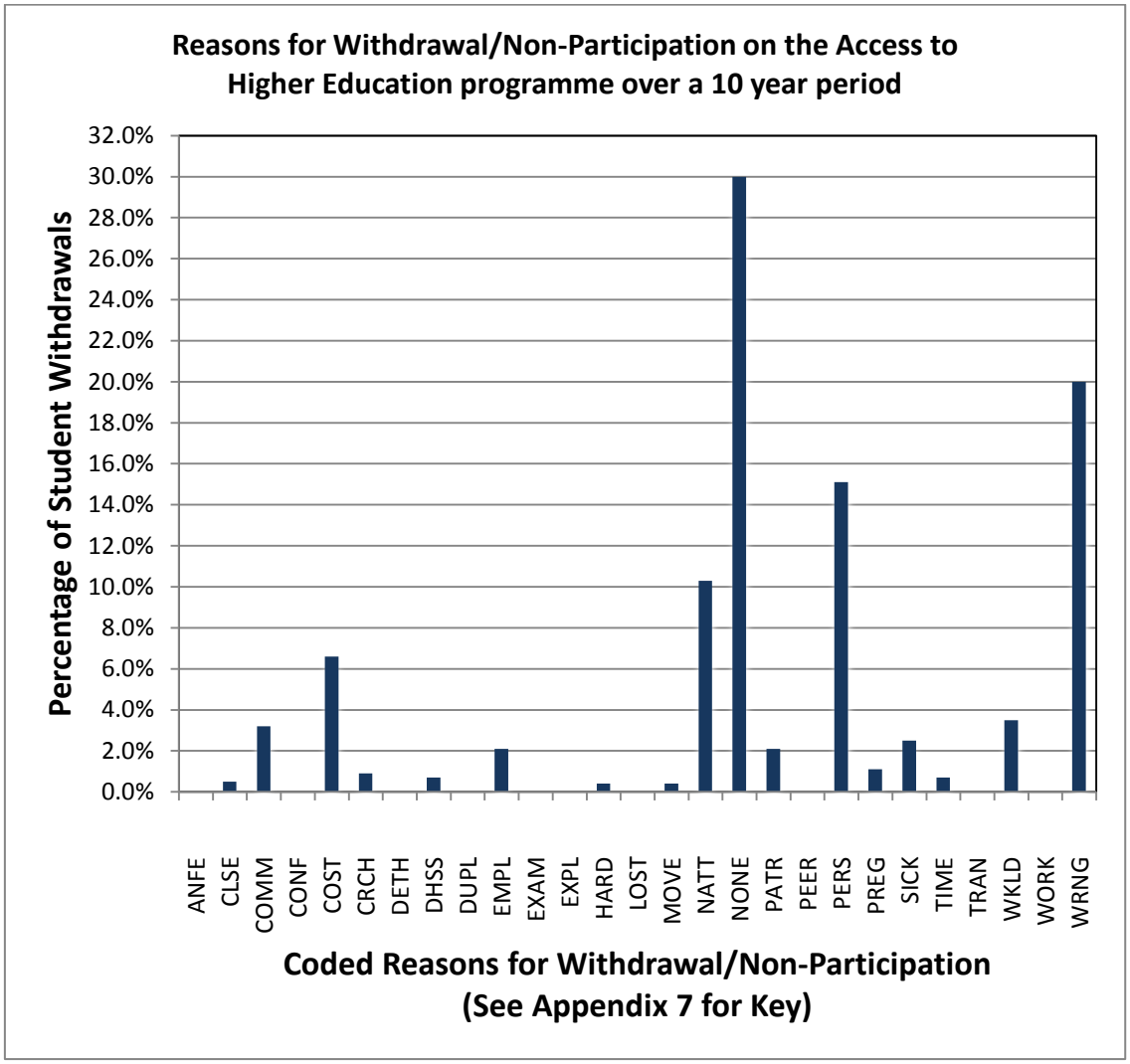


FIGURE 10

It is possible that the themes that emerged from questionnaire and focus group concerning barriers to participation for Access to Higher Education programmes also act to prevent students attending their college course. However this is speculation and all that can really be concluded is that there is a need to reduce the large proportion of cases for which no reason for non-participation is collected.

How can the type of non-information that is gathered with these two categories be avoided in the future? And more importantly how can an alternative form of information be gathered that can assist in an improved policy for participation? In the first instance, to aid collection of such data, a strong argument can be made for improved attendance monitoring. The SLALE research group in Scotland (2007) found that best practice would be served if a system was introduced which involved:

"Staff monitoring attendance, following up non-attendance, then after discussion with the student putting in place a tailored package of support measures – 'a student recovery plan' " (Page 95).

The onus here is on support and guidance. The current system for recording withdrawals at this college suggests unknown factors for non-participation in 40.3% of recorded student withdrawals. If this percentage were generalisable across Further Education colleges, it would point to the need for greater accuracy in data recording and monitoring which could assist in understanding reasons for non-attendance and ultimately non-participation.

<u>Reasons established via withdrawals to account for non-participation.</u>

Having considered the anomaly that presented itself in terms of 'never attended' and 'no reason given', attention is turned to analysing the remaining factors. If 'never attended'

and ‘no reason given’ are not considered, or considered separately, then the next five reasons account for 80.9% of reasons for withdrawal over a 10 year period, which is highly significant and needs further exploration – See Appendix 9 (page 240). These factors are – in order of significance:

a) Wrong Course (33.5%)

b) Personal Problems (25.2%)

c) Financial Problems (11.0%)

d) Workload Too Big (5.9%)

e) No Commitment (5.3%)

Year-on-year trends in relation to these five factors will be established to attempt to address interrelatedness with the emergent themes established in the two previous empirical chapters.

Can/Does the data corroborate the participant’ views in relation to Emergent Themes?

Earlier it was shown that good inter-rater reliability could be achieved between the categorisation of reasons for withdrawal as stated in the M.I.S data and the emergent themes from earlier chapters reported in this thesis. In this section trends in the findings for the top five reasons (see previous section) given in M.I.S data over a ten years period are reported, together with how these reasons were categorised by the three raters in relation to the emergent themes.

Enrolment on Wrong Course

Enrolments onto the wrong course contributed the highest percentage towards total withdrawals (33.5%). Worryingly, the underlying trend shows this problem to be worsening

as can be seen from Figure 11, below, over the 10-year period being studied. It is also interesting to note that the three raters who were used to establish Fleiss' Kappa statistic previously in this chapter all agreed that enrolments onto the wrong course to be primarily attributable to opportunity and relevance.

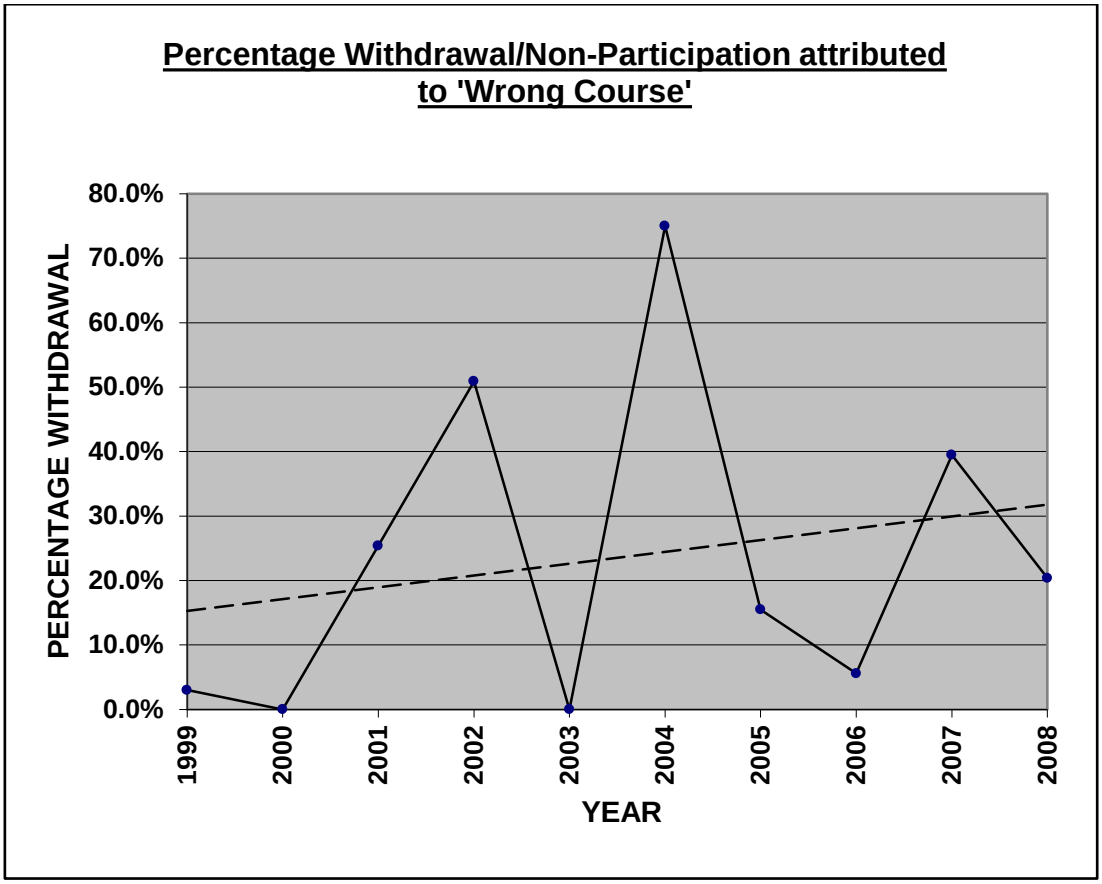


FIGURE 11

All 3 raters noted that marketing and quality guidance have important roles to play in ensuring that withdrawals do not happen due to being enrolled on the wrong course. Information in prospectuses needs to be accurate so as to ensure that students are making the correct informed decision. Changes to this information need to be made as quickly and effectively as possible, and more importantly first points of contact such as front-of-house

need to be made aware as a matter of priority, so that the correct information can be passed on to prospective students with the greatest efficacy.

It is also entirely possible that the method of recording withdrawals due to enrolment on the wrong course needs to be examined more closely. Some of the more common potential pitfalls include:

i) Transferred students being shown to withdraw rather than transfer?

ii) Deferring entry onto a course marked as being withdrawn?

iii) Students moving from full-time to part-time provision?

iv) Students moved to an alternative slot for the same course, therefore wrongly withdrawn from a course rather than transferred to the alternative time slot?

Personal Problems

From Figure 12, overleaf, it can be seen that 'Personal Problems' are gradually increasing as a cited factor for withdrawals/non-participation over the 10-year period being studied. This factor contributes to just over a quarter (25.2%) of the overall withdrawals.

The three raters who assisted with establishing the Fleiss' Kappa statistic previously in this chapter, showed concurrence in relation to primary interrelatedness with emergent themes on 2 occasions – citing 'opportunity' – and on one occasion, 'relevance'. All three raters also referred to both perception and apathy/non-aspiration as being secondary themes as well as on two occasions, the issue of guidance. Guidance may be a key to tackling the complex issue of personal problems as a contributor to non-participation. MacIver (2001) suggests that:

"The most effective advice and guidance services in colleges are those which operate alongside a range of other support services for students, such as welfare advice and personal counselling… [and that]…when these services are based on a whole-college policy for

student support, which also encompasses personal tutoring, they can have a marked effect in increasing the number of students who stay and complete their courses" (Page 7)

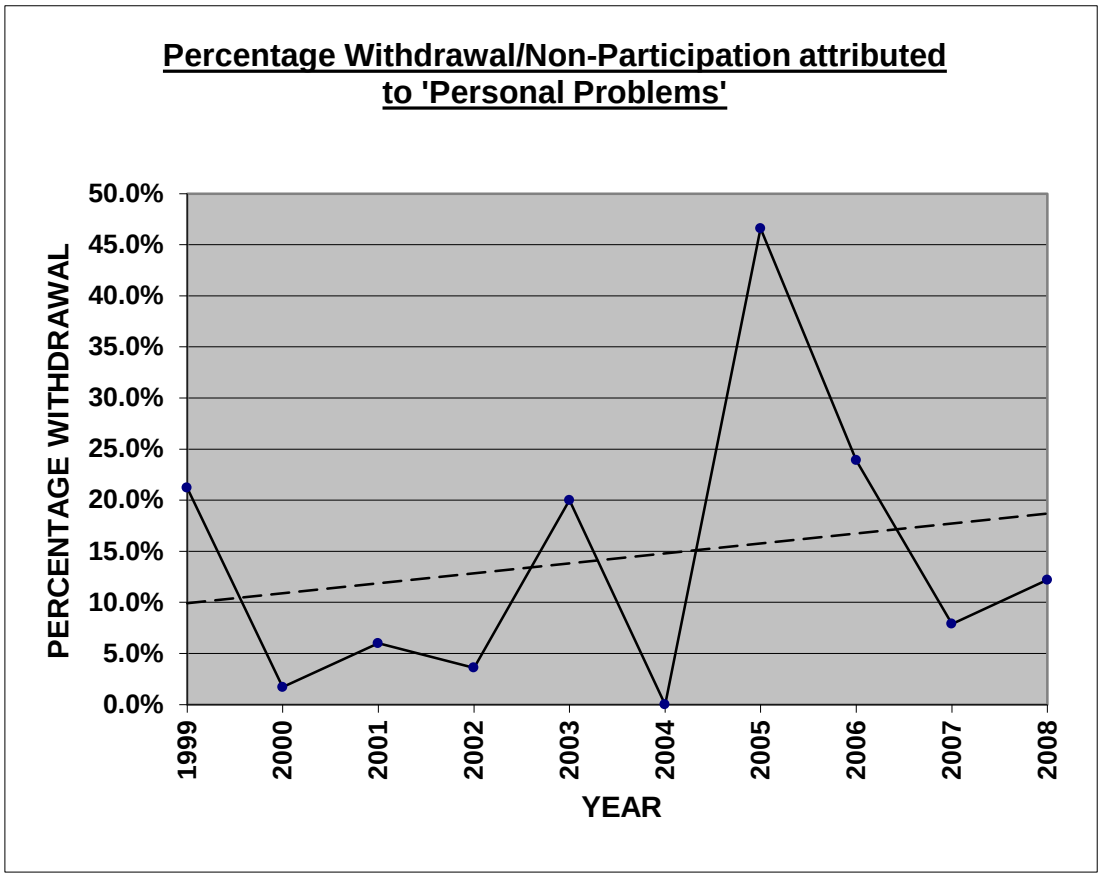


FIGURE 12

In order to ensure that the need to leave during periods in which personal problems are experienced is kept to a minimum staff may require additional guidance training or at the very least, be made aware of a centralised guidance system that students could access in order to discuss personal problems. Flexibility must be a cornerstone in these cases. Rigid assignment extension protocols could be helpful or unhelpful depending on the personal problem being faced. The same can be said for 'leave of absence' and 'one strike and you're

out' type regimens, which if used flexibly and with personal consideration to individual problems, could assist in lessening the problem of withdrawal/non-participation.

Financial Problems

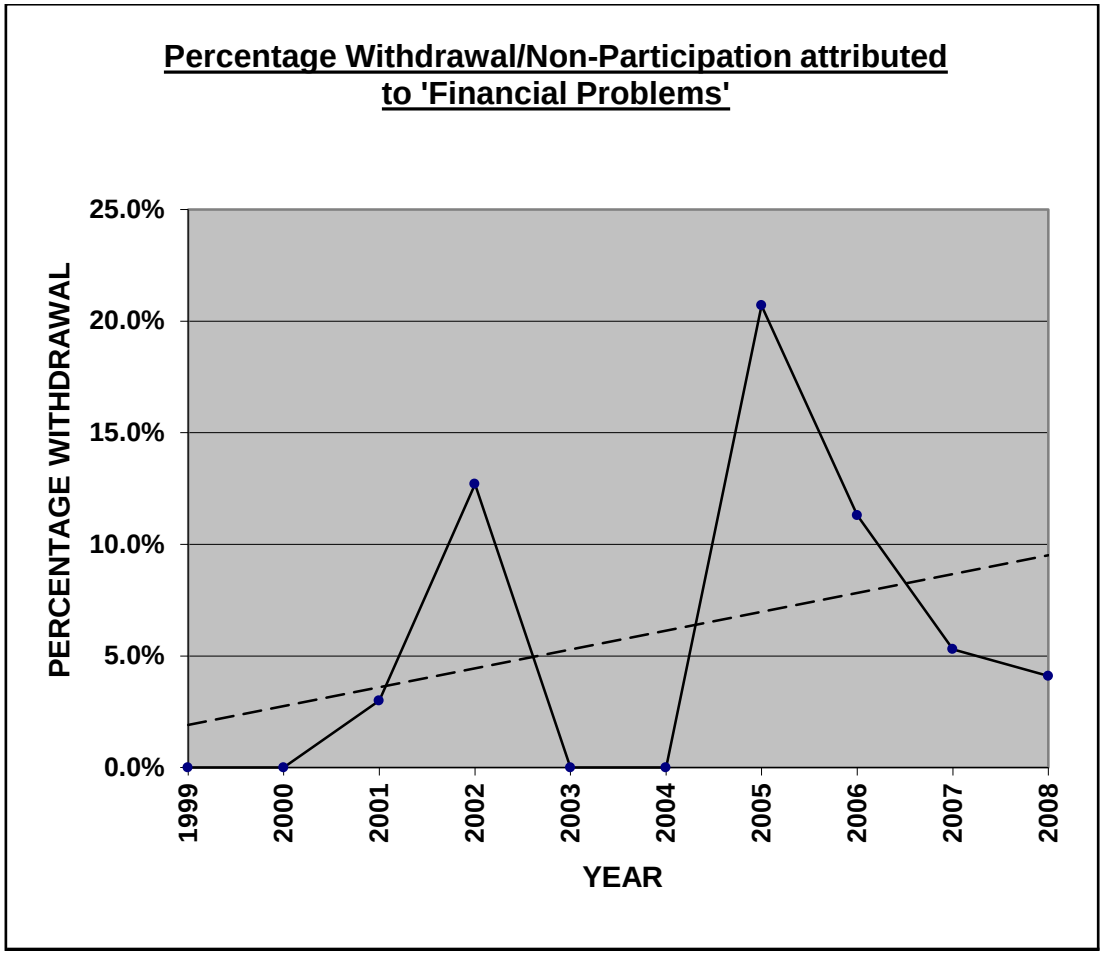


FIGURE 13

Figure 13 shows that the underlying trend for withdrawals due to 'Financial Problems' is a worsening problem and have contributed towards 11.0% of the drop-out rate over the 10-year period being observed. It is also interesting to note that all three raters who helped establish the Fleiss' Kappa statistic previously in this chapter, cited financial problems to be

primarily interrelated with the emergent theme of opportunity. There are currently many schemes in place which are targeted at assisting those with financial issues to participate. Jones (2010) writes that:

"Recent funding initiatives (Adult Learning Grants, Discretionary Learner Support Funds, Care to Learn Schemes, Additional Learning Support for Disabled Students, Skills Accounts, Childcare Grant Parents Learning Allowance Adult Dependents' Grant Disabled Student Allowances and so on) are clearly designed to address financial barriers to participation in adult learning" (Page 34).

So why does the MIS data point towards financial issues showing a worsening underlying trend? The answer to this question may well lie in the case set up on pages 143-144, which relates to the fact that students from working-class backgrounds perceive the relationship between education and paid employment from a different perspective than those from other class backgrounds. Hutchings (2002) writes directly about students from lower social class groups when observing that:

They have to cope with a very complex system that does not enable them to plan their income and expenditure, or to make an economic assessment of the costs and long-term economic benefits of [further] higher education" (Page 155).

Dealing with this 'complex system' can also lead to the necessity to work whilst in education as Hutchings goes further to observe:

"Students from lower social class groups...have the largest and most rapidly rising debts, and are more likely to undertake term-time employment (with possible negative effects on their academic work)" (Page 155).

The trend relating to financial issues consolidates the findings from both the questionnaire responses and the analysis of the student utterances from the focus group. In

each of these cases, it was intimated that financial issues act as a barrier to participation, whereas the MIS data corroborates those findings via an established trend.

Workload Too Big

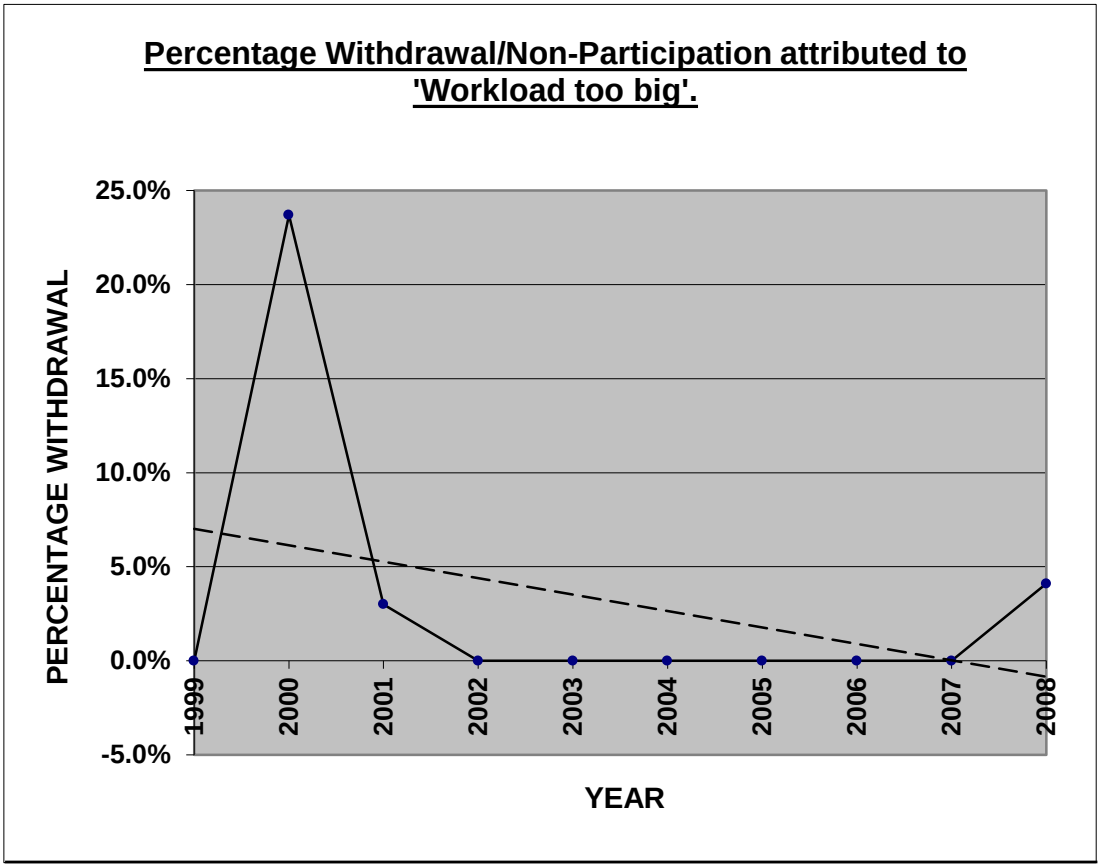


FIGURE 14

Figure 14 shows withdrawals/non-participation due to students' 'Workload too big'. This factor contributed towards 5.9% of the overall withdrawals over the 10 year period. All three raters who were used to establish Fleiss' Kappa statistic previously in this chapter showed concurrence in relation to interrelatedness with emergent themes, citing 'opportunity'

as the primary interrelated theme. Tresman's research into students on OU courses provides parallels for those in Further Education (2002) where she states that:

"In some cases, dropout occurs in relation to individual students' exceeding their personal thresholds, which they have failed to adequately establish through integration of their studies with their lifestyle. When dropping courses, they often cite: "The workload is too great."

However, the issue of how and why the workloads are excessive do not necessarily impact on all students in a purely one-dimensional manner as the 'personal thresholds' that Tresman refers to suggests. For example, any of the following issues or a combination of them could lead to citing "workload too great":

- Students need guidance about how to manage time and workloads;
- There is indeed work overload within the course being studied;
- Students are not provided with adequate study skills to be able to perform effectively on the course they have embarked upon;
- There is deficiency in time that can be allocated to studies outside the college environment due to e.g. childcare issues, part-time work commitments, personal issues etc...

Tresman (2002) goes further to say that:

"It is suggested that course workload be re-examined to ensure it places realistic demands on students while remaining true to learning outcomes...curriculum managers are often helpful in providing additional guidance to students on managing workloads and promoting study skills"

It is therefore important that colleges recognise the need for students to be able to manage time, workloads and extra-curricular interests effectively so as to negate the issue of non-participation due to heavy workloads. Ashby (2004) provides guidance as to how this can be achieved through the use of 'workload maps' as follows:

"Workload maps [should be] designed to help students navigate their way through their courses. The aim is help students plan their time more effectively by providing a realistic picture of what is required at various stages of the course rather than assuming that each week will be the same as far as the amount of work is concerned" (Page 74).

Lack of Commitment

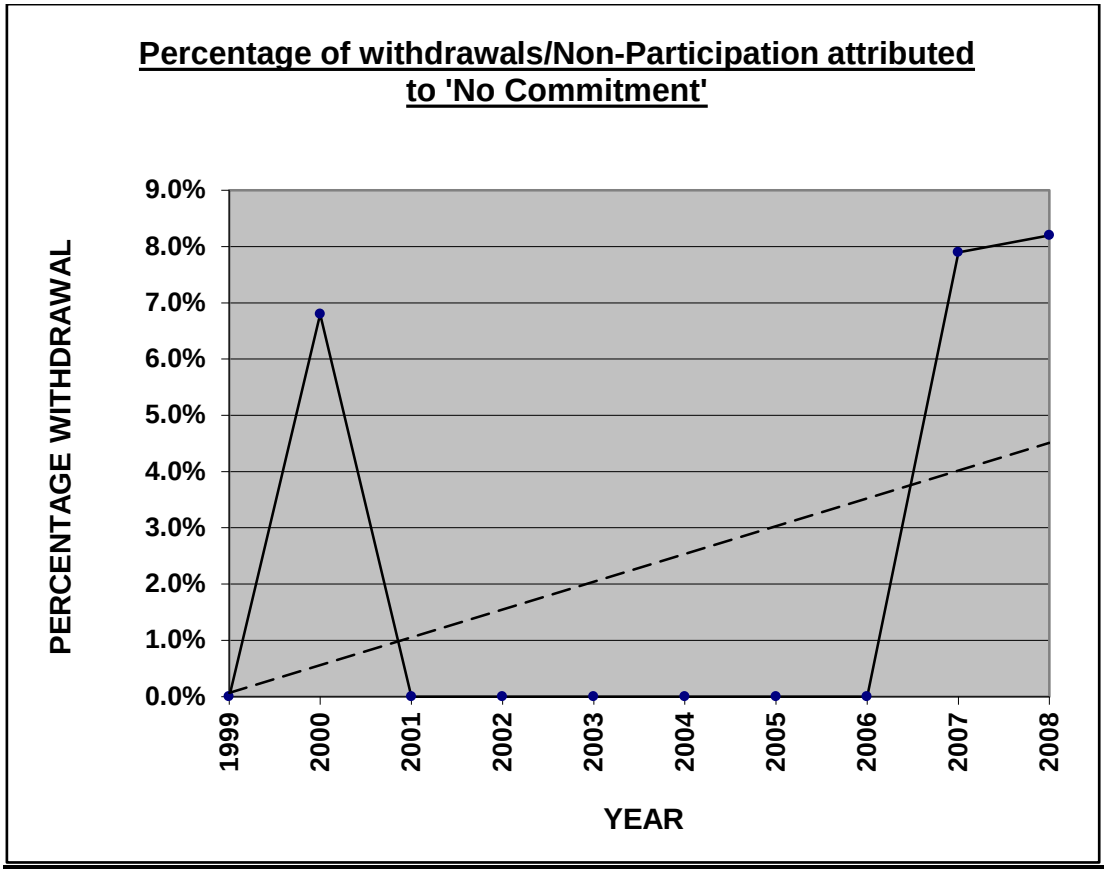


FIGURE 15

It is worrying to note in the case of 'lack of commitment' being cited as a major reason for non-participation due to withdrawal, that the issue is worsening – see Figure 15, above. The 10-year picture shows that lack of commitment contributes to 5.3% of the drop-out rate. From the perspective of perceived interrelatedness of emergent themes, all three raters who established the Fleiss' Kappa statistic previously in this chapter cited lack of commitment to be primarily interrelated with the emergent theme of apathy/non-aspiration.

To attempt to understand this phenomenon necessitates the need for exploration of underlying factors, which will be undertaken through the perspective of my own teaching experience. A primary contributor to lack of commitment is an 'aversion to study a particular course or topic' i.e. perceived lack of relevance to personal aspirations due to course content. There are invariably two junctures at which a participant demonstrates lack of commitment, i.e. during the course due to lack of relevance, or at enrolment. The issue of lack of commitment at the point of enrolment seems paradoxical at first glance. Why would a prospective student enrol onto a course if s/he does not intend to engage with it? In any academic cohort there has always been a proportion of students – from all age backgrounds – who have been there for the 'sake of doing something' rather than being idle. It is also interesting to note that whilst this number usually increases and decreases in proportion with cohort numbers, over the past 2-3 years it has increased quite dramatically. Whilst this is admirable from the perspective that they are at least attending, their contributions once in college are often are of a low standard academically, and in the worst cases this can contribute to a quite disruptive behaviour within the classroom. In attempting to address the issue of why these students feel the need to enter tertiary education my own experience suggests that the answer is two-fold, i.e. recession based pressures and monetary governmental incentives to study. During times of recession and low employment, there is a higher natural tendency to

enter into education. However, this is currently compounded by grants and bursaries that have been introduced such as the Educational Maintenance Allowance, and the Adult Learning Grants that students are eligible for once they re-enter education. Whilst the aim for introducing these allowances has hit governmental targets in terms of increasing numbers within academic cohorts, the fact remains that for many from socially deprived backgrounds it is seen as a secondary source of income during difficult economic periods, which in turn has had a major impact on managing the ever more complex issues that they bring with them.

The reasons for these students' reluctance to return to college are unknown but could include fear or dislike of study due to low self-esteem - perhaps developed through previous school experience and never having developed study habits that work for them. These prior experiences and habits may need to be changed or challenged. Another possibility is that they may not see study as a means to an end or believe that this end is attainable through study *by them* – that they have the capacity to change their situation and that change is achievable *for them*. This reluctance to engage with education can be challenged through the provision of courses that are relevant to the prospective jobs that participants may wish to enter into once the economic climate improves as well as working with students to help them develop good study habits. Gorard and Reece (2002) suggest that:

"Further (including sixth-form) and higher education are still the main growth areas today, while job related training is relatively static. Many people stay in education solely because they cannot get a job, and more because their parents who finance them want them to" (Page 95).

This issue needs to be addressed in order to accommodate the needs of those from socially deprived backgrounds, so as to allow for a much higher degree of relevance and therefore desire to engage because of it.

In Chapter 8 I will revisit the salient findings of the three main empirical chapters in order to establish emergent interrelationships both discretely and from a triangulated perspective. Based on this synthesis I will conclude with some recommendations for further work.

CHAPTER 8

GENERAL SUMMARY, SYNTHESIS AND/OR RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to consolidate the findings of this research, I will refer back to the initial research questions that were established at the end of chapter 3, pages 65-66, and attempt to address them via the central focus of the research, i.e. student perspectives.

Research Question 1

Through the use of students' perspectives explore when and why adults return to education.

- What are the micro- and macro-issues that inform learners' decisions to participate in the Further Education sector?

One of the strengths of using McGivney's initial categorisations and analysis is that it aids in showing how a variety of different factors interact to promote 'readiness to participate'. McGivney's work in turn draws on Cross's 'Chain of Response Model (1981), Rubenson's 'Recruitment Paradigm' (1977) and Darkenwald and Merriam's 'Psychological Interaction Model' (1982). However, in each of these models there are 'stages', an 'order of importance' and 'sequencing'. This research shows that consideration also needs to be given to fluidity in relation to the interrelatedness of its emergent themes. In particular, the student's perspectives have shown that reasons for non-participation are based around the relationship that a person has with self and society. It has also shown that self and society are not discrete but rather intricately interrelated; so that macro and micro-issues do not impact discretely, nor do they impact sequentially. This is in contrast to parts of the contextual

frameworks that were set up in chapter 2, particularly figure 2, page 23 and figure 3, page 27 which have a hierarchical bias. Everything depends on the situation that the prospective student finds him/herself in at any given point in time and crucially, the situation includes how they see themselves in relation to that situation. The fact that any combination of issues is possible at any given time with any prospective student and that individuals react to these complex situations individually, means that it may not be possible to find generic approaches to eliminating factors but rather each individual needs to be guided as to how they might mitigate their influence(s). In many ways Brookfield's (2005) explanation regarding the perception of power as a 'Janus-like phenomenon' (see page 31) has parallels to the findings of this research, i.e. that situatedness can present interrelationships that can be explainable extrinsically and/or intrinsically using hierarchical frameworks, but on the other hand can show high levels of extrinsic v intrinsic contradictions.

- How can the influence of perceived or actual barriers be mitigated?

Student perspective in this research has given direction as to where resources need to be most targeted at an institutional level. M.I.S data shows that the most salient reasons accounted for 80.9% of perceived contributors to non-participation/withdrawal over a 10-year period at this college, each of which have been reported below in order of significance and in each case, guidance from student perspectives and emergent themes have been applied in order to establish possible ways of mitigating barrier effects:

Enrolment on Wrong Course

The underlying trend shows this problem to be rapidly worsening. Enrolment on the wrong course is linked to the emergent theme of opportunity and relevance - as with course/class closures with which there is significant interrelatedness due to the need to fill

classes in order to guarantee their survival. There may be many reasons for a student being enrolled onto the wrong course, both from the institutional perspective as well as the student's, however it could be argued that the most compelling reason for wrong enrolments is two-fold:

Firstly, those who enrol need to do so and would do so ethically, but are stifled by set quotas for class sizes that need to be met. There is a stand-off here where on one side there is the need for ethical enrolments, yet on the other, the need to ensure that the course/class survives. Students may then be enrolled onto a course even though they do not meet with *all* criteria for enrolment onto it to ensure that numbers are met, knowing that the inevitable percentage drop-out would be smaller against a large group size.

Secondly, methods of recording withdrawals due to enrolment on the wrong course need to be examined more closely. High rates of non-enrolment and/or withdrawals (as shown by the MIS data in this research) should lead to a suspicion that there may be fundamental systematic errors contributing to misleading/wrong data entries. Some of the more common pitfalls being that students are double enrolled (showing both on courses from which they have withdrawn and on new courses they have re-enrolled onto); students who have transferred onto an alternative course (for reasons such as relevance / preference) but shown to have withdrawn rather than transferred; students making the decision to decrease workloads by deferring entry onto part-time provision, are wrongly shown as having withdrawn from full time-provision instead of showing as transferred; students moving to an alternative slot for the same course being wrongly withdrawn from a course rather than transferred to the alternative time slot.

College-wide limits placed on viable numbers should be softened or rethought in order to allow for ethical enrolments to take place without losing profitability.

Marketing has an important role to play in ensuring that withdrawals do not happen due to being enrolled on the wrong course. Information in prospectuses needs to be accurate so that students are making the correct informed decisions. Also, guidance during the initial phase of a course is paramount. This could lead to the recognition of lack of relevance in course content, or even actual wrong enrolment onto a course, leading to the movement onto an alternative and more relevant course.

In terms of system errors, enrolments and withdrawals should be actioned by a core team of trained individuals, acting as gatekeepers for accurate data input – be they immediate line managers for teaching staff, senior management, or within trained data inputting teams.

Personal Problems

The underlying trend shows this problem to be worsening. Withdrawals/non-participation attributed to personal problems is extremely problematic inasmuch as there are such a wide variety of issues that can be labelled as being personal. There is also the issue of a high level of subjectivity as issues that are complex and insurmountable to one individual, may be seen as solvable by another.

The key to tackling this complex issue lies in the provision of quality guidance. Staff need to be trained effectively to deal with the issues of guidance or at the very least, be aware of a centralised guidance system that students can access in order to discuss and/or alleviate personal problems. Support and guidance structures need to be accessible as close as possible to the point of inception of the problem in a timely and effective manner.

Financial Problems

The underlying trend suggests that financial issues are increasingly a reason for lack of participation within the college. The research shows that this barrier effect is highly interrelated with increasing or decreasing opportunity, as well as the emergent themes of culture, perception, relevance and guidance. Furthermore, the problem cannot be examined from a one-dimensional perspective as the need for organised finance feeds into many aspects of adult student lives ranging from 'minor' outlays such as transport, food, books and other equipment needed for the course to the 'major' considerations that would still need to be addressed such as childcare provision, paying bills and all other costs related to running a home away from the educational environment.

From the student perspective, the focus group analysis showed that financial reasons factored heavily during the process to decide whether to participate as pointed to by direct utterances such as "Yeah, money problems", "It was like work and stuff and not having any money", "There was no childcare for my littlest one". Furthermore, the questionnaire showed that only 21.6% of students felt that the college catered adequately for financial support (see responses to question 10d in Appendices - Page 225). When interrelatedness is considered in relation to the investment of time that participants have to invest on a full time Access to Higher Education course, it becomes clearer as to why prospective participants may decide not to participate. It has been reasoned during this research that it is not enough to merely have money available via governmental initiatives as a way to alleviate this issue, rather to attempt to understand how students from differing social backgrounds perceive the relationship between paid employment and education, and furthermore, how they react to that perception from a participatory viewpoint.

Workload too big

M.I.S data shows that a major reason for non-participation over the 10-year that has been studied can be contributed to excessive workload. It has been reasoned that it would be unwise to approach this issue from a discrete perspective as personal thresholds and perceptions are naturally subjective and interrelations between those perceptions are complex. It could be inferred, for example, that it may actually be the case that there is work overload within the course being studied; or it may be that students are not provided with adequate study skills to be able to perform effectively on the course they have embarked upon; or that there is deficiency in time that can be allocated to studies outside the college environment due to e.g. childcare issues, part-time work commitments, personal issues etc... However, due to the subjectivity of perception, the differentiation that occurs in ability levels within cohorts, and individual/personal thresholds, it can be deduced that the same factors given above may act in isolation or interact on a complex level and result in highly differentiated outcomes in terms of the decision to participate or drop out.

It is imperative that colleges recognise the need to place realistic demands on students in terms of workloads and furthermore provide guidance in order to manage time, workloads and extra-curricular interests effectively so as to negate the issue of non-participation due to heavy workloads. Student utterances such as “having children [‘being a parent first’]”, “I had problems with regards to medical problems”, “I wasn’t sure if I was able to do it...It was like ‘you dropped out of school and won’t be able to take it’” and “I didn’t think I would be clever enough”, all point to a high level of complexity in terms of the relationship that a prospective has with re-entering education which a heavy workload without guidance would only act to exacerbate.

Lack of commitment towards the course

The underlying trend suggests that this issue is slowly improving. Lack of commitment is highly linked to the emergent theme of apathy/non-aspiration and the research established a link to an aversion to study a particular course or topic which was further compounded by perceived lack of relevance of course content to personal and vocational aspirations. The Leitch Review of Skills (2006) and The Foster Report (2005) both extol the virtues of embedding a culture of learning, improving employability and supplying economically valuable skills (see pages 49-50), however it was found that factors relating to culture, conformity and aspiration come to bear heavily on those for whom tertiary education is not perceived to be the norm. Resultantly, they find it more difficult to access the resources to make those ideals a reality.

There also remains a challenge regarding students entering Further Education for the sake of doing something rather than remaining idle. The problem may be that they remain uncertain about what that 'something' is or how it might help them to move forward. Awareness-raising in terms of achievable aspirations and the study habits they depend on may be needed to achieve a positive cycle going forward.

Lack of relevance leading to an aversion to study a particular topic can be challenged through the provision of courses that are relevant to prospective jobs that participants may wish to enter into, and through making students aware of how developing study habits to achieve pass grades for these courses can lead them to the goal that they desire. However, this factor is probably related to aspiration and a more general aversion to returning to study. Therefore students may need to also believe that such a goal is achievable *by them* since low self-esteem in turn related to past issues with schooling can lead to low aspiration which may need to be addressed first. This latter point also relates to guidance.

Courses should avoid curricular elements that are present for the sake of 'jumping through hoops'. This is a drain on both energy and efforts that have already been made to re-enter into education.

Research Question 2

Barriers and enablers that adults face in returning to education at different stages in their adult lives.

- How and why do adult students form the intention to re-enter education and in what vocational and personal circumstances?

It has been established that the primary extrinsic motivators relating to participation for the target groups within this research are to increase promotion prospects; to up-skill in existing employment; to effect a change of income; to obtain a first degree and/or to effect a change of career.

Intrinsically, participants are motivated by the need to gain intellectual stimulation; to meet people (widen social network) and/or to update knowledge.

These motivators are guided by highly intricate and interrelated underpinning political, economical and cultural perspectives at any given point in time, which can act as either enablers or disablers within the participatory decision making process.

- What are the perceived barriers and enablers to participation in adult education?

In her reporting of the work of Cross in relation to the categorisations of barrier effects to participation, McGivney recognised that Cross's categorisations were an over-simplification of the issues surrounding non-participation. This research has shown that McGivney's basic classifications into Situation, Disposition and Institution, are indeed not

enough…that there are thematic sub-layers that not only inform the initial categories reported by McGivney, but also are dynamically interrelated themselves. These themes cannot be looked at discretely, or by their relationships with initial barrier classifications as to do this would lessen the importance of their effects at any given point in time. The research has shown the establishment of emergent themes (listed on page 135) acting as influences on the initial participatory barriers of Situation, Disposition and Institution that were reported by McGivney. The emergent theme of 'opportunity' acts as a super rather than sub layer and was cited as *the* probable primary enabler/disabler to participation. Financial issues, childcare issues, time constraints, medical issues and family/general support structures, are all highly influential. The research shows that opportunity to participate necessarily becomes the focal point for the decision-making process, as can be seen from Figure 16 overleaf, which shows that factors in outer circles impact on the inner ones to lead to increased/decreased opportunity to participate. Resultantly, the research shows that McGivney's reported initial categorisations of Situation, Disposition and Institution can themselves act as a sub-layer to opportunity.

LAYERS LEADING TO INCREASED/DECREASED OPPORTUNITY

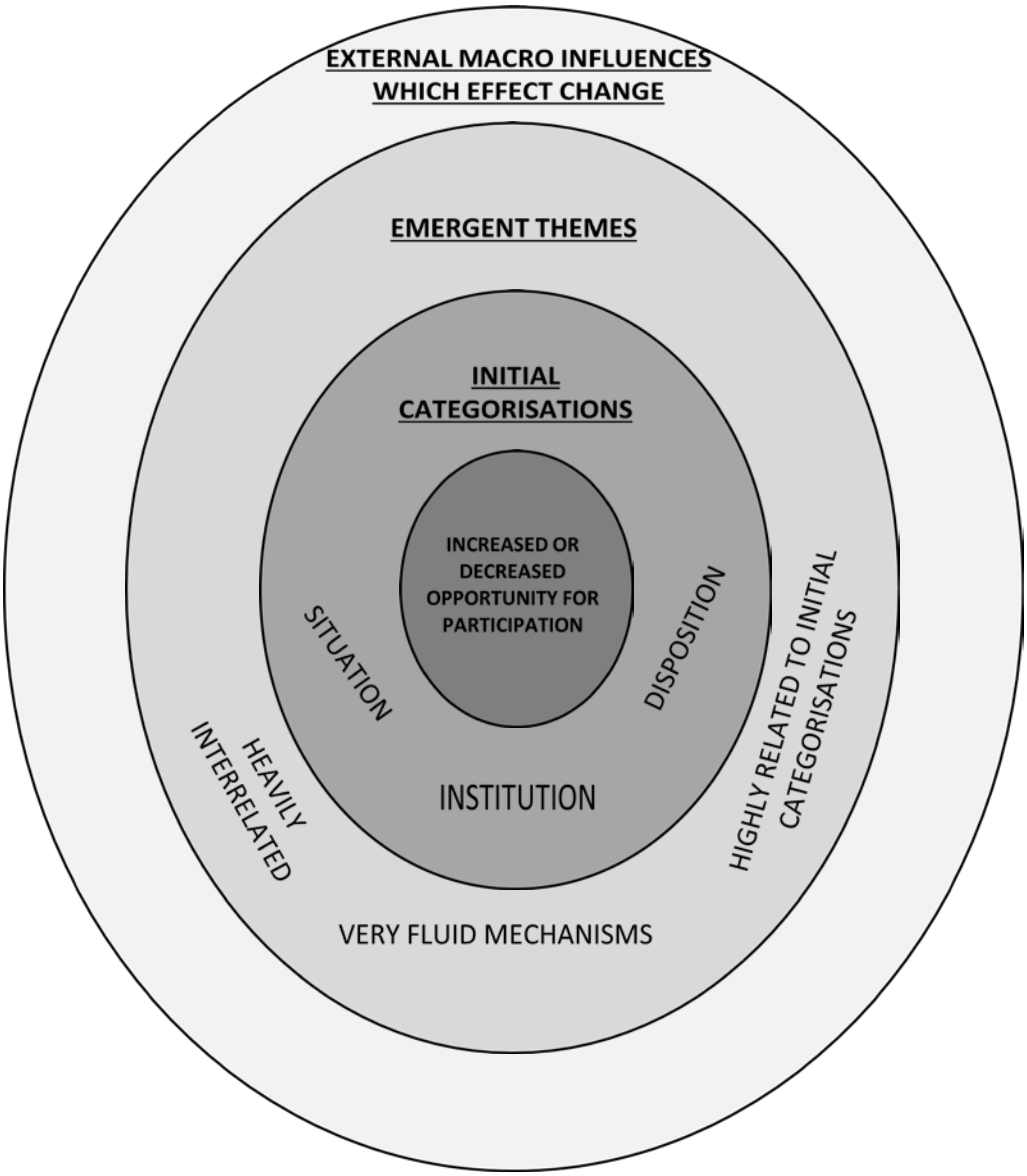
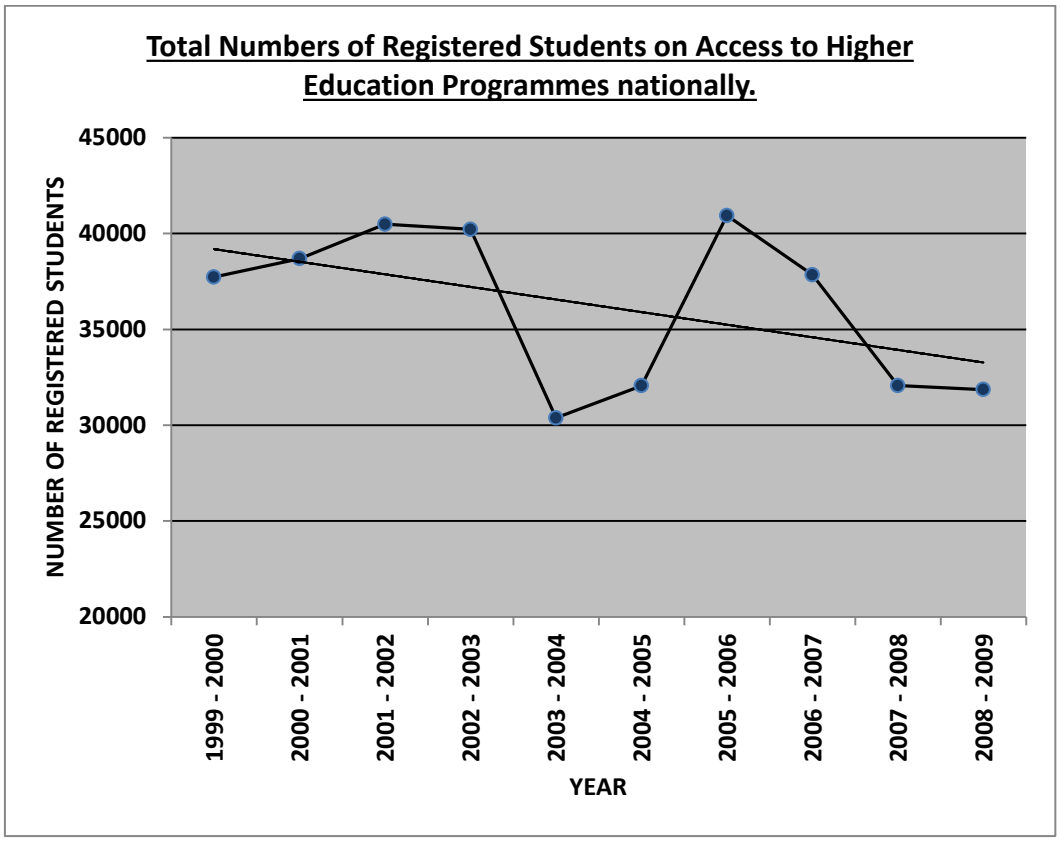


FIGURE 16

To draw out the high level of interrelatedness within figure 16, I will discuss how the emergent barriers/enablers that have been established by this research impact on the strata of initial categorisations and thereafter, opportunity. As the summary progresses, the reader will be signposted to the themes that combine to arrive at the conclusions made – **in bold**.

Participation rates on Access to Higher Education programmes show a negative trend on a national level as figure 17 shows below:



SOURCE:

Adapted from the annual 'Key Statistics' information available at website URL: http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/partners/statistics/

FIGURE 17

At the same time, the percentage gap between genders remains largely constant - at around 50% - in favour of females (see table 12 on page 138). Gender is linked with cultural norms, expectations and identity and subsequently interacts heavily with **opportunity, perception and institutional provision**. It was evident that this was not simply because females have more time available to them in order to re-enter education in comparison with males, but rather that there were complex inter-relationships concerning perceived norms

around gender, employment, childcare and the types of courses on offer. Therefore the educational establishment may need to consider policies and provisions to attract more male students into Further Education as well as the accessibility of these for students who are in employment or have childcare responsibilities. If, as expected, colleges cater for the courses that hold the greatest profit, and if in turn these courses are linked to over simplistic perceptions regarding these issues, then the cycle of non-participation by gender will be perpetuated. An examination of how Governmental initiatives can be used in the college to encourage gender parity, together with an investigation of how cultural norms within the college catchment area impact on the types of student applying to which courses is advisable.

Problems of perception are both extrinsic and intrinsic. The determinants of people's perceptions include their values, beliefs, attitudes, needs and self-experiences. More importantly, the feelings that prospective students have concerning their preferred way of life will affect their perception of their present environment, and this may lead to a perceptual mismatch between that which is felt to be on offer against that which actually is. Managers within educational institutions must accept this start point and either work within the constraints set by the adult entrant, or be able to provide manageable transitional policies that will allow these students to operate effectively within the establishments existing framework – **[opportunity, culture and guidance]**. It is however recognised that although it becomes necessary to be aware of issues of perception from an institutional perspective, a great deal still rests on the shoulders of the prospective participant to actually make that first step and aim to participate. All subsequent efforts are to no avail if this is not achieved. To a certain extent the college can aim to make itself a more attractive place to learn, but if societal pressures and lack of need or vision form the learner causes non- participation, then any amount of effort may not be enough.

Students in the target group were of diverse ages, some having worked in low-paid employment, but most with little or no prospects due to recent coal-pit closures (see pages 3-4 and 55-56). Change in these circumstances is by its very nature perceived to be problematic which can lead to an apathetic view toward Further Education. This view is not so much a lack of care or effort but more a problem with self-esteem or confidence in prospective participants, and resultantly a perceived lack of power to change future course of events- **[apathy, perception and disposition]**. There is also a danger of apathy once the student has enrolled onto a course. This may originate from the student perceiving the course to be at the wrong level, not relevant, not challenging enough, not giving enough support or guidance, or through other factors such as teaching style or otherwise, not engaging them-**[non-aspiration, relevance, guidance and marketing]**.

The research showed that decisions made by the target groups originated from their current place in society and perceptions of alternative positions from that place - **[culture, conformity and perception]** and that the extrinsic/intrinsic interactions that impose cultural constraints upon prospective participants arise through the economic and social conditions that they presuppose, and moreover, their ability to react/relate to those presuppositions. For example, out of short-term necessity, prospective students may find the need to prioritise paid employment over the need to re-enter education, but it would perhaps benefit them more to understand the importance of both - **[opportunity, conformity, relevance and guidance].** It is over-simplistic to perpetuate the suggestion that people from lower socio-economic classes may not value education as highly as other groups and so be less willing to forfeit other activities (including employment) in preference to education; or that they may simply have no experience of it. The research suggests that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds

tend to feel Further Education is out of reach and unachievable – **[perception, marketing, culture, conformity, guidance].**

Once enrolled however, the research concurs with Bourdieu's viewpoint regarding cultural capital as reported by Thomas (2005: page 120); that "working class students were less successful not because they were of inferior intelligence...but because the curriculum was biased in favour of those things which middle-class students were already extra-curricularly familiar". Pressures of social conformity which initially may have acted against re-entry to education such as gender, age, social class, family constraints and perception of what awaits if the step to participate were taken, now act to deter continuation. It can take a great deal of courage and character to act against such pressures. The socio-cultural environment that causes an individual to perceive Further Education to be outside the norm of behaviour is one that can be exceptionally difficult to break out of. The prospective participant has to contend with potential isolation from those groups with whom they usually associate themselves, and the formation of new alliances with like-minded people – any combination of interrelationships amongst emergent themes is possible here, dependent on the viewpoint of the individual and his/her relationship with self and society. Interrelationships at this stage are possibly multi-faceted but necessarily highly fluid. It is important that they make the break and to do so it is recognised that they will need targeted support and guidance. It may help those needing such support if those who have taken such a leap in the past can be involved in giving this kind of guidance. Social approval, through contact with others from similar backgrounds who have taken the step to participate in college, might provide both a useful model and motivate students who are disaffected – with particular reference to 14-16 year old provision – to change attitudes towards study. In cases such as these, outreach programmes may be an alternative way to access these students, which in turn, must be

marketed through intelligent, targeted campaigns. If College is seen as a relevant path to employment and/or Further/Higher education can be secured by them, it will be seen as an attainable goal and a resource to return to throughout the life-span for these students. Not surprisingly then, a great deal depends on the way a college markets itself to its potential catchment area(s). Gibbs and Knapp (2002) state that:

"It is essential to put the educational offering into the context of a marketing process, for it is the logical progression within the process that can help institutions understand who are their 'customers', how their needs are changing, and how an institution needs to adapt, develop and change to meet these needs" (Page 1).

The need for well-targeted advertising campaigns that commend relevant courses and the ethos of the establishment to that catchment area cannot be underestimated. If at an institutional level there is low expectation of the prospective participants, then by providing less academic courses the institutional reputation is harmed and it becomes a less attractive place for those students who wish to follow the more academic courses. It may be felt that this is an obvious point to make, however, the fact that the research has indicated reputation and marketing process as a potential barrier effect to entry, suggest that there is work to do at both ends of the aspirational scale - [**relevance, apathy, perception, marketing, culture, conformity, guidance]**.

A regularly cited emergent theme for lack of participation was that of age. Due to cultural/societal norms, age, like gender, is often experienced as a strong pressure to conform in particular ways. This problem is compounded by the fact that students are much more reluctant to re-engage with education if they have been away from it for a long time. There is a salvageable point for the prospective participant who has been away from education for up to 15 years. Much more beyond this age lead to excessive time-disengagement and tends to

lead to non-participation. 85% of students in the target groups of this research were 19-39 years of age. In order for the college to be one that is wholly inclusive, greater provision needs to be made for prospective students outside this age bracket.

Finally, if a prospective student cannot see any value in re-entering education and can see no direct incentive, be that extrinsic or intrinsic to enrol onto a course, then this acts as a powerful reason for lack of participation. Relevance of courses and the content within that course are of high importance in the hierarchy of the decision-making process for the prospective participant. Lack of relevance becomes highly focussed upon due to the already large impact that re-entry into education has to prospective students' established lives. The need for participants to feel that they will be taught those skills that are needed to move them on to the next stage of their life journey is therefore of paramount importance, without the added complication of irrelevant material. Consequently, well-timed and professional guidance is a necessary element to ensure that retention is maximised. Guidance is central throughout the duration of student's contact with the college, that is, from first impressions through to exit polls. There is a need for interventions at critical points which will be felt with differing levels of influence dependent on where they fall within the college journey, and more importantly, how specific students react to them. These include entrance requirements and available courses at enrolment; organisation of time, money, childcare facilities, etc…; learning how to learn again for returning students; dealing with unforeseen issues such as illness, bereavement, loss of income, etc… during the college period and how to prepare for the challenges beyond Further Education, all of which can be met by the teacher whose role should not be restricted to delivering subject material but to guide, counsel, motivate and ultimately prepare students adequately for the next step of their journey.

- For those students who have overcome barriers how does the actual experience of participation in Further Education match with their expectations of it?

If consideration is given to the fact that in most years success rates of the target group of students in this research are between 96%-100%, and that just over 90% secured a place at the University of their own choice, then it could be argued that the aspirations of those who have overcome established barriers to participation have on the whole been met. However, precise data that would show exact reasons for withdrawal needs to be highly prioritised so that retention figures can be maximised. At the time of writing, the only figures that can be explored are those provided by a withdrawal form that is not always completed correctly, not always followed up and lacking in depth of choice in terms of reasons for withdrawal.

Triangulated target group data shows that overall, a significant proportion of retained participants stated that their experiences did match aspirations, the most salient points being that they felt that the college had guided them through a relevant, targeted and worthwhile process. It was felt that the quality of teaching/subject specialism was of a high standard. Guidance at entry, during the course and at exit was perceived as being of good quality. Students did feel that courses were badly advertised, however they felt that the college was an excellent local service that needed to be more visible within the community.

Research Question 3

Implications for the role of educators in the formulation of a 'framework for participation':

- What are the issues involved in generating a framework for participation within the college catchment area?

Relative to reasons for lack of participation, an effective framework depends on the reporting of accurate information. It is unacceptable that large numbers of students are being reported as withdrawn from courses due to 'No Reason Given'. More critically, the proportion of students not participating due to the reported factor as 'Never Attended' is unacceptably high. To negate the effects of these two factors an effective two-pronged attack consisting of clear categories relating to withdrawal along the lines of the emergent themes from this research, coupled with the training of staff to more effectively complete the withdrawal form, would lead to a much smaller proportion of unknowns. There should be no compulsion on behalf of those who organise the withdrawal form to work within the constraints of this or any other research findings, rather to be open to accurate reasons for non-participation that are both reflective and practical.

- <u>What type of framework could be implemented not only to assist in widening participation of adult students but also relate to the specific needs of the community within the college catchment area?</u>

Attention to this problem necessitates a great deal of time and investment on behalf of Further Education colleges if the aim of widening participation is to be truly achieved. There are consequences here not only for the college(s) deciding to take this path, but also for the 'theory of widening participation'. The main thrust of this type of framework is grounded in the problematic area of 'individual needs' which was discussed at length in the literature review, pages 44-47. Colleges and researchers must ensure that barrier-effects are not seen as one-dimensional, rather a fluid situation which changes at points in time according to the needs of the potential participant and the society/culture within which they operate. As argued in the literature review, it is not good enough to assume that all individual needs can

be catered for all of the time in a generalisable way, as to suggest this would assume that all educators are open to the same or a similar interpretation of all individual needs. This is a false assumption due to the fact that the educators themselves are subjective products of their own pasts and will therefore perceive individual needs from differing perspectives.

The discourse of 'individual needs' should point colleges and researchers to the *situatedness* of participants from differing backgrounds, as it is only by giving situatedness consideration, that any framework can act to assist in the successful negotiation of challenges that participants face at any given point. Here, the word 'framework' also causes a problem as it presupposes the need for categorisations and classifications. For example, if a student were to withdraw from a course mid-way, how could the reason for withdrawal be placed in a neat box when there may be many interrelated issues that come to bear on the decision made? Moreover, how could any 'withdrawal form' be so flexible as to allow for all possible reasons for withdrawal and any possible interrelation of those issues at any given point in time? This research shows that it would be more advisable to put a system into place that would involve a student-tailored package of support measures – 'a student recovery plan'. The onus would be on support and guidance to ensure that an effective recovery plan was in place to establish whether the perceived reasons for non-participation from both the student and institution's perspective could be mitigated. For example, an effective two-pronged attack might consist of - but not be necessarily confined to – an attempt to more clearly define categories relating to withdrawal together with training for staff to more effectively complete the form(s) relating to the reasons for withdrawal. However, more than this, once such data can be relied upon to more reliably record reasons for withdrawal, emerging patterns could be used to suggest strategies for intervention earlier in the student's progress, i.e. to spot potential issues

for students in advance and so trigger additional support and guidance at the point when it is needed.

Figures 18 (page 201) and 19 (page 202), show possible frameworks that emerge from this research. The reason for there being more than one framework has been argued above as it would be wrong to presuppose that any one framework would suit all institutions within all catchment areas. However, in all cases it is imperative that increased/decreased opportunity to participate is the focal point, with the initial categorisations of Situation, Disposition and Institution sitting in the next ring outwards.

Figure 18 shows an example of a more simplistic framework, whereby emergent themes from this research are directly attributable to the initial categorisations of Situation, Disposition and Institution. Certain themes such as Guidance, Gender, Age and Relevance are used on more than one occasion to show that they can be attributable to more than one of the initial categorisations. At other times the themes are used at a juncture between two initial categorisations to show that the theme is relevant to the interaction between them. For example, if we look at Guidance placed between Disposition and Institution, it would be logical to argue that if a prospective participant were to have a dispositional reason for non-participation within any institution it would be the emergent theme of guidance that could act as a mediator to reconcile differences. The diagram moves further to show that there are many external macro/micro influences that come to bear on the decision making process, all of which can be heavily interrelated.

Figure 19 shows a more targeted scenario, whereby the influences that come to bear on the decision-making process are more highly categorised. For example, here we see that the macro/micro factors are attributed to the initial categorisations, or at a juncture between them. Each of these influences forms a two-way process between themselves and the initial

categorisation, each informing the other. Marketing is placed at Institutional level, whereas Guidance is attributed to the dispositional aspect that the prospective student finds him/herself in. It is also recognised that staff and student demography, culture and conformity may differ giving rise to different standpoints, but that as we move to the centre of the diagram, they need to have a workable level of reconciliation.

It is important to therefore note that the high levels of interactions and interrelatedness between macro/micro influences, emergent themes and initial categories, necessarily leads to this research being viewed as a methodology that can be used to inform the construction of a framework for participation that is tailor made to suit the typology of students within specific catchments areas, the ethos of the college itself and the requirements of local environments.

EMERGENT THEMES DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO INITIAL CATEGORISATIONS

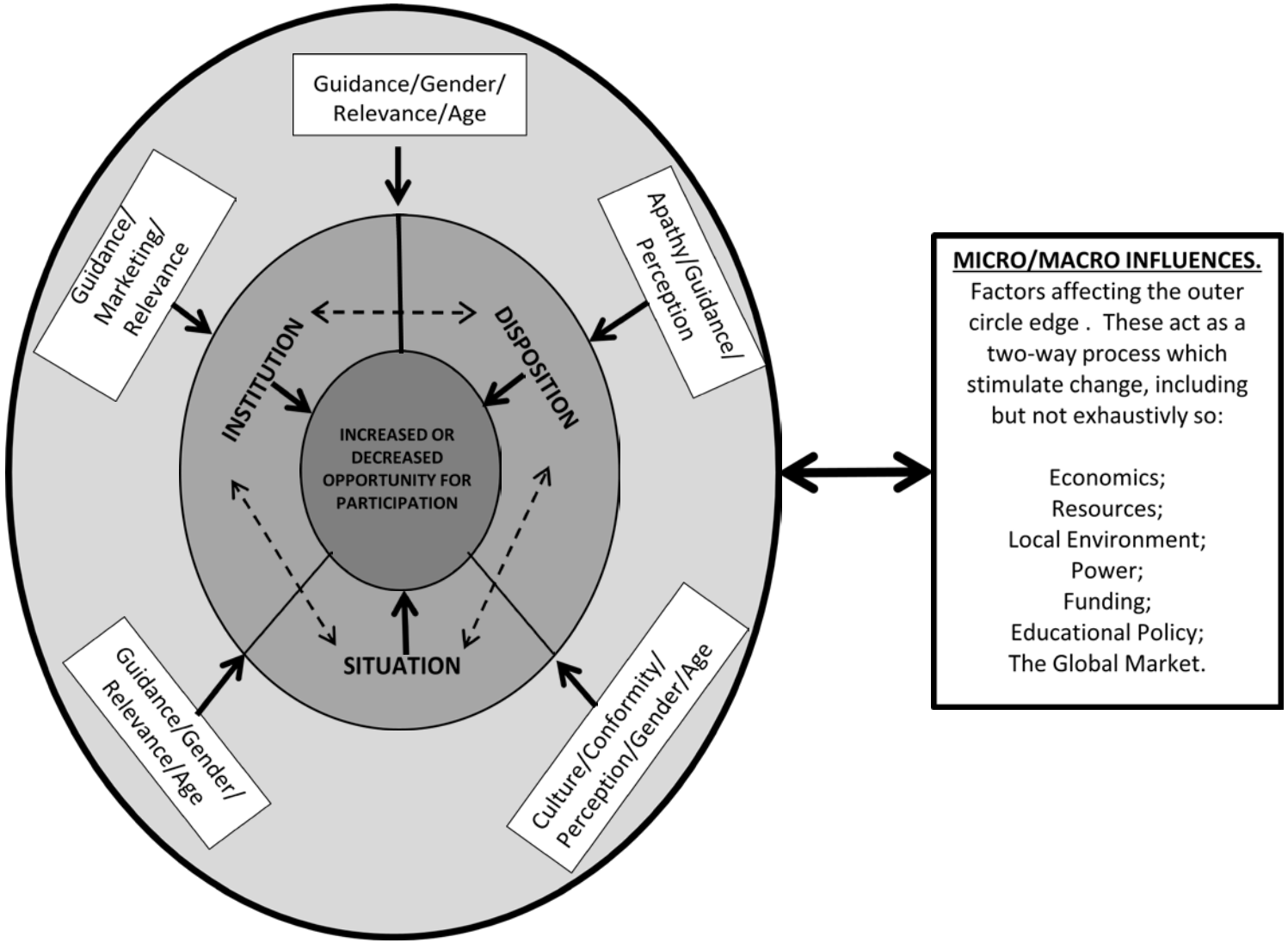


FIGURE 18

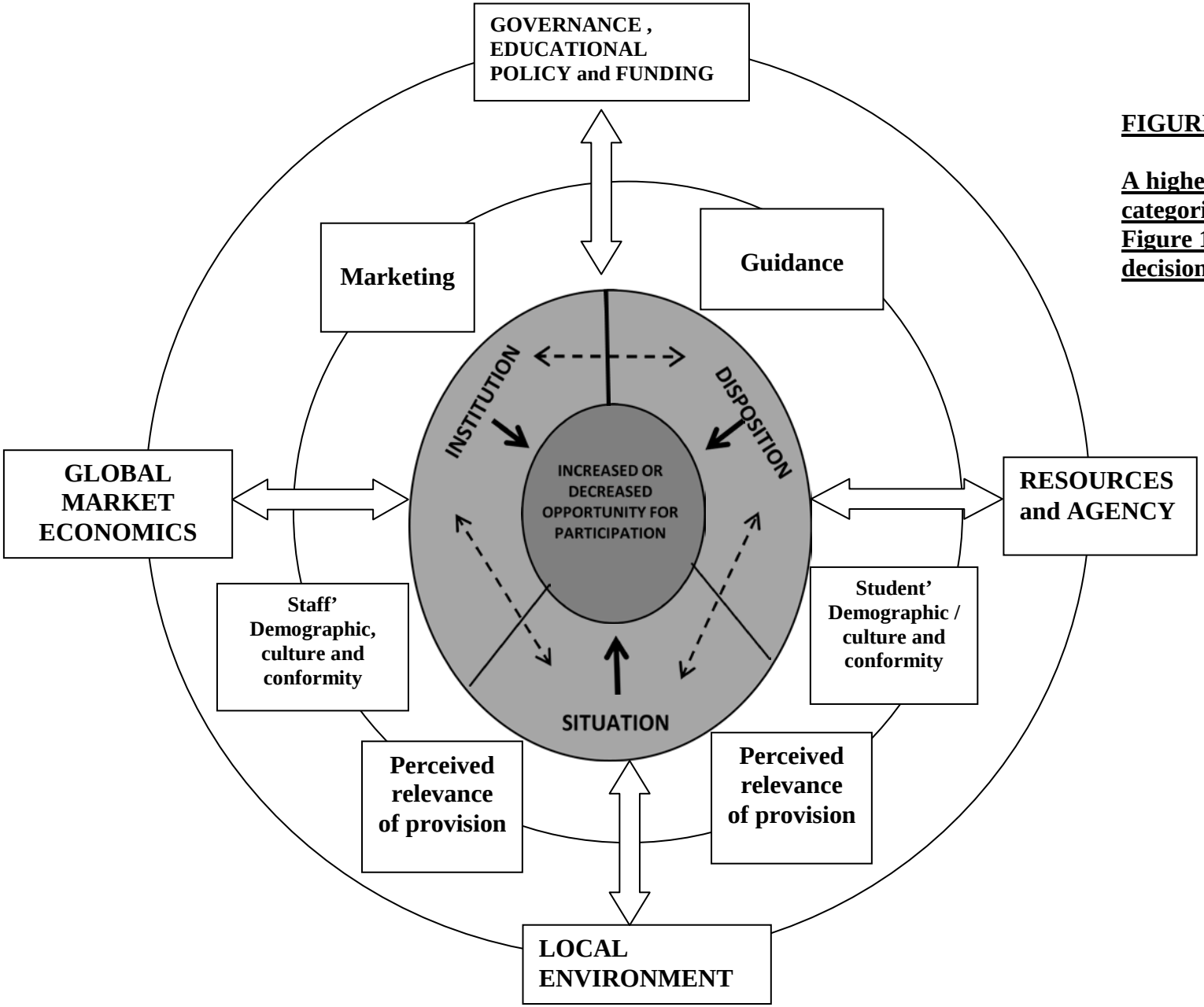


FIGURE 19

A higher level of categorisation than Figure 18, informing the decision to participate

LIMITATIONS AND SUCCESSES OF THE RESEARCH AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER WORK

Throughout this research I have been aware of the fact that it has been undertaken within a specific college and that leaves the research open to a claim that it may lack generalisability. However, this is the premise upon which the research was founded (see Chapter 4 –Methodology). It is not claimed here that all colleges will have the same issues concerning widening participation as this college but rather that similar colleges in similar situations might also want to look for factors emerging here to see if they help explain trends in their own institutions. Moreover, the framework emerging here, if used across a number of such studies, might help in the quest to inform practice concerning both the reasons why students do or do not participate and what may help overcome barriers to participation. Stakeholders in all colleges must tailor the findings of this research to their specific students, taking into consideration the typology of prospective participants and their needs.

The main lessons that have been learned having undertaking this research are based around those aspects that would allow for data arising from methodological triangulation to show greater generalisability and validity. This is not to say that all attempts have not been made to optimise both in this research, as they have. Rather that further work could benefit from the insights into methodological processes that have been learned from this study. In terms of the questionnaire, it would promote generalisability if it were administered to a much larger sample size, from a larger breadth of the student population on a cross-college basis, and to colleges either multi-regionally or nationally. Questionnaires could be handed out in-situ or by post, but whichever way were chosen, credibility would be better served if a pilot were conducted to iron out any issues that would arise both in terms of administration, and final evaluation/analyses. In relation to the focus group, there would be the need to have

more than one and to build in one-to-one interviews so that those opinions that were unable to be shared in a group forum could be brought to bear on the final analysis. Wherever possible, there is the need to contextualise utterances so that the spoken word is not manipulated to fit any subjective findings from the researcher's viewpoint, rather as objectively as possible they are analysed within the context that they were spoken. Data from management information systems were highly useful in this research in order to give credence to the interrelatedness of themes that emerged from the questionnaire and focus groups, i.e. establishing historical trends that both validated and gave greater credibility to emergent themes. M.I.S data would therefore be a great asset to any further research that were to follow from this work. The main problem that arises from using data from management information systems is that it is not initially collected to answer academic research-based questions and the danger is that it can be manipulated to validate any outcomes. It is therefore imperative to ask questions ethically, honestly and openly enough to let the data tell its own story.

In terms of the successes of the research, the methods used have been strong enough to generate some really interesting emergent themes. I have been able to establish that the issues of non- participation within the sector are not able to be pinned down to any one factor – rather that there are many factors that inform the decision-making process of a potential student that act as sub layers to the initial categories reported by McGivney. These factors act upon the individual at a given point in time and are subject to change and are relative to how the prospective student sees their relationship to self and society at many levels. Added to this is the complication that the barriers that have been established are themselves intricately interrelated and perceived to act upon each other differently at different times, dependent on the students' perception. Any unified theory concerning acceptance of participation in Further Education would therefore have to acknowledge the situated nature of the student's

decision to participate – particularly in terms of sensitivity to local context. Although this research has established emergent themes, they cannot be looked at discretely and should not be categorised in terms of importance or hierarchy, as any one of the themes could be perceived to have a greater impact on any one individual at a given moment in time, due to the fact that people react to barrier-effects on an individual basis.

Having established this highly fluid dynamic, the challenges that face Further Education colleges would need to focus on how to accommodate it in order to mitigate barrier-effects and to maximise retention and success. There is a need for further work, possibly in the format of a 'test and refine' type of research project to further crystallise the findings of this work, where the effects of emergent themes are tested and research questions refined in the light of those findings. This research provides a start point for that type of research. For example, how do the effects of emergent themes impact on prospective participants and ultimately effect the decision to participate? Do any combinations impact more than others? What are the mechanisms that allow for or accommodate interrelatedness of barrier effects that have been shown to be emergent themes in this research? Much needs to be done in order that mechanisms become policies within Further Education colleges which can work towards facilitating the intricate set of parameters that are highlighted by this research.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire about YOUR views of the Access to Higher Education course.

I am currently researching views from students on your course.
I would be grateful if you could take some time to complete this questionnaire.
All information provided will be dealt with in strict confidence.

1.	**Please tick your gender**	Male	☐
		Female	☐
2.	**Please tick your age range**	19 - 29 years	☐
		30 - 39 years	☐
		40 - 49 years	☐
		50 - 59 years	☐
		60 - 69 years	☐
3.	**Please tick your ethnic group** ***(OPTIONAL)***	Afro-Caribbean	☐
		African	☐
		Black : Other	☐
		Asian : Indian	☐
		Asian : Pakistani	☐
		Asian : Bangladeshi	☐
		Asian : Chinese	☐
		Asian : Other	☐
		White : European	☐
		White : Other	☐
4.	**What is your current employment status? (Please tick the appropriate box)**	Employed Full Time	☐
		Employed Part Time	☐
		Not Employed	☐
5.	**Are you currently raising a young family? (Please tick the appropriate box)**	Yes	☐
		No	☐
6.	**If yes, please tick the category into which your children fall :**	Pre-school age	☐
		School age	☐
7.	**How many years were you out of education before you attended this course? (Please tick the appropriate box)**	1 - 5 years	☐
		6 - 10 years	☐
		11 - 15 years	☐
		16 - 20 years	☐
		21 - 25 years	☐
		> 25 years	☐

8. **Please rate the following factors as influences that kept you away from education :**
(Please circle your rating for all influences)

a)	*You felt you were qualified enough*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
b)	*You needed to start earning*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
c)	*Family Commitments*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
d)	*Education had no relevance to your life*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
e)	*OTHER* *Please state up to 3 reasons and rate them*				
.		*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
.		*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
.		*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*

9. What are your main reasons for returning to education?
(Please circle the appropriate responses)

a)	*To increase promotion prospects*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
b)	*To gain intellectual stimulation*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
c)	*To meet people*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
d)	*To update your knowledge*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
e)	*To increase your skills at work*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
f)	*To obtain a first degree*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
g)	*A change of income*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
h)	*A change of career*	*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
i)	*OTHER* *Please state up to 3 reasons and rate them*				
.		*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
.		*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*
.		*Irrelevant*	*A Factor*	*Important*	*Very Important*

10. Does this college cater adequately for the following areas?
(Please circle the appropriate responses)

a)	*Relevance of the course to your needs*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
b)	*Quality of teaching*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
c)	*Fitting the course into your available time*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
d)	*Financial support*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
e)	*Crèche facilities (If applicable)*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
f)	*Guidance - At Entry*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
g)	*Guidance - During the course*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
h)	*Guidance - At Exit*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
i)	*Publicity/Advertising of the course*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
j)	*Quality of information - Before Entry*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
k)	*Quality of information - At Entry*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
l)	*Quality of information - During the course*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
m)	*Quality of information - At Exit*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

Thank You

Date **May/June 2006/2007**

APPENDIX 2A

QUESTIONS FOR THE FOCUS GROUP

As part of research that I am currently undertaking, I wish to explore your views regarding participation within this college. The following ten questions, which you will be asked to discuss in a small group, are central to this research.

1. How long were you away from education before you applied for the Access to Higher Education Programme?

2. What were the main personal reasons that kept you away from education?

3. What was the change in your personal outlook/circumstances that allowed you to return to education?

4. What were the main situations that kept you away from education?

5. What was the change in your situational outlook/circumstances that allowed you to return to education?

6. What was your perception of Further Education before you re-entered education?

7. As a general overview, why did you decide to return to education?

8. Do you feel that the college has catered for all of your educational and holistic needs?

9. How, if at all, do you think that your experience of this college could have been improved?

10. Why do you feel that the vast majority of students on the Access to Higher Education course are females?

APPENDIX 2B

RESPONSE SHEET FOR THE FOCUS GROUP

PERSONAL (DISPOSITIONAL)
1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.
SITUATIONAL
1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.
INSTITUTIONAL
1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.
OTHER
1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.

APPENDIX 3

COLLATED RESPONSES FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Question Number	Possible Responses	Totals	Total %
1	Male	**14**	*11.20%*
	Female	**111**	*88.80%*
2	19-29	**52**	*41.60%*
	30-39	**54**	*43.20%*
	40-49	**15**	*12.00%*
	50-59	**4**	*3.20%*
	60-69	**0**	*0.00%*
3	Afro-Caribbean	**2**	*1.60%*
	African	**0**	*0.00%*
	Other black	**0**	*0.00%*
	As/Indian	**0**	*0.00%*
	As/Pakistani	**0**	*0.00%*
	As/Bangladeshi	**0**	*0.00%*
	As/Chinese	**0**	*0.00%*
	S.E. Asian	**0**	*0.00%*
	White/European	**100**	*80.00%*
	White/Other	**23**	*18.40%*
4	Full Time	**16**	*12.80%*
	Part Time	**65**	*52.00%*
	Not Employed	**44**	*35.20%*
5	Yes	**83**	*67.48%*
	No	**40**	*32.52%*
6	Pre-School	**23**	*25.27%*
	School	**68**	*74.73%*
7	1-5	**46**	*36.80%*
	6-10	**17**	*13.60%*
	11-15	**24**	*19.20%*
	16-20	**27**	*21.60%*
	21-25	**7**	*5.60%*
	>25	**4**	*3.20%*
8a	Irrelevant	**95**	*76.00%*
	A factor	**17**	*13.60%*
	Important	**10**	*8.00%*
	Very Important	**3**	*2.40%*

Question Number	Possible Responses	Totals	Total %
8b	Irrelevant	**49**	*39.20%*
	A factor	**27**	*21.60%*
	Important	**26**	*20.80%*
	Very Important	**23**	*18.40%*
8c	Irrelevant	**52**	*41.60%*
	A factor	**12**	*9.60%*
	Important	**18**	*14.40%*
	Very Important	**43**	*34.40%*
8d	Irrelevant	**63**	*50.40%*
	A factor	**51**	*40.80%*
	Important	**11**	*8.80%*
	Very Important	**0**	*0.00%*
9a	Irrelevant	**42**	*33.60%*
	A factor	**19**	*15.20%*
	Important	**28**	*22.40%*
	Very Important	**36**	*28.80%*
9b	Irrelevant	**9**	*7.20%*
	A factor	**27**	*21.60%*
	Important	**51**	*40.80%*
	Very Important	**38**	*30.40%*
9c	Irrelevant	**30**	*24.00%*
	A factor	**52**	*41.60%*
	Important	**31**	*24.80%*
	Very Important	**12**	*9.60%*
9d	Irrelevant	**6**	*4.80%*
	A factor	**23**	*18.40%*
	Important	**48**	*38.40%*
	Very Important	**48**	*38.40%*
9e	Irrelevant	**21**	*16.80%*
	A factor	**27**	*21.60%*
	Important	**38**	*30.40%*
	Very Important	**39**	*31.20%*
9f	Irrelevant	**19**	*15.20%*
	A factor	**8**	*6.40%*
	Important	**30**	*24.00%*
	Very Important	**68**	*54.40%*

Question Number	Possible Responses	Totals	Total %
9g	Irrelevant	28	22.40%
	A factor	14	11.20%
	Important	31	24.80%
	Very Important	52	41.60%
9h	Irrelevant	14	11.20%
	A factor	17	13.60%
	Important	15	12.00%
	Very Important	79	63.20%
10a	Strongly Disagree	2	1.60%
	Disagree	3	2.40%
	Neutral	22	17.60%
	Agree	69	55.20%
	Strongly Agree	29	23.20%
10b	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%
	Disagree	8	6.40%
	Neutral	12	9.60%
	Agree	64	51.20%
	Strongly Agree	41	32.80%
10c	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%
	Disagree	4	3.20%
	Neutral	17	13.60%
	Agree	67	53.60%
	Strongly Agree	37	29.60%
10d	Strongly Disagree	8	6.40%
	Disagree	35	28.00%
	Neutral	55	44.00%
	Agree	17	13.60%
	Strongly Agree	10	8.00%
10e	Strongly Disagree	10	10.64%
	Disagree	2	2.13%
	Neutral	63	67.02%
	Agree	10	10.64%
	Strongly Agree	9	9.57%

Question Number	Possible Responses	Totals	Total %
10f	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%
	Disagree	1	0.80%
	Neutral	34	27.20%
	Agree	69	55.20%
	Strongly Agree	21	16.80%
10g	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%
	Disagree	8	6.40%
	Neutral	17	13.60%
	Agree	69	55.20%
	Strongly Agree	31	24.80%
10h	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%
	Disagree	4	3.20%
	Neutral	45	36.00%
	Agree	60	48.00%
	Strongly Agree	16	12.80%
10i	Strongly Disagree	3	2.40%
	Disagree	39	31.20%
	Neutral	64	51.20%
	Agree	19	15.20%
	Strongly Agree	0	0.00%
10j	Strongly Disagree	3	2.40%
	Disagree	13	10.40%
	Neutral	35	28.00%
	Agree	69	55.20%
	Strongly Agree	5	4.00%
10k	Strongly Disagree	3	2.40%
	Disagree	2	1.60%
	Neutral	30	24.00%
	Agree	73	58.40%
	Strongly Agree	17	13.60%
10l	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%
	Disagree	8	6.40%
	Neutral	24	19.20%
	Agree	69	55.20%
	Strongly Agree	24	19.20%
10m	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%
	Disagree	2	1.60%
	Neutral	54	43.20%
	Agree	53	42.40%
	Strongly Agree	16	12.80%

Application of Initial Barrier Coding by 2 raters (Phase 1) **APPENDIX 4**

Utterance No. (From Transcript)	UTTERANCE	Rater 1 - Me	Rater 2 - Colleague
58	*Yeah, Money problems*	S	S
60	*There was no childcare for my littlest one*	S	S
69	*I didn't think I'd be able to cope time-wise. Time was a big worry for me*	S	S
71	*Because of having children*	S	S
71	*The situation was bigger than the personal thing really*	S	S
82	*I had problems with regards to medical problems*	S	S
91	*I think you realise that some people don't like you doing anything*	S	D
93	*I've got several friends that backed away when I started this. Two of them were jealous*	S	S
97	*My other half, he's like my best friend, and he wouldn't encourage me.*	S	S
113	*It was a big joke at first (Other's perceptions)*	S	D
121	*My friends first gave me a week, then two weeks. They said "I'll give you a month, you won't do it."*	S	S
141	*It was like work and stuff, and not having any money.*	S	S
144	*I already had a brilliant job, nice car and nice holidays. But after having kids I got bored and thought "I want to go back to college".*	S	S
155	*Childcare*	S	S
156	*It's such a step from leaving something you are quite familiar with, outside of your comfort zone, throwing it all away. You know you can't go back and say, "I want my job back".*	S	D
235	*When you're in a relationship as well…[family/commitment as a barrier]*	S	S
244	*When I was at school, all the lads wanted to do was leave here and go down the pit for the money.*	S	D
264	*I think a man would have to feel twice as secure [in terms of income before moving in to education]*	S	D
331	*You've got children at home, and night-time is their time, so that's very awkward [studying part time in the evenings]*	S	S
	TOTAL COUNT OF CONCORDANT UTTERANCES		14

Utterance No. (From Transcript)	UTTERANCE	Rater 1 - Me	Rater 2 - Colleague
61	*I wasn't sure if I would be able to do it, to be a bit more fair. I was like, "you dropped out of school and won't be able to take it".*	D	D
62	*I didn't think I would be clever enough*	D	D
63	*I was like "Will I drop out"*	D	D
64	*I worked in a shop and thought that was all I could do*	D	D
66	*I didn't do very well at school*	D	D
68	*Just scared really, of what to expect. What was expected? What would happen? If I'd be able to do it.*	D	D
73	*I wasn't sure. That was my main problem.*	D	D
73	*I didn't want to start it and not complete it.*	D	D
73	*I had to feel it was right*	D	D
139	*It was just actually making a step forward and doing it*	D	D
157	*There's like a step as well, like a transition…*	D	S
159	*It never felt right. I felt I had too much guilt for the kids.*	D	S
161	*We've always known that we've wanted to do something…but it's doing that little step*	D	D
189	*I've got children, but it wasn't a problem for me to get to college, it was just me and doing stuff…*	D	D
199	*19 year old lads think it's quite feminine …to do a course like this.*	D	D
216	*Scared, Scared of learning.*	D	D
233	*It's a masking thing isn't it? [Males tend to hide behind a mask…they won't take a step into Further Education due to inhibitions and fears]…*	D	D
234	*As a woman, once you've had children you don't care, you sort of lose your inhibitions. There's nothing more scary is there? [than having a baby]*	D	S
267	*I don't think that a lot of men would like to feel supported by their wife/[partner] financially…[thus restricting themselves to not entering into Further Education]*	D	D
269	*My husband was bought up very old school, women stayed at home and cooked and cleaned, and the men went out to work…It's still very much like that…he wouldn't go back to college.*	D	D
	TOTAL COUNT OF CONCORDANT UTTERANCES		17

Utterance No. (From Transcript)	UTTERANCE	Rater 1 - Me	Rater 2 - Colleague
33	*Tutors are supportive*	I	I
33	*Not every college does it like this (Acceptable style)*	I	I
43	*Walsall has got a lot worse reputation*	I	I
43	*I felt like I was walking around on my own*	I	D
46	*Walsall check for your English and Maths*	I	I
66	*I was shocked when I came to the Induction day, and you were going around saying "What do you want to be?"*	I	D
191	*I thought it was something for young people*	I	I
194	*When I looked into it (joining the Access course), it said this course starts at 19. I thought that was quite young for a mature student.*	I	I
194	*Prospectus states "This course [Access to Higher Education] starts at 19".....I thought I would be like a granddad….older than the teachers.*	I	I
197	*Last year [students were] a lot older. This year, there were a lot of young ones..*	I	D
201	*Some courses are directed at men intentionally [which is why males traditionally go to them rather than the Access course]*	I	I
204	*Yeah, it [prospectus] says Midwifery, Nursing, Primary teacher…which are like female dominated areas.*	I	I
208	*I think that the age level is a big thing [students being classed as mature at 19+]*	I	D
212	*I thought I wouldn't fit in…just me the granny, and that I ain't going to make friends.*	I	D
278	*When I came in I didn't know there was an Access course or anything. I came in and said "I need to sit my GCSE's".*	I	I
305	*[This] College is very much that; it keeps itself in [this area]…it's not broadly advertised is it?*	I	I
314	*I think you ought to do Geography and the Humanities…GCSE's and 'A' levels…History…but there was no reference to it [in the prospectus]*	I	I
330	*I think a lot of the part-time courses are in the evenings…The daytimes are so much easier for me, I could come in at most times, I'd just have to get the children to nursery.*	I	I
342	*I don't think it's wide enough you know [provision of educational courses]. And that's one thing that I was unsure about before I came here.*	I	I
343	*There's an awful lot of hairdressing, those types of courses, not so much academic courses.*	I	I
346	*If I'd have seen the prospectus, actually I'd have thought, "Oh no! Do they really do the academic side of it then?"…I wouldn't have known, you just follow what sort of prospectus you're given.*	I	I
	TOTAL COUNT OF CONCORDANT UTTERANCES		16

APPENDIX 5

Showing application of Layered Coding by 2 raters (Phase 2)

Utterance No. (From Transcript)	UTTERANCE	Rater 1 - Me	Rater 2 - Colleague
58	*Yeah, Money problems*	S, I	S, I
60	*There was no childcare for my littlest one*	S, I	S, I
69	*I didn't think I'd be able to cope time-wise. Time was a big worry for me*	S, I	S, I
71	*Because of having children*	S, I	S, D, I
71	*The situation was bigger than the personal thing really*	S, I	S, I
82	*I had problems with regards to medical problems*	S, D	S, D
91	*I think you realise that some people don't like you doing anything*	S, D	D
93	*I've got several friends that backed away when I started this. Two of them were jealous*	S, D	S, D
97	*My other half, he's like my best friend, and he wouldn't encourage me.*	S, D	S, D
113	*It was a big joke at first (Other's perceptions)*	S, D	D, S
121	*My friends first gave me a week, then two weeks. They said "I'll give you a month, you won't do it."*	S, D	S, D
141	*It was like work and stuff, and not having any money.*	S, D	S, D, I
144	*I already had a brilliant job, nice car and nice holidays. But after having kids I got bored and thought "I want to go back to college".*	S	S
155	*Childcare*	S, I	S, I
156	*It's such a step from leaving something you are quite familiar with, outside of your comfort zone, throwing it all away. You know you can't go back and say, "I want my job back".*	S, D, I	D
235	*When you're in a relationship as well…[family/commitment as a barrier]*	S	S, D
244	*When I was at school, all the lads wanted to do was leave here and go down the pit for the money.*	S	D, S
264	*I think a man would have to feel twice as secure [in terms of income before moving in to education]*	S	D, S
331	*You've got children at home, and night-time is their time, so that's very awkward [studying part time in the evenings]*	S	S
	TOTAL COUNT OF CONCORDANT UTTERANCES		12

Utterance No. (From Transcript)	UTTERANCE	Rater 1 - Me	Rater 2 - Colleague
61	*I wasn't sure if I would be able to do it, to be a bit more fair. I was like, "you dropped out of school and won't be able to take it".*	D, I	D, I
62	*I didn't think I would be clever enough*	D, I	D
63	*I was like "Will I drop out"*	D, I	D, I
64	*I worked in a shop and thought that was all I could do*	D	D
66	*I didn't do very well at school*	D	D
68	*Just scared really, of what to expect. What was expected? What would happen? If I'd be able to do it.*	D, I	D
73	*I wasn't sure. That was my main problem.*	D	D
73	*I didn't want to start it and not complete it.*	D, I	D
73	*I had to feel it was right*	D, I	D, I
139	*It was just actually making a step forward and doing it*	D,S	D,I
157	*There's like a step as well, like a transition…*	D, I, S	S, D
159	*It never felt right. I felt I had too much guilt for the kids.*	D	S, D
161	*We've always known that we've wanted to do something…but it's doing that little step*	D, I	D, I
189	*I've got children, but it wasn't a problem for me to get to college, it was just me and doing stuff…*	D, S	D, S
199	*19 year old lads think it's quite feminine …to do a course like this.*	D, I	D, I
216	*Scared, Scared of learning.*	D, I	D
233	*It's a masking thing isn't it? [Males tend to hide behind a mask…they won't take a step into Further Education due to inhibitions and fears]…*	D, I	D, I
234	*As a woman, once you've had children you don't care, you sort of lose your inhibitions. There's nothing more scary is there? [than having a baby]*	D, I	S, D
267	*I don't think that a lot of men would like to feel supported by their wife/[partner] financially…[thus restricting themselves to not entering into Further Education]*	D, S, I	D
269	*My husband was bought up very old school, women stayed at home and cooked and cleaned, and the men went out to work…It's still very much like that…he wouldn't go back to college.*	D, S, I	D
	TOTAL COUNT OF CONCORDANT UTTERANCES		10

Utterance No. (From Transcript)	UTTERANCE	Rater 1 - Me	Rater 2 - Colleague
33	*Tutors are supportive*	I	I
33	*Not every college does it like this (Acceptable style)*	I, D	I, D
43	*Walsall has got a lot worse reputation*	I	I
43	*I felt like I was walking around on my own*	I, D	D, I, S
46	*Walsall check for your English and Maths*	I, D	I, D
66	*I was shocked when I came to the Induction day, and you were going around saying "What do you want to be?"*	I	D
191	*I thought it was something for young people*	I	I
194	*When I looked into it (joining the Access course), it said this course starts at 19. I thought that was quite young for a mature student.*	I, D	I, D
194	*Prospectus states "This course [Access to Higher Education] starts at 19".....I thought I would be like a granddad....older than the teachers.*	I, D	I, D
197	*Last year [students were] a lot older. This year, there were a lot of young ones..*	I, D	D, I
201	*Some courses are directed at men intentionally [which is why males traditionally go to them rather than the Access course]*	I, D	I, D
204	*Yeah, it [prospectus] says Midwifery, Nursing, Primary teacher…which are like female dominated areas.*	I, D	I, D
208	*I think that the age level is a big thing [students being classed as mature at 19+]*	I, D	D, S
212	*I thought I wouldn't fit in…just me the granny, and that I ain't going to make friends.*	I, D	D
278	*When I came in I didn't know there was an Access course or anything. I came in and said "I need to sit my GCSE's".*	I	I, S
305	*[This] College is very much that; it keeps itself in [this area]…it's not broadly advertised is it?*	I	I
314	*I think you ought to do Geography and the Humanities…GCSE's and 'A' levels…History…but there was no reference to it [in the prospectus]*	I	I
330	*I think a lot of the part-time courses are in the evenings…The daytimes are so much easier for me, I could come in at most times, I'd just have to get the children to nursery.*	I, S	I, S
342	*I don't think it's wide enough you know [provision of educational courses]. And that's one thing that I was unsure about before I came here.*	I	I
343	*There's an awful lot of hairdressing, those types of courses, not so much academic courses.*	I	I
346	*If I'd have seen the prospectus, actually I'd have thought, "Oh no! Do they really do the academic side of it then?"…I wouldn't have known, you just follow what sort of prospectus you're given.*	I	I
	TOTAL COUNT OF CONCORDANT UTTERANCES		16

APPENDIX 6

Application of Emergent Themes to Focus Group Utterances

UTTERANCE	UTTERANCE NUMBER	SITUATIONAL	DISPOSITIONAL	INSTITUTIONAL	OPPORTUNITY	APATHY/NON-ASPIRATION	PERCEPTION	RELEVANCE	GENDER	CULTURAL	CONFORMITY	REPUTATION & MARKETING	GUIDANCE	AGE
Yeah, Money problems	58	✓			✓			✓						
There was no childcare for my littlest one	60	✓		✓	✓							✓		
I didn't think I'd be able to cope time-wise. Time was a big worry for me	69	✓		✓	✓			✓					✓	
Because of having children	71	✓		✓	✓		✓					✓	✓	
The situation was bigger than the personal thing really	71	✓		✓	✓		✓					✓	✓	
I had problems with regards to medical problems	82	✓	✓		✓								✓	
I think you realise that some people don't like you doing anything	91	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓			
I've got several friends that backed away when I started this. Two of them were jealous	93	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓			
My other half, he's like my best friend, and he wouldn't encourage me.	97	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			
It was a big joke at first (Other's perceptions)	113	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓			
My friends first gave me a week, then two weeks. They said "I'll give you a month, you won't do it."	121	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓			
It was like work and stuff, and not having any money.	141	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓			✓	
I already had a brilliant job, nice car and nice holidays. But after having kids I got bored and thought "I want to go back to college".	144	✓				✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Childcare	155	✓		✓	✓		✓					✓	✓	
It's such a step from leaving something you are quite familiar with, outside of your comfort zone, throwing it all away. You know you can't go back and say, "I want my job back".	156	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
When you're in a relationship as well…[family/commitment as a barrier]	235	✓			✓			✓				✓	✓	
When I was at school, all the lads wanted to do was leave here and go down the pit for the money.	244	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
I think a man would have to feel twice as secure [in terms of income before moving in to education]	264	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
You've got children at home, and night-time is their time, so that's very awkward [studying part time in the evenings]	331	✓			✓					✓			✓	
INITIAL : SITUATIONAL (TOTALS)		19	8	6	11	3	12	8	3	10	7	9	12	0

UTTERANCE	UTTERANCE NUMBER	SITUATIONAL	DISPOSITIONAL	INSTITUTIONAL	OPPORTUNITY	APATHY/NON-ASPIRATION	PERCEPTION	RELEVANCE	GENDER	CULTURAL	CONFORMITY	REPUTATION & MARKETING	GUIDANCE	AGE
I wasn't sure if I would be able to do it, to be a bit more fair. I was like, "you dropped out of school and won't be able to take it".	61		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓		
I didn't think I would be clever enough	62		✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓		
I was like "Will I drop out"	63		✓	✓			✓				✓	✓		
I worked in a shop and thought that was all I could do	64		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		
I didn't do very well at school	66		✓				✓				✓	✓		
Just scared really, of what to expect. What was expected? What would happen? If I'd be able to do it.	68		✓	✓			✓			✓		✓	✓	
I wasn't sure. That was my main problem.	73		✓			✓	✓	✓					✓	
I didn't want to start it and not complete it.	73		✓	✓			✓					✓	✓	
I had to feel it was right	73		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
It was just actually making a step forward and doing it	139		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	
There's like a step as well, like a transition…	157	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓				✓	
It never felt right. I felt I had too much guilt for the kids.	159		✓			✓	✓	✓					✓	
We've always known that we've wanted to do something…but it's doing that little step	161		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	
I've got children, but it wasn't a problem for me to get to college, it was just me and doing stuff…	189	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	
19 year old lads think it's quite feminine …to do a course like this.	199		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scared, Scared of learning.	216		✓	✓		✓	✓					✓	✓	
It's a masking thing isn't it? [Males tend to hide behind a mask…they won't take a step into Further Education due to inhibitions and fears]…	233		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
As a woman, once you've had children you don't care, you sort of lose your inhibitions. There's nothing more scary is there? [than having a baby]	234		✓	✓	✓									
I don't think that a lot of men would like to feel supported by their wife/[partner] financially…[thus restricting themselves to not entering into Further Education]	267	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
My husband was bought up very old school, women stayed at home and cooked and cleaned, and the men went out to work…It's still very much like that…he wouldn't go back to college.	269	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
INITIAL : DISPOSITIONAL (TOTALS)		4	20	15	7	11	18	8	5	7	8	13	14	1

UTTERANCE	UTTERANCE NUMBER	SITUATIONAL	DISPOSITIONAL	INSTITUTIONAL	OPPORTUNITY	APATHY/NON-ASPIRATION	PERCEPTION	RELEVANCE	GENDER	CULTURAL	CONFORMITY	REPUTATION & MARKETING	GUIDANCE	AGE
Tutors are supportive	33			✓			✓					✓		
Not every college does it like this (Acceptable style)	33		✓	✓			✓					✓		
****** has got a lot worse reputation*	43			✓			✓					✓		
I felt like I was walking around on my own	43		✓	✓			✓					✓	✓	
Walsall check for your English and Maths	46		✓	✓			✓					✓		
I was shocked when I came to the Induction day, and you were going around saying "What do you want to be?"	66			✓			✓					✓	✓	
I thought it was something for young people	191			✓			✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
When I looked into it (joining the Access course), it said this course starts at 19. I thought that was quite young for a mature student.	194		✓	✓			✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
Prospectus states "This course [Access to Higher Education] starts at 19".....I thought I would be like a granddad….older than the teachers.	194		✓	✓			✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
Last year [students were] a lot older. This year, there were a lot of young ones..	197		✓	✓			✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
Some courses are directed at men intentionally [which is why males traditionally go to them rather than the Access course]	201		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Yeah, it [prospectus] says Midwifery, Nursing, Primary teacher…which are like female dominated areas.	204		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
I think that the age level is a big thing [students being classed as mature at 19+]	208		✓	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I thought I wouldn't fit in…just me the granny, and that I ain't going to make friends.	212		✓	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
When I came in I didn't know there was an Access course or anything. I came in and said "I need to sit my GCSE's".	278			✓			✓					✓	✓	
[This] College is very much that; it keeps itself in [this area]…it's not broadly advertised is it?	305			✓						✓		✓	✓	
I think you ought to do Geography and the Humanities…GCSE's and 'A' levels…History…but there was no reference to it [in the prospectus]	314			✓				✓						
I think a lot of the part-time courses are in the evenings…The daytimes are so much easier for me, I could come in at most times, I'd just have to get the children to nursery.	330	✓		✓				✓						

UTTERANCE	UTTERANCE NUMBER	SITUATIONAL	DISPOSITIONAL	INSTITUTIONAL	OPPORTUNITY	APATHY/NON-ASPIRATION	PERCEPTION	RELEVANCE	GENDER	CULTURAL	CONFORMITY	REPUTATION & MARKETING	GUIDANCE	AGE
I don't think it's wide enough you know [provision of educational courses]. And that's one thing that I was unsure about before I came here.	342			✓	✓			✓				✓	✓	
There's an awful lot of hairdressing, those types of courses, not so much academic courses.	343			✓				✓				✓	✓	
If I'd have seen the prospectus, actually I'd have thought, "Oh no! do they really do the academic side of it then?"…I wouldn't have known, you just follow what sort of prospectus you're given.	346			✓	✓			✓				✓		
INITIAL : INSTITUTIONAL (TOTALS)		1	10	21	2	0	15	6	2	9	3	18	14	6
OVERALL TOTALS		*24*	*38*	*42*	*20*	*14*	*45*	*22*	*10*	*26*	*18*	*41*	*40*	*7*

Notification of Student Withdrawal

APPENDIX 7

Sector: _____ **Date:** _____

Student Name	Date Last Attended	Destination
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
Course Code / Title		
Lecturer		
CAM		

Student's Reason for Withdrawal

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Another F.E. Institution*	*ANFE*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Course Closed*	*CLSE*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*No Commitment*	*COMM*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Timetable Clash*	*CONF*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Financial Problems*	*COST*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Creche Problems*	*CRCH*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Bereavement*	*DETH*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*DSS Problems*	*DHSS*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Enrolled on course twice*	*DUPL*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Found Employment*	*EMPL*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Worried about exams*	*EXAM*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Expelled by college*	*EXPL*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Course too hard*	*HARD*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Lost job*	*LOST*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Moved from area*	*MOVE*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Never attended*	*NATT*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*No reason given*	*NONE*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Work pattern*	*PATR*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Peer pressure*	*PEER*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Personal problems*	*PERS*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Pregnant*	*PREG*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Illness*	*SICK*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Lack of time*	*TIME*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Problems with transport*	*TRAN*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Workload too big*	*WKLD*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Employer will not pay*	*WORK*
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	..	*Wrong course*	*WRNG*

W/Drawn from Compass **Awards Notified**

Finance Notified **Reason entered**

Date Sent _____

Return By Date _____

Date Returned _____

These students have not attended for four weeks or more according to the register and have been withdrawn from the student record system - Compass. It is important that you should notify MIS if this is incorrect. This information is necessary to allow us to claim the correct funding units for these students.

APPENDIX 8

PERCEIVED INTERRELATEDNESS OF EMERGENT THEMES IN RELATION TO THE COLLEGE WITHDRAWAL SHEET – 3 RATERS

		EMERGENT THEMES										
	RATER 1	OPPORTUNITY	APATHY/ NON-ASPIRATION	PERCEPTION	RELEVANCE	GENDER	CULTURAL	CONFORMITY	REPUTATION/ MARKETING	GUIDANCE	AGE	Number of perceived Interrelated Themes
M.I.S. BASED REASONS FOR STUDENT WITHDRAWAL	*ANFE*	✔			✔				✔	✔		3
	CLSE	✔							✔	✔		2
	COMM		✔	✔						✔		2
	CONF	✔								✔		1
	COST	✔			✔					✔		2
	CRCH					✔			✔	✔		2
	DETH		✔	✔	✔		✔		✔			4
	DHSS	✔	✔		✔					✔		3
	EMPL	✔			✔							1
	EXAM		✔	✔						✔	✔	3
	EXPL		✔	✔				✔				2
	HARD		✔	✔	✔					✔		3
	LOST		✔	✔	✔					✔		3
	MOVE	✔			✔							1
	PATR	✔	✔	✔						✔	✔	4
	PEER		✔	✔	✔		✔	✔		✔		5
	PERS		✔	✔	✔							2
	PREG	✔	✔		✔	✔				✔		4
	SICK		✔	✔	✔					✔		3
	TIME		✔	✔	✔					✔	✔	4
	TRAN	✔		✔					✔			2
	WKLD		✔	✔								1
	WORK	✔	✔	✔	✔							3
	WRNG		✔	✔	✔				✔	✔		4

See Appendix 7 for clarification of abbreviations used in this table.

	RATER 2	EMERGENT THEMES										
		OPPORTUNITY	APATHY/ NON-ASPIRATION	PERCEPTION	RELEVANCE	GENDER	CULTURAL	CONFORMITY	REPUTATION/ MARKETING	GUIDANCE	AGE	Number of perceived Interrelated Themes
M.I.S. BASED REASONS FOR STUDENT WITHDRAWAL	*ANFE*	✓		✓	✓					✓		3
	CLSE	✓							✓			1
	COMM		✓	✓	✓							2
	CONF	✓								✓		1
	COST	✓				✓	✓	✓				3
	CRCH	✓				✓		✓		✓		3
	DETH		✓									0
	DHSS							✓		✓		1
	EMPL	✓			✓							1
	EXAM			✓						✓		1
	EXPL	✓	✓					✓				2
	HARD		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		4
	LOST	✓	✓							✓		2
	MOVE	✓										0
	PATR	✓			✓					✓		2
	PEER		✓				✓	✓				2
	PERS	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		6
	PREG		✓			✓						1
	SICK		✓							✓		1
	TIME	✓	✓							✓		2
	TRAN	✓										0
	WKLD	✓	✓	✓						✓		3
	WORK	✓								✓		1
	WRNG				✓				✓	✓		2

See Appendix 7 for clarification of abbreviations used in this table.

	RATER 3	EMERGENT THEMES										
		OPPORTUNITY	APATHY/ NON-ASPIRATION	PERCEPTION	RELEVANCE	GENDER	CULTURAL	CONFORMITY	REPUTATION/ MARKETING	GUIDANCE	AGE	Number of perceived Interrelated Themes
M.I.S. BASED REASONS FOR STUDENT WITHDRAWAL	*ANFE*	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓		4
	CLSE	✓		✓	✓					✓		3
	COMM		✓	✓	✓			✓				3
	CONF	✓		✓	✓					✓		3
	COST	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		4
	CRCH	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	6
	DETH		✓	✓	✓					✓		3
	DHSS	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓		4
	EMPL	✓			✓		✓				✓	3
	EXAM			✓			✓			✓		2
	EXPL		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	5
	HARD		✓	✓						✓		2
	LOST	✓	✓		✓		✓			✓	✓	5
	MOVE	✓			✓							1
	PATR	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓		4
	PEER		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	5
	PERS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		6
	PREG	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		5
	SICK	✓			✓					✓		2
	TIME	✓	✓				✓			✓		3
	TRAN	✓		✓						✓		2
	WKLD		✓	✓						✓	✓	3
	WORK	✓		✓	✓						✓	3
	WRNG	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		5

See Appendix 7 for clarification of abbreviations used in this table.

Reasons for Withdrawal at this college from the Access to Higher Education programme – 1999/2000 to 2008/09

APPENDIX 9

		1999/2000		2000/01		2001/02		2002/03		2003/04		2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08		2008/09		Totals ('Never attended' and 'No reason given' considered)		Totals ('Never attended' and 'No reason given' not considered)		
CODE	REASON FOR NON-PARTICIPATION/ WITHDRAWAL	Count	% of total year	Count	% of total year	Count	% of total year	Count	% of total year	Count	% of total year	Count	% of total year	Count	% of total year	Count	% of total year	Count	% of total year	Count	% of total year	Count	10-yearly percentage	Count	10-yearly percentage	
ANFE	Another F.E. Institution	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
CLSE	Course Closed	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	5.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	0.5%	3	0.9%	
COMM	No Commitment	0	0.0%	4	6.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	7.9%	8	8.2%	18	3.2%	18	5.3%	5
CONF	Timetable Clash	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
COST	Financial Problems	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	3.0%	7	12.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	12	20.7%	8	11.3%	4	5.3%	4	4.1%	37	6.6%	37	11.0%	3
CRCH	Creche Problems	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	3.4%	3	4.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	0.9%	5	1.5%	
DETH	Bereavement	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
DHSS	DSS Problems	2	3.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	2.0%	4	0.7%	4	1.2%	
DUPL	Enrolled on course twice	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
EMPL	Found Employment	3	4.5%	1	1.7%	2	3.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	3.4%	2	2.8%	0	0.0%	2	2.0%	12	2.1%	12	3.6%	
EXAM	Worried about exams	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
EXPL	Expelled by college	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
HARD	Course too hard	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	3.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.4%	2	0.6%	
LOST	Lost job	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
MOVE	Moved from area	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	2.0%	2	0.4%	2	0.6%	
NATT	Never attended	16	24.2%	4	6.8%	11	16.4%	5	9.1%	8	80.0%	1	25.0%	1	1.7%	4	5.6%	0	0.0%	8	8.2%	58	10.3%			
NONE	No reason given	20	30.3%	35	59.3%	27	40.3%	10	18.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	3.4%	23	32.4%	22	28.9%	30	30.6%	169	30.0%			
PATR	Work pattern	6	9.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	2.8%	4	5.3%	0	0.0%	12	2.1%	12	3.6%	
PEER	Peer pressure	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
PERS	Personal problems	14	21.2%	1	1.7%	4	6.0%	2	3.6%	2	20.0%	0	0.0%	27	46.6%	17	23.9%	6	7.9%	12	12.2%	85	15.1%	85	25.2%	2
PREG	Pregnant	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	5.6%	2	2.6%	0	0.0%	6	1.1%	6	1.8%	
SICK	Illness	3	4.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	5.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	5.6%	2	2.6%	2	2.0%	14	2.5%	14	4.2%	
TIME	Lack of time	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	4.1%	4	0.7%	4	1.2%	
TRAN	Problems with transport	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
WKLD	Workload too big	0	0.0%	14	23.7%	2	3.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	4.1%	20	3.5%	20	5.9%	4
WORK	Employer will not pay	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
WRNG	Wrong course	2	3.0%	0	0.0%	17	25.4%	28	50.9%	0	0.0%	3	75.0%	9	15.5%	4	5.6%	30	39.5%	20	20.4%	113	20.0%	113	33.5%	1
Grand Totals		66	100%	59	100%	67	100%	55	100%	10	100%	4	100%	58	100%	71	100%	76	100%	98	100%	564	100%	337	100.0%	

APPENDIX 10

FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

Barriers/Enablers Faced by Students Entering Further Education

PRESENT:

1. (1. AM)

2. (2. SB)

3. (3. CA)

4. (4. CJ)

5. (5. RS)

6. (6. GM)

7. (7. KS)

1 7. KS

I'll leave you to it then, OK? I'll see you at about quarter past-ish. I'll close the door then, so that your sound doesn't go out the room.

2 1. AM

Which year did we start?

[Group continue to work in silence]

3 1. AM

Number two? I've got more and more reasons.

4,5 2. SB & 3. CA

Well just…, one – two – three – four.

6 **1. AM**

I'll write it all up in a minute.

[Group continue to work in silence]

7 **2. SB**

In a bit, we'll go through mine.

8 **1. AM**

What was your first perception of adult education?

9 **6. GM**

Isn't that number ???

10 **4. CJ**

Yeah.

11 **2. SB**

What's your perception? I don't remember.

[Group Continue to Work in Silence]

12 **2. SB**

General overview?

13 **4. CJ**

General overview?

14 **2. SB**

They're asking us…, it's just a general comment.

15 **6. GM**

[Laughs] – I wish they'd have blooming said.

16 **4. CJ**

It's like going back to school.

[7. KS Re-enters Room]

17 **7. KS**

Would you like some more time?

18 **4. CJ**

Yeah.

19 **1. AM**

I am far behind everyone else.

20 **7. KS**

You don't have to necessarily give ten answers you know, there may just well be that one thing which was…. And you don't necessarily have to write something in for each of those areas. It may not be the case that you had any personal reasons or situations. It's something to discuss when I come back. I'll give you another five minutes.

[7. KS Leaves room - Group continue to Work in Silence]

21 **4. CJ**

How do you spell 'career'?

22 **2. SB**

It's C-A-R-E-E-R.

[*Group Laugh*]

23 **4. CJ**

That's it, I thought it was.

24 **2. SB**

I can talk, I spelt graphic, G-R-A-F-F-I-C.

[*Group Laugh – Indistinct comments*]

25 **4. CJ**

Is it the last Thursday that we have come to college?

26 **1. AM**

Have you had your letter?

27 **4. CJ**

Yeah.

[*Indistinct comments*]

28 **3. CA**

I've started filling smiles in the bathroom [*Laughs*].

[*Indistinct comments*]

29 **3. CA**

Do you feel that the college has catered for all of your educational and holistic needs? What do you think?

30 **2. SB**

Yeah, I would recommend it.

31 **5. RS**

Do you feel that the college has catered for all of your educational and holistic needs?

32 **3. CA**

What are we meant to be looking at? It's not everything.

33 **5. RS**

It's not every college that does it like this centre, and the tutors are supportive.

34 **3. CA**

I thought I.T. could have been much more better.

35-41 **ALL**

IT could definitely have been better.

42 **6. GM**

I.T. was bad last year.

43 **1. AM**

But I think [names another local college] has got a lot worse a reputation. When I went around there, I felt like I was walking around on my own.

44 **2. SB**

Someone from last year went to [names another local college] and felt really peeved. She got on something else that she didn't want. So she came here, because you could just apply here. She told me to come here, you can just apply here.

45 **2. SB**

I didn't have to do anything.

46 **1. AM**

Because [names another local college] check for your English and Maths.

47 **4. CJ**

I had to do a test before I….

[*7. KS Re-enters Room – Checks Camera*]

48 **7. KS**

Have you all got a few ideas down?

49 **2. SB**

Yep.

50 **7. KS**

OK, so most of you have stopped writing. Well, so how long were all of you out of education?

51 **4. CJ**

10 years

52 **3. CA**

18 years

53 **5. RS**

16 years.

54 **6. GM**

20 years.

55 **2. SB**

24 years.

56 **1. AM**

On and off, 18, I left, then I went back for 8 years.

57 **7. KS**

Alright. OK, so in terms of personal reasons and your dispositions, was there any personal reasons that kept you away?

58 **6. GM**

Yeah, money problems.

59 **7. KS**

That would actually come under a situation. That would be a situation that you just put forward. Was that your guiding point?

60 **6. GM**

Childcare as well, there was no childcare for my littlest one.

61 **3. CA**

I wasn't sure if I would be able to do it, to be a bit more fair. I was like, "you dropped out of school and won't be able to take it". I was a bit like that [*gestures that he was unsure*].

62 **2. SB**

I didn't think I would be clever enough.

63 **3. CA**

Yeah, I was like "Will I drop out?"

64 **4. CJ**

I worked in a shop, and I thought that was all that I could do.

65 **7. KS**

But was that from you or what you were told? That's as good as you get?

66 **4. CJ**

Uhhm.., well I didn't do very well in school, so I went straight into shop work, and I thought that's where I'd be stuck forever. And I was shocked when I came to the Induction Day, and you were going around saying "What did you want to be?" I remember [name of course co-ordinator] asking me, and I remember other students saying nurses or midwives or teachers. And I thought that maybe I'd get a career rather than just a job. And that's when I started to think.

67 **7. KS**

Well what actually stopped you…? I mean, what was the thing, the catalyst that stopped you from just thinking "Oh, I can't do this" and then just coming back in? Was there something, or…?

68 **4. CJ**

I suppose just scared really, of what to expect. What was expected? What would happen? If I'd be able to do it.

69 **1. AM**

I didn't think I'd be able to cope time wise. Time was a big worry for me.

70 **7. KS**

What do you mean by time wise?

71 **1. AM**

Because of having children, with regard to the situation. The situation was bigger than the personal thing really.

72 **7. KS**

Right, OK.

73 **1. AM**

And I wasn't sure. That was my main problem, could I complete it? Because I didn't want to start it and not complete it, I'd rather not start it at all. Which is why it took me so long to actually start it, I had to feel it was right.

74 **7. KS**

You know, once you guys had got into it, the Access programme, did you realise that it was what you wanted? Or wasn't it, and you just carried on anyway because you wanted to get into university?

75-81 **ALL**

I enjoyed it actually. I enjoyed it.

82 **6. GM**

I had problems with regards to the medical problems. That was an issue, but it was great, because I felt I was starting something.

83 **4. CJ**

And it's like you get a whole new social life as well.

84-90 **ALL**

Yeah.

91 **1. AM**

And I think that it changes your perspectives on lots of people as well, from the outside, and I think you realise that some people don't like you doing anything. Some people have very different reasons don't they?

92 **7. KS**

What do you mean?

93 **1. AM**

I've got like several friends that backed away when I started this, certainly, two of them were jealous.

94 **4. CJ**

Yeah, it is a lot of jealousy.

95 **3. CA**

It is jealousy.

96 **1. AM**

And one has only just started to speak to me about the past week ago.

97 **2. SB**

My other half, he's like my best friend, and he wouldn't encourage me, and I thought, "What did you do that for? Don't be nasty" I know we've got kids, but I want me brain to work.

98 **4. CJ**

That's because you were bored. I know I was just really bored. I just needed to do something different.

99 **2. SB**

And every morning when I was going to college he used to put an apple on the table, and say "There you go [2. SB]"

[*All Laugh*]

100 **7. KS**

Who was this, your friend?

101 **2. SB**

No, that was my better half that was.

102 **7. KS**

Oh no.

103 **2. SB**

Yeah, he used to laugh at it and think that it was funny. But after a couple of months, and I was doing a piece of sociology, no psychology, and we had to pick somebody and cross reference what we'd learnt to his behaviour, and I chose a man that had abused two little girls in the 1960s, and killed and buried them on The Chase. And he actually called me in and said "There's a thing here about The Ripper, I got it out of the paper, and there's a bit on there, it might come in handy"

104 **7. KS**

And he starts helping you there, that's where it turns around.

105-111 **ALL**

Yeah.

112 **7. KS**

Did any of the rest of you find the same problem, this sort of…, your other half…?

113 **4. CJ**

It was a big joke at first.

114-120 **ALL**

Yeah.

121 **3. CA**

My friends first gave me a week, two weeks.

122-128 **ALL**

Yeah.

129 **3. CA**

They said "I'll give you a month, you won't do it"

130 **4. CJ**

And I would say "Do you need any money for your dinner? Or do you need __?" And like with the kids with their lunch boxes, and I would say "Do you need one?"

[*Group Laughs*]

131 **1. AM**

My little lad used to say that he couldn't actually understand that I was doing anything different, because I was there in the morning when he went out to work, and I was there when he came home from work.

132 **7. KS**

So then to him there was no difference then?

133 **1. AM**

Yeah. And then I would say "I'm going upstairs to get this done" and because it didn't infringe on him, he thought that I could just carry on and do everything else exactly the same. He had actually forgotten that I was at college during the day, he just thought I was at home watching Trisha or whatever else.

134 **7. KS**

What you said 4. CJ, the fact that you just got bored, some…, because at some point, that is exactly what happens. Because do you know? a lot of the students, the new intakes that I'm interviewing, they're all saying the same thing, "We just had enough, we just wanted to do something different. We're just bored"

135 **4. CJ**

Yeah.

136 **7. KS**

And about what you're saying 3. CA, you know, about you being the only male here, other than myself. Your mates down the pub or whatever, is it a case of them taking the rip out of you a bit?

137 **3. CA**

Oh yeah, of course it is.

138 **7. KS**

Is that one of the things that kept you away at any point? Or was you stronger than that?

139 **3. CA**

No, no, no, don't get me wrong or anything, I found it difficult, and I felt like quitting every week, but it was what I always wanted to do, since I left school really, it was just actually making that step forward to do it.

140 **7. KS**

So why did you stop? Or what stopped you?

141 **3. CA**

I don't know, it was just like work and stuff, and not having any money and that sort of situation, and just the way I was. I just got to a point when I got to a certain age, in my last job, and I was just there and I thought "Well, it's either now or never, if I'm not gonna do it now, I'm not gonna do it at all"

142 **2. SB**

Yeah.

143 **3. CA**

So, if you're gonna do it, do it. So that's what I did, I put one step forward.

144 **2. SB**

I think you get to a bit of a…, a bit of a mid-life crisis, and like I thought if I don't do it… I mean I had a brilliant job you know, nice car, nice lifestyle and nice holidays. Then I had my children late, because I was 36 when I had my first, and everything changed. Work became more difficult and we didn't need me to work. But I was a bit bored, and I thought "I can't just sit here and look after the kids" I want to be at work, but I've got my brains, I thought "I'm going to go back to college, I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it even though my other half will laugh at me."

145 **7. KS**

So what your…? Because you're all back here, you've decided to come to college, how did it change your family life? Did it really sort of throw it?

146 **2. SB**

Not a great deal I would think.

147 **7. KS**

Or did you manage to sort of cope?

148 **6. GM**

It didn't really.

149 **1. AM**

You have to sort of communicate don't you?

150 **6. GM**

Actually, it was quite good for me, because my husband actually started washing up and things when I asked him.

[*All Laugh*]

151 **6. GM**

It was like "Oh yeah, I'll do it because you're doing your college work"

152 **4. CJ**

Actually, I've got to admit that I was supported, because he would bring in a cup of tea if I was stressing, or he would say, "Oh I'll put a load of washing in." It was like "My God"

[*All Laugh*]

153 **4. CJ**

Yeah, so that was good.

154 **7. KS**

So if I was to say OK, forget about your personal reasons, what was the biggest situations that kept you away from college? I mean, you've all talked about money problems or busy at work, what was the biggest thing?

155 **6. GM**

That and childcare.

156 **2. SB**

I think it's such a step from leaving something that you are quite familiar with, outside of your comfort zone, throwing it all away, you know you can't go back, you can't just say "Oh, I'll have my job back" It's just that step.

157 **1. AM**

There's like a step as well, like a transition, but obviously I can only speak for females. Yeah, you have a good job before you have children, and then the job becomes irrelevant. And then you get to the stage where for me, personally, was when I could perceive children going to school. And I had always worked, I'd always worked part-time, whether it be in the evening, and then I've got to do work at school. But it's not right, in your head you know it's not right. And I mean I have looked into this course for probably a good three years, every September I have rung the college up and I have rung universities time and time again, but I've always put it off.

158 **7. KS**

Why?

159 **1. AM**

Because it never felt right, I felt that I had too much guilt for the kids.

160 **7. KS**

Oh right, OK.

161 **1. AM**

But I think that everybody has said this at some point, I mean, because we've always known that we've wanted to do something…, but it's doing that little step.

162 **7. KS**

Yeah, it's a case of taking that little step you know, that step into college is *the biggest*, once you have done it you're OK.

Are you all moving on to University?

[*Some mumbles, a few nods of head*]

163 **6. GM**

I'd like to yeah.

164 **7. KS**

Oh yeah, you've got another year on the course (speaking to 2. SB).

165 **6. GM**

Yeah, I'm going to do accounts now.

166 **7. KS**

Are you doing your AAT?

167 **6. GM**

Yeah.

168 **7. KS**

With [names a member of staff]. And you five are all into Uni?

169 **2. SB**

I didn't get in, I failed that last one.

170 **7. KS**

Why?

171 **2. SB**

I even passed the written one. I got a pass, and they said "Yeah, come in you've got an interview" And they offered me a secondary course or something, but I said I either want social work or nothing, I want to be a social worker.

172 **7. KS**

Did you know that sometimes you can go on to a course and then change courses? Because what will happen is, you won't always get a case where say for example, you have 14 students who start a course, those 14 students won't necessarily finish it. So as soon as somebody drops out, you make them aware that you are available. So you've just got to work it out, get on the phone, and see how it goes.

173 **2. SB**

[*Mumbles*]

174 **7. KS**

[Addressing 2. SB] What you don't want to do is go off the boil, you've got the mind for it, you've got the aptitude for it, and you've got a really good work ethic, so use it.

175 **2. SB**

I know I could do it, I want to do something else, even this year, I will do a night course maybe, or a secondary course, just to fit around family. When I gave up work to look after the children, there was one [course] at the back of Stafford Hospital. Hopefully, by next year I'll have sorted all my problems out.

176 **4. CJ**

It's a bit scary, when I was thinking that its gonna be like another 30 odd years before I retire, I didn't want to work in a shop for the next 30 years.

177 **3. CA**

It's job satisfaction.

178-184 **ALL**

Yeah.

185 **7. KS**

Where do you work?

186 **4. CJ**

[Names a place of employment], I'm still there a couple of days a week, the photograph shop. I've been up to management, but I can't get any further. I've just got to do something different.

187 **2. SB**

Yeah, it's just not enough sometimes.

188 **7. KS**

So it's mainly children and money, or is it children and money?

189 **3. CA**

I've got children but it wasn't a problem for me to get to college, it was just me and doing stuff, I knew what I wanted to do and it was a case of just stepping forward and doing it. I mean I had a good job, a great job, and I left it do it, I felt that what I wanted to do with my life was probably better for me than other people anyway. Overall, in about five years from now, I could still be sitting there with telephone wires or be doing something better, and probably feel better doing it and getting paid for it.

190 **7. KS**

OK, lets just look at the institution now. While you was out, before you came here, did the institution hold any fears for you? Was there a barrier anywhere? Did you see it as a barrier?

191 **3. CA**

I thought it was something for young people, something that…

192 **6. GM**

Yeah, so did I.

193 **7. KS**

Even though you was thinking of going into H.E.?

194 **3. CA**

Yeah, because I think that was when I looked into it, it said "This course starts at 19" I thought that was quite young for a mature student sort of thing, I thought it was something like 25 upwards or something like that, that was what I thought. But that's what put me off it, and I thought that I would be like a granddad or something [*Laughs*] the only one there, older than the teachers, the lecturers [*Laughs*].

195 **4. CJ**

But it turned out o.k.

196 **3. CA**

No, not at all, not at all.

197 **2. SB**

Because last year it was a lot older, because quite a few of them were in their 50s doing it last year, and not much younger ones, and this year there was a lot of young ones, and a lot of them have dropped out. They think they're gonna do this, and they haven't got the commitment of that bit.

198 **1. AM**

I wouldn't have done it at 17/18 or 19.

199 **3. CA**

I think that probably the biggest problem with the female…, more female students than males, the actual age that they access the mature student course starts are 19 year old lads playing football, they think it's quite feminine, do you know what I mean? to go and do something like this, whereas if you're 25 or 30 you've seen a bit of life, you realise that it's not like that at all.

200 **7. KS**

Yes, and it's a huge problem from our point of view.

201 **3. CA**

I think that has got to be one of the biggest problems, plus some courses are directed at men intentionally.

202 **7. KS**

Is that in the prospectus?

203 **3. CA**

Uhhm, I've not seen it myself, but I've been told that you do.

204 **2. SB**

Yeah it says Midwifery, Nursing, Primary Teaching…, which are like female dominated areas.

205 **7. KS**

If something was written a bit differently in the prospectus, do you think it would have a difference?

206 **3. CA**

Oh yeah, yeah.

207 **2. SB**

Yeah.

208 **3. CA**

I would think so yeah. But again, I think that the age level is a big thing as well.

209 **1. AM**

On the web-site and in the prospectus, actually, you could have older people, not just older people. But yeah, when you look through the prospectus…

210 **3. CA**

There are a lot of young people there.

211 **7. KS**

Or even if we could say something like the average age group is you know, 35 to 40 or something like that, I suppose that would make it easier.

212 **2. SB**

I mean I thought I wouldn't fit in, I thought that I would be the old one, everyone is going to be…, just me the granny, and I ain't going to make friends, and I got to the point where I didn't care. But you think that you're not going to chug along with anybody, and you find that you do.

213 **7. KS**

Yeah.

214 **2. SB**

Because you're all in that same boat.

215 **1. AM**

Same boat ain't ya?

216 **2. SB**

Scared, scared of learning.

217 **3. CA**

And I suppose you've got that point that you've got to look at as well, if you do want to do something, you really want to do it, then that will be irrelevant won't it?

218 **7. KS**

Well why don't the males think that?

219 **4. CJ**

I think it's like asking for directions.

230 **3. CA**

It's a mask.

231, 232 **1. AM & 2. SB**

Yeah.

233 **3. CA**

It's a masking thing isn't it?

234 **2. SB**

Yeah, especially once you've had children, you don't care; you sort of lose your inhibitions. There's nothing more scary is there?

235 **1. AM**

And I think that when you're in a relationship as well, it goes back to the money thing doesn't it?

236 **2. SB**

Yeah.

237 **1. AM**

Unless the wife has got a good job, you're used to going without the wife's wages, I mean you've got these children who need feeding, and it's a big step, that's a big step. My sister is just about to swap roles, she's done her stuff, she's got her job, and he's about to go part-time now. So he's going to go back to college, but it's taken them…, he's 44. It's been a massive commitment.

238 **7. KS**

Are you all from [the college catchment area]?

239 **5. RS**

No.

240 **7. KS**

Whereabouts are you from?

241 **5. RS**

[Place of abode].

242 **7. KS**

Those of you in the [the college catchment area], do you find that with it being an old mining community, that community thing still stop males coming in or is it just me over-thinking?

243 **3. CA**

I don't think so, no. It's just how it is. It's not like that or anything.

244 **2. SB**

I think that maybe years ago when the pit.., because when I was at school, all the lads wanted to do was leave here and go down the pit for the money, because it was excellent money, they didn't care if they passed their skills, they could just go down the pit.

245 **7. KS**

Yeah, because this place was initially opened as an old mining college.

246 **2. SB**

I mean the pits were around when I was…, I mean there was…

247 **3. CA**

Around [the college catchment area], there was a few.

248 **7. KS**

It's interesting, because it's a nationwide problem that we have less males than females coming to the Access course, but here it's just huge, there's a 90% to 10% ratio. We had about 5 to start with this year.

249 **2. SB**

I remember [names a student on the course].

250 **3. CA**

[names a student on the course] didn't want to go though did he? He was forced into it.

251 **3. CA**

And…, I can't think of his name was on the course the year before wasn't he? [names a student on the course], yeah.

252 **7. KS**

Yeah, [names a student on the course].

253 **2. SB**

Yeah, he left at Christmas didn't he? And that was the hardest bit.

254 **7. KS**

Yeah, that was the hardest bit.

255 **2. SB**

Yes, up to Christmas, and then after Christmas it's like downhill.

256 **7. KS**

Yes, he was working at the hospital.

257 **4. CJ**

Yes, he used to come straight from work.

258 **7. KS**

And there was [names a student on the course].

But yeah, it's really interesting that you should say about the age thing, and how we should put it in the Prospectus, because if we put that out and get it out more the message that the Access course is genderless, would be stronger.

With regard to the male and females numbers here; if your partner was to go out and study at a different time, would that be a problem for you in the household?

259 **2. SB**

If he was to study at the same time sorry?

260 **7. KS**

If he was going to study at the same time, obviously there is going to be a problem with incomes and that. If you were to study at different times, say for example, you were to take home…, say the main bread earner, winner, would that be an issue?

261 **2. SB**

Not for me.

262 **4. CJ**

I think that if I was secure in the career I studied for, and then he decided he wanted to do it, well then I probably wouldn't mind that, because then it would be his chance to do it. Yeah, but as long as I was secure.

263 **7. KS**

But firstly, both of you have to be secure at one point, so one partner is able to let the other one out.

264 **2. SB**

I think a man would have to feel twice as much secure.

265 **6. GM**

As long as I could earn the same amount of money that he's bringing in at the moment.

266 **7. KS**

It's those simple things that matter, isn't it?

267 **2. SB**

I don't think that a lot of men would like to feel supported by their wife financially, I think it would be a big….

268 **1. AM**

I think that's a shame though ain't it?

269 **2. SB**

My husband he was brought up very old school, women stopped at home and cooked and cleaned, and the men went out to work. And he is still very much like that, but he wouldn't go back to college. But he would if it meant putting food on the table….

270 **6. GM**

Because my husband is quite unusual like that; he'd be quite happy to go back to college and have me support him; he'd love it [*Laughs*].

271 **2. SB**

It wouldn't bother me if he wanted to go back to college, but he is very sort of old school, and a bit like his dad and his granddad, and that's the way he thinks.

272 **7. KS**

That's great, thanks.

Has anybody put anything down for the "Other"?

273 **5. RS**

I've put 'institution'.

274 **7. KS**

Is there anything apart from those three areas, that's personal areas, situations and institutions, that you think that there is a possible barrier that stops people from coming in?

275 **6. GM**

No.

276 **2. SB**

I think it's just scared, making that leap, actually going in, signing up and you know, "I'm going to do it, I'm going to finish"

277 **7. KS**

Just seeing it through.

278 **4. CJ**

When I came in I didn't know there was an Access course or anything, I just like wanted to go to college, like you said. I came in and said "I need to sit my GCSEs" and then [name of

member of staff] said “why don’t you try the Access course? It’s brilliant, because you can just do it in a year.”

279 **3. CA**

Are you actually following the progress at the college, like one student from the start through to the end and through to university and so on?

280 **7. KS**

That's something I’m actually thinking of doing, just tracking a group or one person.

281 **3. CA**

Something like that monitoring, because I think that would be a good idea, especially somebody mature from this year, a male probably [*Laughs*].

282-288 **ALL**

Yeah.

289 **1. AM**

Does that mean you’re going to volunteer?

[*All Laugh*]

290 **7. KS**

But once you were all on the course, and everything was fine, was there any problems with the course? Did you perhaps find that it was too narrow? Perhaps it was too general?

291-294 **1. AM – 2. SB – 3. CA – 6. GM**

I.T.

295 **3. CA**

Especially being one of the core subjects as well, because you can’t pass the course without it, people were struggling. I was struggling with it a bit, I was. I mean we got through it, but not without help. But that was a big problem.

296 **2. SB**

It was a bit hit and miss last year.

297 **6. GM**

The study skills. Bless [name of member of staff], we all know what he's like, he goes off the track a bit you know and he'll say "Well what are we doing?" [*Laughs*].

298 **6. GM**

It could be a bit more hands on and stuff, rather than going off onto different subjects, because we were all like "What?"

299 **2. SB**

He gets onto Aston Villa, and then that's all it is, Aston Villa. He's a very good lecturer, but I think the biggest loss this year was [name of member of staff].

300 **7. KS**

[Name of member of staff] was absolutely golden.

301 **2. SB**

You could go to him and say "I can't find this…, this is missing" and he'd go "Hang on; here". He knew, he knew everything.

302 **7. KS**

Well, he'd been here for 25 years.

303 **1. AM**

I don't think it [the college] was advertised enough.

304 **7. KS**

You don't?

305 **1. AM**

No, because I would have automatically have gone to [names another local college], well I suppose really, because it's in the middle of the Midlands and it's certainly more known to me. It was [names another local college] that suggested I came here. Even now, I'm aware of this thing of it's not something that you see. [This] college is very much that; it keeps itself in [the college catchment area], and I think that it's not a case of the people, it's a case of the college because you don't see it, it's not broadly advertised is it?

[*4. CJ Shakes head*]

306 **1. AM**

I mean, I live in [place of abode], which is only a stone's throw, and you would never… When I said to people I was coming to [the college catchment area], people couldn't understand it, because there's nothing to ever advertise it.

307 **7. KS**

Well in Rugeley, all you can hear is about [names another local college] on the radio.

308 **2. SB**

And [names another local college], I hear a lot about [names another local college].

309 **7. KS**

Is [names another local college] a college then?

310 **2. SB**

I dunno, it's like a…, I don't know what it is, but I hear a lot of that about where you can go to do courses like this.

311 **4. CJ**

Yeah, they do courses there don't they? I hear a lot of that, but not [the college catchment area].

312 **7. KS**

Do you think that the breadth of the courses within [the college catchment area] is enough for people out there? Or don't you think that we offer it [breadth]?

313 **6. GM**

No, I think it's fantastic.

314 **2. SB**

I think you aught to do Geography and the Humanities, that side. I was going to do something like that this year if I didn't get into university, just to keep my mind together, but there was no reference to it, nothing like that to do with…

315 **7. KS**

What like GCSEs and A Levels, that sort of thing?

316 **2. SB**

Yeah.

317 **1. AM**

I think history. It's a shame that it's not running, that you can't get it at this college.

318 **7. KS**

Are you talking about just within the Access course.

319-320 **1. AM & 2. SB**

Both, both.

321 **2. SB**

I mean, in the Access course now, I would have liked to have done history.

322 **3. CA**

And I would.

323 **2. SB**

I know loads that would have liked to have done history.

324 **7. KS**

I don't understand why that didn't happen.

325 **3. CA**

It's a capital offence apparently.

326 **2. SB**

I thought it would have been good.

327 **7. KS**

OK. Anything else that anyone wants to say? Anything you're not happy with?

328 **6. GM**

Yeah, I think…, it's nothing to do with the HE course, but in the accounts course I wanted to go on to do an apprenticeship, but because I'm over 24, I can't do that. I've just got to do an AAT course through college. I think that there should be something there for mature students to go on and do…, possibly do apprentices in the workplace.

329 **7. KS**

It's on record [*points to camera*].

[6. GM gives thumbs up sign to camera]

330 **2. SB**

And I think that a lot of the part-time courses are evening courses, and they're not in the day. The daytimes are so much easier for me, I could come in at most times, I'd just have to get the children to nursery.

331 **1. AM**

You've got children at home, and night-time is their time, so that's very awkward.

332 **7. KS**

It’s very difficult to get a balance.

333 **6. GM**

It’s difficult for me because my husband works until 10 o’clock at night.

334 **1. AM**

You’re not going to please everybody all the time are you?

335 **2. SB**

No.

336 **2. SB**

Teaching assistants or accounts or something like that, something just to keep my mind, but both of them are in the night, if they were in the day they would be a lot easier.

337 **7. KS**

But again, that depends on numbers, if depends on students and what time they prefer. Say if you are in the minority, and they have got 15 or 20 students already who might be quite happy to come in the evening, then you’re a casualty of that.

338 **2. SB**

Yeah.

339 **7. KS**

I mean it’s not nice being a casualty, but…

340 **2. SB**

Well yeah, that’s fair, but yeah.

341 **7. KS**

But it’s all about numbers isn’t it? and business.

342 **1. AM**

I don’t think it’s wide enough you know. And that's one thing that I was unsure about, before I came here, I didn’t even know where the college was, I didn’t know, I knew the bus station, but that was it.

343 **2. SB**

There’s an awful lot of hairdressing, those types of courses, not so much academic courses. I got the prospectus and I thought “There’s a lot of hairdressing and cake decorating and tiara making”

[*All Laugh*]

344 **2. SB**

And I thought “I can wear that tiara with…”

345 **7. KS**

And belly dancing [*Laughs*].

This is it, you see, the college itself is seen traditionally, as a vocational college; it’s not seen as an academic college.

346 **1. AM**

That’s a bit….., because if I’d have seen the prospectus, actually I’d have thought “Oh no! do they really do the academic side of it then?”... I wouldn’t have known; You just follow what sort of prospectus you’re given.

347 **7. KS**

Yeah.

348 **1. AM**

Because honestly, I wouldn't have known, so you just sort of follow what prospectus you're given.

349 **2. SB**

And now they're pushing Foundation degrees. There was a couple I noticed, a Foundation degree. That would have been brilliant, because I could have done that, and then moved on and done it that way around. That would be brilliant.

350 **1. AM**

I'd recommend the college though to my friends now.

351 **3. CA**

I do too.

352 **1. AM**

If anybody wanted to do an Access course…, because a lot of people don't know what an Access course is.

353 **7. KS**

Much of the Access course intake is by word of mouth. Did you guys come here by word of mouth or did you actually make…?

354 **1. AM**

It was the university that recommended you to me.

355 **7. KS**

Which university was that?

356 **1. AM**

Wolverhampton. Because I had phoned them about [names another local college], and they said that they recommend [the college catchment area], because they said "When you get there at [names another local college], they are not as prepared" That's what I was told.

357 **2. SB**

I had already got a psychology ‘A’ Level and I’ve got an ‘A’ Level, and I came in and actually bumped into [name of member of staff], that was here last year.

358 **7. KS**

[Name of member of staff]?

359 **2. SB**

Yeah, [name of member of staff], and she said “You don’t want to do that, do this with me”. And I said “I can’t do that. I can’t do ‘A’ levels”, but she pushed and pushed and said “sign here” and that was it.

360 **1. AM**

It was either this or cake making.

[*ALL Laugh*]

361 **7. KS**

Look guys thanks a lot for all of this, you’ve been superb.

You do realise that now I’ve got to write this all up.

- END OF FOCUS GROUP -