

## Mature and part-time students

This briefing gives an overview of the current challenges around access, student success and progression for mature learners in England. It highlights effective practice examples of how universities and colleges are working towards widening access and participation for mature learners. It also includes questions that higher education providers can use to further develop their work in this area.

We hope this briefing will stimulate thinking and discussion about access, student success, and progression for mature learners leading to more evidence-led approaches tailored to institutions' own contexts and circumstances.

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### Who are mature students?

In line with the national strategy for access and student success<sup>1</sup> we define mature students as those aged 21 or over at the time of starting their course.

This term 'mature students' covers a large variety of learners of all ages, needs and backgrounds. UCAS<sup>2</sup> has indicated that approximately half of mature undergraduate UK entrants in 2017 are aged between 21 and 24, 39 per cent are between 25 and 39, and 12 per cent are over 40 years old.

In 2016-17, 92 per cent of undergraduate part-time students were mature students compared with 23 per cent of full-time students<sup>3</sup>. Part-time students, therefore, made up 48 per cent of the mature student population in 2016-17.

### Why are mature learners important?

As discussed later in this briefing, mature students are more likely than the general student population to be from groups disadvantaged in higher education. Fair access and participation for mature students is an important issue for social mobility as it is a route for those who either missed out or for whom it wasn't the right time after school. Often mature learners bring to their

<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/299689/bis-14-516-national-strategy-for-access-and-student-success.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/299689/bis-14-516-national-strategy-for-access-and-student-success.pdf) (PDF)

<sup>2</sup> [www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-data-resources/applicants-and-acceptances-groups-applicants-2017](http://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-data-resources/applicants-and-acceptances-groups-applicants-2017)

<sup>3</sup> [www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he)

studies a commitment to excel, significant life experience, and high levels of motivation which help to enrich and diversify the student body<sup>4</sup>. Mature students outperform young learners in terms of degree outcomes once other factors such as prior qualifications are taken into account<sup>5</sup>.

Mature students who are parents or members of a community also support fair access and participation in higher education for young disadvantaged students. For example, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>6</sup> found that parental influence is a key factor in whether young students attend higher education.

There is also a strong economic argument for enabling mature students to access higher education. The Office for National Statistics<sup>7</sup> forecasts a decline in the number of 18-19 year-olds until around 2020, with the 18 year old population not recovering to 2015 levels until 2024, and an increasingly aging population. Mature learners also play an important part in upskilling the workforce to help meet the future economic demands facing the country<sup>8</sup>. London Economics<sup>9</sup> speculate that, when considering the labour market, demand for part-time study exists and may increase in the future due to the need to upskill and reskill, and that it is other factors such as finance and debt aversion that have resulted in the number of part-time students declining. HEFCE<sup>10</sup> highlighted that revenues from part-time students with financial backing from an employer increased by 5 per cent in the academic year 2014-15.

However, as discussed further in this briefing, there has been a decline in the numbers of mature students in higher education. This is a significant concern for fair access and participation in higher education.

## Guidance about mature learners

The Office for Students' 'Regulatory Notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance for 2019-20'<sup>11</sup> (2018) identifies reversing the decline in higher education participation by mature students from under-represented groups as one of two key priorities relating to improving fair access to higher education. The document also highlights an expectation that all institutions with an access and participation plan will assess their performance in relation to mature students.

In addition to OfS guidance, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) commissioned research<sup>12</sup> into the impact of outreach activity for mature learners with low or no prior qualifications. This research includes five institutional case studies and provides a tool for institutions to use to assess their performance in this area.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students)

<sup>5</sup> [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2015/201521/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2015/201521/)

<sup>6</sup> [www.jrf.org.uk/report/role-aspirations-attitudes-and-behaviour-closing-educational-attainment-gap](http://www.jrf.org.uk/report/role-aspirations-attitudes-and-behaviour-closing-educational-attainment-gap)

<sup>7</sup> [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/nationalpopulationprojections/2016basedstatisticalbulletin](http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/nationalpopulationprojections/2016basedstatisticalbulletin)

<sup>8</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students)

<sup>9</sup> <https://londonconomics.co.uk/blog/publication/demand-part-time-higher-education-affected-changing-economic-conditions-september-2017/>

<sup>10</sup> [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2017/201720/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2017/201720/)

<sup>11</sup> [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/)

<sup>12</sup> <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511112343/https://www.offa.org.uk/egp/improving-evaluation-outreach/outreach-mature-learners/>

MillionPlus has also produced research<sup>13</sup> with support from OFFA entitled 'Forgotten Learners: building a system that works for mature students' (2018). The research highlights key issues, barriers and opportunities to enable mature students to access higher education.

## The current state of issues relating to mature students

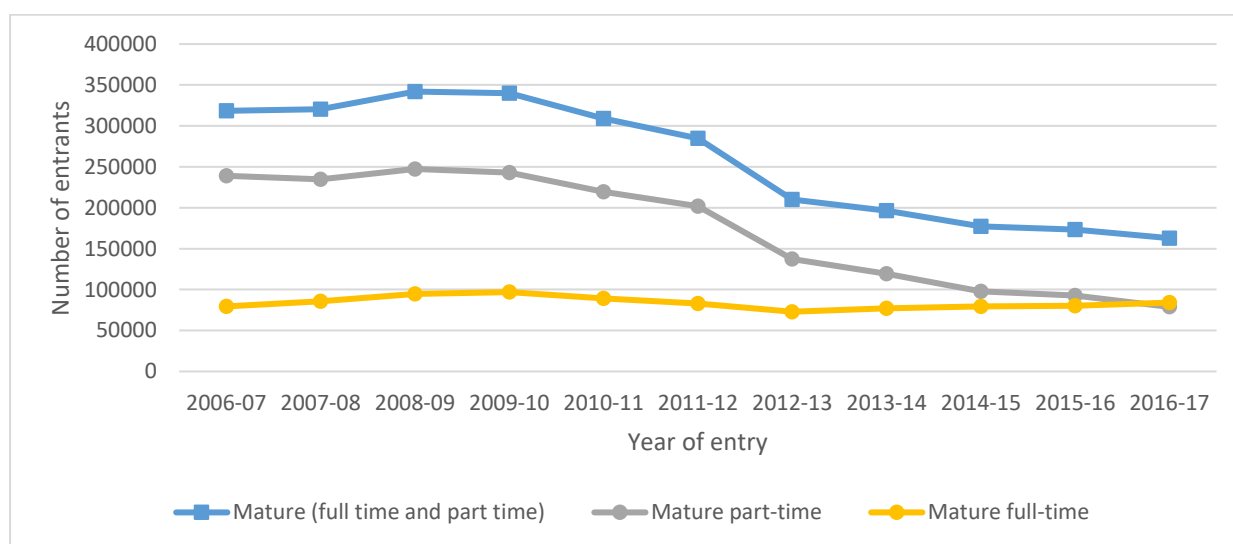
### Numbers of mature students have declined as there are fewer older part-time students

HESA<sup>14</sup> figures show a 49 per cent fall in the number of mature entrants to undergraduate study between 2006-7 and 2016-17 (figure 1). This is primarily due to the significant 67 per cent fall in the numbers of part-time students over the same period, the equivalent of 175,000 learners. There has been a small increase in the numbers of full-time mature learners over the last four years, although it is still below the level of 2009-10. Analysis by HEFCE<sup>15</sup> shows that mature learners were disproportionately affected by the tuition fee changes in 2012 compared to younger students.

Further analysis of these figures by HEFCE<sup>16</sup> shows that the group contributing most to this decline are more likely to be:

- over 30 years old
- studying at an intensity of less than 50 per cent, which may relate to the fact that students studying at less than 25 per cent of full-time are ineligible for tuition fees loans
- studying on courses at a level below first degree, such as foundation degrees, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs), which is important as these routes can often be a stepping stone to a first degree.

**Figure 1. Number of UK domiciled, undergraduate mature entrants in English institutions**



**Data source:** HESA UK performance indicators (Table 2a and 2b)

<sup>13</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students)

<sup>14</sup> [www.hesa.ac.uk/news/01-02-2018/widening-participation-tables](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/01-02-2018/widening-participation-tables)

<sup>15</sup> [www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/impact/Students/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/impact/Students/)

<sup>16</sup> [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2017/201720/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2017/201720/)

There has also been a decline in the number of mature student nursing applications and acceptances. The UCAS End of Cycle Report 2017<sup>17</sup> states that one in six nursing applicants are mature. Within this group there has been a 13 per cent decline in acceptances in the 21-25 age group, and a six per cent decline in those aged over 26. A Department for Education report<sup>18</sup> (2016) suggests that the change from NHS bursaries to fees and loans for nursing students may have created a specific barrier for the largely female intake who are over 25 and have children, as they may be more sensitive to cost. However, nursing courses in general remain oversubscribed<sup>19</sup>.

### **Mature and part-time students have different degree outcomes**

A report by HEFCE<sup>20</sup> found that a lower proportion of mature students obtain a first or upper second class degree compared with young students. However, after taking into account other factors such as entry qualifications, mature graduates have an unexplained seven percentage point advantage over young graduates. This suggests that mature students with the same entry qualifications as younger students do better in their studies.

The same report also found that there is an unexplained 14 percentage point gap between the proportions of full-time and part-time students obtaining a first or upper second class degree. In other words, when comparing full- and part-time students with the same entry qualifications, part-time students do less well than their full-time peers. This indicates that there are additional factors, unrelated to demography or prior attainment, facing part-time students.

Furthermore, the non-continuation rate for mature students in England is currently around 12 per cent<sup>21</sup>, compared with around 6 per cent among young students. Significant reasons for this cited by students include the difficulties of balancing study with other commitments and financial problems<sup>22 23</sup>.

### **Mature students are more likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds and have non-traditional qualifications**

Mature learners are more likely than younger learners to have characteristics associated with disadvantage and under-representation in higher education. Research by MillionPlus and the NUS<sup>24</sup> (2012) states that mature students are more likely to be from lower socio-economic status backgrounds, have caring responsibilities, be disabled, and be from Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. A report<sup>25</sup> by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) (2017) found that care experienced young people are more likely than the general student population to enter higher education later, having taken alternative qualifications, and stay in higher education longer, meaning that they are more likely to be mature students.

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<sup>17</sup> [www.ucas.com/file/140436/download?token=WX45D1IF](http://www.ucas.com/file/140436/download?token=WX45D1IF) (PDF)

<sup>18</sup>

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/577420/Equality\\_Analysis\\_for\\_Student\\_Support\\_Regulations\\_2016.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577420/Equality_Analysis_for_Student_Support_Regulations_2016.pdf) (PDF)

<sup>19</sup> [www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/ucas-undergraduate-analysis-reports/2017-end-cycle-report](http://www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/ucas-undergraduate-analysis-reports/2017-end-cycle-report)

<sup>20</sup> [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2015/201521/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2015/201521/)

<sup>21</sup> [www.hesa.ac.uk/news/08-03-2018/non-continuation-summary](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/08-03-2018/non-continuation-summary)

<sup>22</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/reports/Never\\_Too\\_Late\\_To\\_Learn\\_-\\_FINAL\\_REPORT.pdf](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/reports/Never_Too_Late_To_Learn_-_FINAL_REPORT.pdf) (PDF)

<sup>23</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students)

<sup>24</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/reports/Never\\_Too\\_Late\\_To\\_Learn\\_-\\_FINAL\\_REPORT.pdf](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/reports/Never_Too_Late_To_Learn_-_FINAL_REPORT.pdf) (PDF)

<sup>25</sup> [www.nnecl.org/resources/moving-on-up-report?topic=guides-and-toolkits](http://www.nnecl.org/resources/moving-on-up-report?topic=guides-and-toolkits)

Many mature students take non-traditional routes in to higher education. For example, over 23,600 students took an Access to Higher Education Diploma<sup>26</sup> in 2015-16, with 87 per cent of those being mature students. Other common qualifications include distance learning A-levels, professional experience or qualifications, foundation courses, and the Open University Access modules<sup>27</sup>.

### **Finance can be a barrier to higher education for mature students**

Students who have either graduated or completed more than one year of any higher education qualification previously may not be eligible for full student finance to cover the costs of studying. For example, most students who hold a higher education qualification are currently not entitled to apply for fee loans for a second course if that course leads to a qualification that is equivalent or lower in level (ELQ) than their first qualification. This may create a barrier for students who have dropped out of higher education for reasons associated with disadvantage in the past, or who have studied a different higher education qualification such as a HNC, and would then like to start stage one of a full degree.

In addition, while there is a student finance package available for tuition fees and living costs while studying in higher education, there is much less support for the level 3 education often required to gain entry to higher education. For example, the tuition fees for some level 3 qualifications such as an Access to Higher Education Diploma can be funded using an Advanced Learner Loan<sup>28</sup>, but living cost support is often limited to bursaries provided by the further education college.

Finally, recent MillionPlus research<sup>29</sup> identified that mature students are more likely to have childcare responsibilities, mortgages, and commute to university or college, and therefore incur the associated financial and practical barriers to studying in higher education.

### **Mature students are a non-captive audience**

Prospective mature learners, who are not already enrolled with a further education college, are a non-captive and diverse audience. Outreach and information, advice and guidance (IAG) for young learners often relies on institutions engaging with schools and colleges. Higher education providers, therefore, may have to take a more innovative approach to engaging potential mature students, for example by targeting specific groups, such as parents or cultural groups, for outreach activities, and using targeted marketing to provide IAG about higher education. Examples of such activities can be found in The Open University report<sup>30</sup> (2017), commissioned by OFFA, on understanding the impact of outreach on access to higher education for adult learners with no previous qualifications.

The Social Mobility Advisory Group report<sup>31</sup> (2016) states that IAG for mature learners is limited, and highlights this as a key area for development. IAG for prospective mature students is available online, for example the Lifepilot<sup>32</sup> website, and in many further education colleges.

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<sup>26</sup> [www.accesstohe.ac.uk/AboutUs/Publications/Pages/AccessstoHigherEdu.aspx](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/AboutUs/Publications/Pages/AccessstoHigherEdu.aspx)

<sup>27</sup> [www.open.ac.uk/courses/do-it/access](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/do-it/access)

<sup>28</sup> [www.gov.uk/advanced-learner-loan](http://www.gov.uk/advanced-learner-loan)

<sup>29</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students)

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<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511112343/https://www.offa.org.uk/egp/improving-evaluation-outreach/outreach-mature-learners/> (PDF)

<sup>31</sup> [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2016/working-in-partnership-final.pdf](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2016/working-in-partnership-final.pdf) (PDF)

<sup>32</sup> [www.life-pilot.co.uk/](http://www.life-pilot.co.uk/)

However, research<sup>33</sup> from MillionPlus and the NUS (2012) shows that many mature learners do not use public information sources. Therefore institutions may need to be proactive in providing IAG to specific mature student groups.

### What is already being done through access agreements?

In 2018-19 access agreements:

- just over 60 per cent of institutions set targets relating to mature learners
- of those setting targets relating to mature students, 84 per cent institutions set targets related to access, 40 per cent for student success, and 11 per cent for progression of mature students
- just under one third of institutions set targets relating to the non-continuation rates of mature students
- a small number of institutions (13 per cent) set targets relating to mature and part-time learners
- a little under 20 per cent of institutions set collaborative targets relating to mature learners.

### Effective approaches

#### Conduct an assessment of your performance using the OFFA tool and student consultation

The OfS Regulatory Notice 1<sup>34</sup> states that universities and colleges applying for an access and participation plan must conduct an assessment of their current performance to understand the issues facing mature students and the opportunities available, and identify a strategy based on this information. This may include considering the institution's mission, local and national demographics, applications and acceptances to the institution, and mature student and community opinions.

For example, as detailed in a blog<sup>35</sup>, the **University of Bristol** (2017) found that mature student applicants were more likely than the whole student population to be from several key OFFA target groups<sup>36</sup>, and that more than half of applications were independent of a school or college. They also identified that students on their Foundation Year in Arts and Humanities were more likely to have experienced multiple forms of disadvantage.

The Office for Students' 'Regulatory Notice 1: Access and participation plan guidance for 2019-20'<sup>37</sup> highlights that providers must ensure that students will be active partners in developing, implementing and evaluating access, success and progression work. Providers may wish to consult mature students using a variety of methods such as student representation in decision making meetings, focus groups, or by developing programmes in partnership with students.

Higher education providers can also use the OFFA commissioned three-step evaluation tool<sup>38</sup> (2017) to inform the development of their outreach for adult learners. Student unions can also

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<sup>33</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/reports/Never\\_Too\\_Late\\_To\\_Learn\\_-\\_FINAL\\_REPORT.pdf](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/reports/Never_Too_Late_To_Learn_-_FINAL_REPORT.pdf) (PDF)

<sup>34</sup> [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/)

<sup>35</sup> <https://policybristol.blogs.bris.ac.uk/2017/07/04/its-time-to-put-mature-students-at-the-heart-of-widening-participation/>

<sup>36</sup> [www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/target-groups/](http://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/target-groups/)

<sup>37</sup> [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1024/ofs2018\\_03.pdf](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1024/ofs2018_03.pdf) (PDF)

<sup>38</sup> [www.offa.org.uk/egp/improving-evaluation-outreach/outreach-mature-learners/](http://www.offa.org.uk/egp/improving-evaluation-outreach/outreach-mature-learners/)



use the tool as a set of questions to ask their institution about what they are doing to support mature learners.

### **Provide accessible routes in to higher education and work collaboratively**

Depending on provider entry requirements, prospective mature students may have to complete a level 3 qualification to access higher education. In this instance, a provider's ability to recruit more mature students is reliant on the awareness, availability, and accessibility of level 3 provision. Therefore it is important that higher education providers are working collaboratively with schools, further education colleges, and providers of distance learning level 3 qualifications such as A-levels. Distance learning STEM courses present a specific problem as students aren't always able to access facilities to complete the practical element of the course. Institutions may wish to work with providers of such courses to make facilities available for this purpose.

Alternatively, some higher education providers offer a variety of accessible routes into higher education based at their own institution. For example:

- The **University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Centre** offers comprehensive IAG and a broad range of pathways for mature students including foundation, part-time, and short courses which account for varied entry requirements and life experience.
- The **University of Kent** runs an Access to Higher Education Diploma course in the evenings at the schools they sponsor for the parents and community of the school students.
- The **University of Bristol** offers a Foundation Year in Arts and Humanities, BA (Hons) English Literature and Community Engagement, and Ways into History short course, all of which have no formal entry requirements and use other means to assess suitability for study.

### **Information, advice and guidance (IAG) and outreach for mature students**

In 2018-19 access agreements, 81 institutions stated that they provide IAG to mature students. For example, **Birkbeck, University of London** offers monthly Get Started sessions to support prospective mature students through the whole application process, from choosing a course, to supporting with fees and finance.

Some institutions target specific groups of prospective mature learners in collaboration with community groups and organisations. For example, **Bath Spa University** commissioned research<sup>39</sup> into the experiences of people with a services background who undertake an Access to Higher Education Diploma (2016).

Other institutions use targeted outreach specifically for mature learners including taster days, summer schools and advertising aimed for parents at schools. For example, **Croydon College** runs a summer school for mature students. During this event, students are given a full induction to the college, services and facilities, and their tutor. The students are introduced to their chosen subject by completing small project work and are taught academic research methods and referencing.

To read more case studies about effective outreach for adult learners, see the OFFA commissioned research by the Open University<sup>40</sup> research (2017).

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<sup>39</sup> <http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/8454/1/8454.pdf> (PDF)

<sup>40</sup> <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511112343/https://www.offa.org.uk/egp/improving-evaluation-outreach/outreach-mature-learners/>

## **Student success: Taking a whole institution approach to working with mature students, including providing flexible modes of learning**

To enable mature students to succeed in higher education, it may be necessary to make sure a provider is encouraging a sense of belonging among mature learners<sup>41</sup> and meeting their practical needs. An OFFA-commissioned tool<sup>42</sup> assessing a 'whole institution approach' is available to help you review your performance in this area and identify areas for development.

For example, **Liverpool John Moores University** offers Skype facilities to students with parental responsibilities.

Some institutions also provide flexible degree level study aimed at mature students from under-represented groups. This may include flexible and evening part- and full-time study, intensive block classes, modular and credit-based pathways, and virtual or distance learning. An alternative mode of study may be competency-based learning in collaboration with employers.

For example, **Kingston Maurward College and the British Holiday and Home Parks Association** have developed a foundation degree in Tourism Park Management, the flexible delivery of which fits around employment.

Research by MillionPlus<sup>43</sup> (2018) highlights the need to ensure that institutions are set up to be accessible to those with caring responsibilities. They recommend that institutions avoid making changes to timetables which may affect mature students with childcare or work arrangements to ensure that caring responsibilities do not act as a barrier for course completion.

### **Provide tailored financial support for mature students**

Some institutions highlight that they provide additional financial support for mature students, for example for student parents, to aid retention and success. A key recommendation for providers in the MillionPlus report<sup>44</sup> is that institutions should make mature students aware of the financial support available to them.

Where a provider offers significant financial support for mature students, they need to be able to provide strong evidence of how this financial support will help to improve outcomes for mature students. More information can be found in our financial support topic briefing<sup>45</sup>.

### **Student success and progression: Providing tailored support for mature students**

Many institutions report that they offer intensive pastoral, tutoring and mentoring support schemes for mature students. This support is aimed at helping students throughout the duration of their course, identifying those at risk of dropping out.

For example, **Coventry University** runs Transition events for mature students before they start their course. These events provide an opportunity for networking and familiarisation with the institution. The university states that these have resulted in an increased uptake in places and a decrease in drop-out rates.

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<sup>41</sup> [www.researchgate.net/publication/303523035\\_Thinking\\_'spatially'\\_about\\_mature\\_part-time\\_learners\\_in\\_HE](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/303523035_Thinking_'spatially'_about_mature_part-time_learners_in_HE)

<sup>42</sup> <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511112311/https://www.offa.org.uk/egp/whole-institution-approach/>

<sup>43</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students)

<sup>44</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students)

<sup>45</sup> <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511112448/https://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/guidance/topic-briefings/offa-topic-briefing-financial-support/>



Furthermore, MillionPlus research<sup>46</sup> (2018) found that a quarter of students said their student experience could be improved by including more opportunities to meet up with other mature students of similar ages.

Some institutions report that they are supporting the progression of mature students in to employment after identifying key issues in this area. Therefore, institutions may wish to consider how best to support the employability and further study of mature students in their own context.

For example, the **University of East Anglia** has an Employability Development Fund available to target groups, including mature learners. Students are able to use it how they wish with the majority using it to fund work experience and internships, which has helped to improve their confidence, personal development and soft skills.

## Further reading

1. The Open University and OFFA report, 'Understanding the impact of outreach activity for mature learners with low or no prior qualifications'<sup>47</sup> (2017) highlights five case studies and provides a tool providers can use to evaluate their mature student outreach provision.
2. Two MillionPlus reports, 'Never Too Late To Learn'<sup>48</sup> (2012), and 'Forgotten Learners: building a system that works for mature students'<sup>49</sup> (2018) highlight the issues facing mature students and provide recommendations.
3. The London Economics report (2017) for The Open University, Birkbeck University and London South Bank University 'How is the demand for part-time higher education affected by changing economic conditions?'<sup>50</sup> explores some of the issues relating to the part-time student market.

## Questions to consider

1. How are you collecting evidence of the gaps in access, student success, and progression of mature students at your institution?
  - a. How are you taking a strategic, whole lifecycle approach to these issues?
  - b. How do you support the retention and success of your mature students?
  - c. How do you ensure mature learners get adequate support as they prepare to enter and succeed in employment or postgraduate study? Have you articulated this well in your access agreement?
2. How could you listen to and engage with mature learners better, so that you can provide effective support and address any barriers facing them?
3. How might you adapt your mode of studying and/or offer flexible learning provision to make higher education more accessible to your mature learners?
4. How might you provide information, advice and guidance to prospective students who are a non-captive audience?

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<sup>46</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students)

<sup>47</sup>

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180511112343/https://www.offa.org.uk/egp/improving-evaluation-outreach/outreach-mature-learners/>

<sup>48</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/never-too-late-to-learn](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/never-too-late-to-learn)

<sup>49</sup> [www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students](http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/policy/reports/forgotten-learners-building-a-system-that-works-for-mature-students)

<sup>50</sup> <https://londoneconomics.co.uk/blog/publication/demand-part-time-higher-education-affected-changing-economic-conditions-september-2017/>

- a. Could you use any marketing techniques to provide information to potential mature students?
  - b. Do you collaborate with adult community groups and further education colleges?
5. Do you provide any taster courses, short courses, or alternative entry qualifications such as foundation qualifications to support mature learners back into education?
6. What systems do you have in place to robustly evaluate the impact of your work in relation to mature learners?
7. Is your financial support strategy meeting the needs of your mature learners?

### **Case Study (access): University of East London (UEL)**

UEL's Competency Based Learning (CBL) approach, YourWay, is designed to upskill students who require further education to meet new labour market changes and demands. Traditional distance learning in this area takes the same time as face-to-face degree programmes and has poor completion rates.

The product being developed by UEL is a flexible, online subscription model, co-developed with employers, targeted at developing mastery of key competencies which align with particular employment needs.

Overall it enables a faster and more flexible progression route into higher level skills, in a more accessible form. UEL is introducing the following programmes to meet employer identified needs in 2017-18:

- Cert HE Management and Leadership (dual award with the Chartered Management Institute)
- Cert HE Hospitality and Tourism Management
- Cert HE Health and Social Care Management

### **Case study (student success): University of Manchester**

The Off-Campus Students project led by the University of Manchester's Students' Union aims to improve the experience and retention of living at home students. This also encompasses mature students, student parents, and student carers, who all equally received tailored support and social events.

The project has included collaboration with Academic Schools and departments to create events, guidance and student societies which have dramatically improved the representation of living at home students on campus. One example of the support that has been developed is a range of student support guides for students living at home, mature students, student parents, and student carers. These guides have been developed to assist students from these target groups in accessing university support.

Additionally, the project offers a range of pre-arrival advice through representing living at home students at the University of Manchester Open Days and establishing a Living at Home Students Residential which occurs the week before Welcome Week.

During 2016-17 the project delivered a pilot Commuter Cost Scheme, where the university offered 100 students travel reimbursement costs of £100 per semester, encouraging them to engage with extra-curricular activities on campus.

### **Case study (progression): Myerscough College**

The college has developed a coherent approach to the development of academic, personal and wider employability skills to support students in preparing for graduate-level employment or further study in their chosen field.

The development of employability skills is embedded in the curriculum through specific career development and work-related learning modules, vocational assessments and a centralised and structured programme of course and personal tutorials. These activities are linked to the college's 'Graduate Employability' programme to provide a framework of learning materials, support and recognition for the development and enhancement of student employability skills.

This joined-up approach to the development of graduate-level employability skills has helped support graduate-level outcomes for progression to employment or further study.

The college will continue to invest in the further development and delivery of this employability framework which is particularly beneficial for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may have little or no previous work experience and for mature students seeking to build on their existing portfolio or start a second career.