

**Evidence to the Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance
Arrangements in Wales**

PART-TIME HIGHER EDUCATION IN WALES: FINAL REPORT

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Introduction

WISERD was commissioned by the Welsh Government to provide evidence on part-time higher education in Wales for the Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales (the Diamond Review). This report provides an account of the work carried out. It encompasses a variety of research, including analysis of statistical data, literature review and interviews with key informants. It should be emphasised, however, that the central purpose of this research has been to scope the field, rather than to carry out fully developed analysis. Accordingly, the report concludes by making recommendations as to areas for further research, which the Review may consider undertaking.

The next section explores some of the definitional issues that arise in analysing part-time higher education. There follows a broad-brush account of recent trends in the development of part-time higher education in Wales. This provides the context for a review of the previous research literature in this area, both general and specific to Wales. The subsequent section engages with the views expressed by 'key actors' in Welsh higher education on the most pressing problems confronting part-time provision of higher education currently. Finally, we identify some of the most important areas where, we believe, further research is required.

Definitions

It is widely recognised that defining part-time higher education in a meaningful way is problematic (for example, Feinstein *et al.*, 2007). In particular, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between part-time and full-time higher education, as the provision of the latter has become more flexible and ‘full-time’ students are more likely to combine their studies with other activities (especially employment). As a result, part-time higher education has come to be defined as a residual: that is, everything which is not defined as ‘full-time’. Moreover, the latter is specified in somewhat arbitrary terms. For example, formal HESA definitions are based on precise numbers of contact hours per week and weeks of attendance in the year; hence, someone attending a higher education institution for 23 weeks in the year would be classified as part-time, whilst someone attending for 24 weeks would be full-time.¹

It is also the case that there is very substantial heterogeneity within part-time higher education. It encompasses a range of programmes, from postgraduate degrees (research-based and taught), to bachelors or first degrees, foundation degrees, diplomas and certificates of higher education, higher national diplomas and certificates, as well as a multiplicity of other vocational qualifications. There are also large numbers of part-time students who are not seeking a formal qualification at all (as, for example, in some forms of work-based provision) (for example, Maguire, 2013). It is not surprising, in consequence, that there is considerable diversity in the motivations for undertaking part-time study, in the educational and wider social backgrounds of part-time students, in their learning experiences, as well as in the effects of their studies on their subsequent lives.

There is no straightforward way of resolving these ambiguities. However, it is clear that they need to be borne in mind when interpreting both statistical data and the results of previous research. Certainly, we need to be extremely circumspect in making generalisations across a notional ‘part-time sector’ and in drawing hard-and-fast distinctions between part-time and full-time higher education. Inevitably, this has important implications for the development of policies.

¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/1902/#mode>

Part-time Participation in Higher Education in Wales: a descriptive analysis

This section sets out an initial, descriptive analysis of recent trends in part-time higher education, based upon formal HESA definitions of the latter.² It is primarily based upon Welsh-domiciled students, some of whom study at institutions that are outside of Wales. However, some of the analysis looks at students registered in institutions in Wales, some of whom live outside of Wales. With the *caveats* set out in the previous section in mind, a feature of our analysis is that it distinguishes between different groups of part-time students in terms of the type of programme on which they are registered.

HESA Data: definitions

We use the following methods of defining the sample group of students:

- All Wales-domiciled students in the HESA datasets from 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10, 2010/11, 2011/2012 and 2012/13;
- All students studying at higher education institutions in Wales in the HESA datasets 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10, 2010/11, 2011/2012 and 2012/13;
- ‘Instances’ officially classified as part-time and those on further education (in higher education institutions) continuous delivery (using the XMODE01 variable)³;
- Every ‘instance’ over the time period (even if this means the same student appears more than once, although we will look at the consequences of this in the analysis);
- Only the first year of each ‘instance’ in the reporting period is included (using XFYRSR01), that is, every *new* instance in the time period.

The reason that ‘instances’ are used here, and not unique students, is that over the four year period students may undertake more than one course. Each ‘instance’ is recorded as at one of five levels (using XLEV501):

1. Postgraduate (research)
2. Postgraduate (taught)
3. First degree
4. Other undergraduate
5. Further education.

Patterns of Change in Part-time Numbers

In total, there are 298,566 part-time ‘instances’ over the six year period and 210,105 unique students (70 per cent of all ‘instances’ in this time period). A breakdown of the number of ‘instances’ over time and by level is presented in Table 1. This shows that the number of part-time first degree students has risen by 25 per cent over the six year period. However, there has been a 15 per cent decline in the number of part-time ‘instances’ on other undergraduate

² We are very grateful to colleagues in the Welsh Government who made these data available to us for the purposes of this analysis.

³ ‘Part-time’ includes those studying part-time on block release, during the evenings only, and full-time for less than 24 weeks in the academic year. It *excludes* sandwich students.

courses. It is also worth noting that the number of part-time ‘instances’ on further education courses has risen quite significantly over this time period, by some 14 per cent (although, as Table 2 shows, this is largely accounted for by the growth in Welsh for Adults).

Table 1: Number of Wales-Domiciled Part-time Instances, 2007/08 to 2012/13

Level	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	TOTAL	% change*
All PG	4,758	4,672	4,783	4,598	4,128	4,689	27,628	-6.5
First degree	2,633	3,014	3,257	3,303	3,450	3,627	19,284	25.3
Other UG	19,921	19,436	17,262	17,171	17,221	16,293	107,304	-14.8
<i>All UG</i>	22,554	22,450	20,519	20,474	20,671	19,920	126,588	-9.8
FE in HE	22,329	23,923	20,523	25,090	28,260	24,225	144,350	13.5

* Calculated as the % change between 2007/08 + 2008/09 and 2011/12 + 2012/13.

The more detailed breakdown of the types of courses (defined in terms of the qualifications aimed for) shown in Table 2 reveals further important divergences over time, which emphasise the heterogeneity of the part-time ‘sector’. For example, although part-time first degree numbers have risen over time (see Table 1), Table 2 shows that the number of ‘instances’ with NVQ Level 6 course aims has actually fallen by almost a fifth (-19.4 per cent), largely accounted for by a significant decline in the number of Level H Diplomas. Conversely, although the number of ‘instances’ in the other undergraduate category has declined significantly (Table 1), this masks a significant increase in numbers on courses with NVQ Level 5 aims (Table 2).

Table 2: Course Aims of Wales Domiciled Part-time Instances between 2007/08 and 2012/13

Course Aim	Number of Instances	% change*
Welsh for adults†	131,878	18.5
Access Level	2,295	-46.3
NVQ1	3,374	-65.3
NVQ2	4,300	49.7
NVQ3	2,503	-54.7
NVQ4	71,384	-8.7
NVQ5	12,668	23.5
NVQ6	42,517	-19.4
NVQ7	26,346	-6.7
NVQ8	1,301	-4.0
<i>Total</i>	298,566	1.2

* Calculated as the % change between 2007/08 + 2008/09 and 2011/12 + 2012/13.

† This includes approximately 1,000 instances with no formal qualification aims.

In short, then, there is no consistent pattern of change over the part-time higher education ‘sector’. Different types of part-time higher education have shown markedly different trends of development over the period considered here, reflecting the complexity of factors that influence

levels of participation. We think that this is an important point, which otherwise extremely valuable previous studies have not adequately acknowledged (for example, Williams, 2010).

Intensity of Study

In this section, we examine the intensity of participation amongst Wales-domiciled part-time higher education students. This is measured as the full-time equivalence of each component of study that a student is registered on in each year. These are aggregated to provide a total measure of full-time equivalence (FTE) for each student ‘instance’ (in each year). This is significant, as eligibility for student financial support is contingent upon individuals meeting intensity thresholds. In addition, there are important implications for higher education institutions in terms of the organisation and costs of provision.

The average FTE of part-time students varies by level of qualification. For postgraduate research this is 0.51 (or 51%); for postgraduate taught 0.33; first degree 0.41; other undergraduate 0.28; and for further education in higher education 0.08. In other words, the lower the level of qualification being studied, the lower the level of intensity at which this qualification is being studied.

Table 3 outlines the total FTE for all part-time student ‘instances’ over time. The trends over time are similar to those presented in Table 1 for the number of student ‘instances’. However, the rate of change over time appears to be more accentuated. So, for example, the total FTE for other undergraduate declined by 29.8 per cent between 2007/08 and 2012/13, compared with a total decline of 14.8 per cent in the absolute number of student ‘instances’. Conversely, the total FTE of first degree student instances increased by 32.6 per cent over the same time period, compared to a 25.3 per cent increase in the number of student ‘instances’. In both cases, the direction of change is the same, but the amount of change is more marked when calculated using FTE.

Table 3: FTE of Wales-Domiciled Part-time ‘Instances’, 2007/08 to 2012/13

Level	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	TOTAL	% change*
All PG	1,719	1,592	1,617	1,517	1,384	1,489	9,318	-13.2
First degree	1,091	1,172	1,322	1,310	1,368	1,633	7,896	32.6
Other UG	5,842	6,291	5,443	4,234	4,410	4,184	30,404	-29.8
All UG	6,933	7,463	6,765	5,544	5,778	5,817	38,300	-19.5
FE in HE	1,665	1,979	1,942	1,918	2,317	1,875	11,696	15.0

* calculated as the % change between 2007/08 + 2008/09 and 2011/12 + 2012/13.

Just under 30 per cent of all undergraduate part-time students are studying on courses at an intensity of 0.5 or more. Forty one per cent of first degree students are studying at 0.5 or more, but only 28 per cent of other undergraduate students are studying at this level of intensity.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between level of course, age and intensity of study (as measured by the aggregated FTE of the student ‘instance’). This shows two things. First, it

demonstrates that first degree students are more likely to be studying at a greater level of intensity than other undergraduates. Secondly, it shows that students aged 18-39 years are more likely to study at a greater level of intensity than older students on equivalent courses.

Figure 1: FTE of Wales-Domiciled Part-time Undergraduate ‘Instances’ by Level of Course and Age (2007/08 to 2012/13)

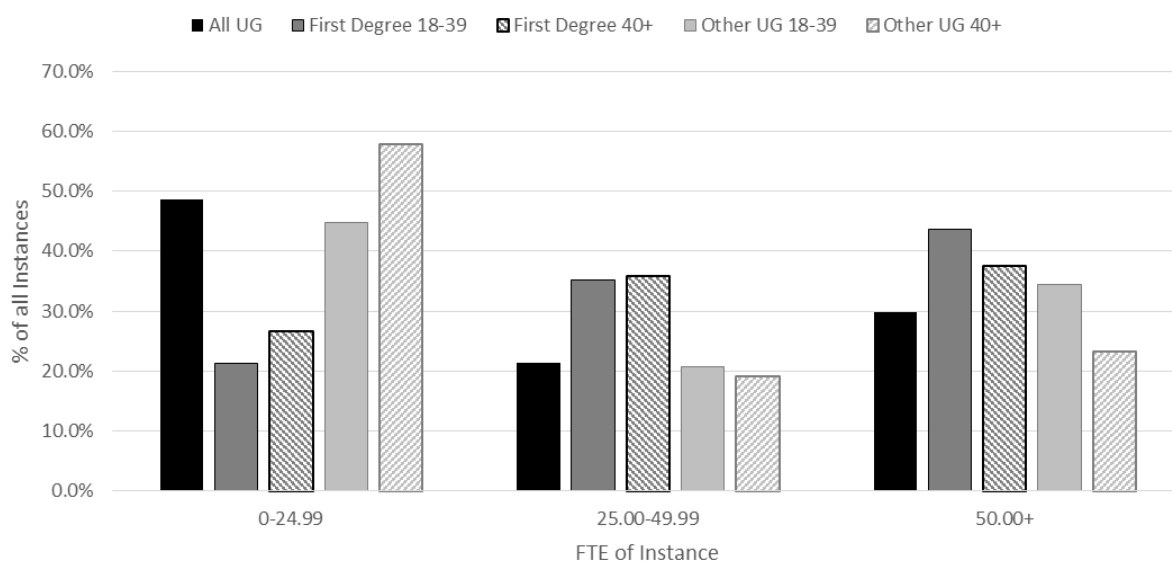


Table 4 shows trends in subjects studied by Wales-domiciled part-time undergraduate students on the basis of their levels of study intensity. This shows that the FTE of part-time students studying STEM subjects has remained fairly constant over time (and accounts for just under 31 per cent of all FTE part-time students). The biggest share of Wales-domiciled part-time students study social science subjects (37 per cent overall); but there has been a fall of 14 per cent in FTE numbers over time. The subjects in greatest decline (measured on the basis of intensity) appear to be those aligned to the arts and humanities. However, it is possible that many of these have simply been reclassified as ‘combined’. But even if these subject figures were aggregated they constitute a 37 per cent fall in FTE numbers over the six-year period.

Table 4: FTE of Subjects Studied by Wales-Domiciled Part-time Undergraduates, 2007/08 to 2012/13†

Level	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	TOTAL	% change*
STEM	2,000	2,061	1,983	1,753	1,987	1,943	11,727	-3.2%
Social Sciences	2,600	2,476	2,430	2,208	2,185	2,173	14,072	-14.1%
Arts & Humanities	1,870	565	530	450	417	456	4,288	-64.1%
Combined	462	2,363	1,822	1,132	1,189	1,244	8,212	-13.9%
All UG	6,932	7,465	6,765	5,543	5,778	5,816	38,299	-19.5%

† Weighted by FTE of the student ‘instance’ and by FPE of the subject studied. However, the weightings are not calculated for each subject and so figures should be treated with some caution.

* Calculated as the % change between 2007/08 + 2008/09 and 2011/12 + 2012/13.

Characteristics of Part-time Students

HESA records the highest qualification on entry for all students. This allows us to compare the NVQ Level attained by Wales-domiciled part-time students prior to entry to their current course with the qualification aim of this current part-time course. This suggests that some 30 per cent of all part-time students (excluding Welsh for Adults and Access students) are undertaking a qualification at the same or lower level than their prior highest qualification. Of part-time Wales-domiciled students on further education courses, 33 per cent are on equivalent or lower level qualifications; and of students on undergraduate courses, 37 per cent are on equivalent or lower level qualifications. These substantial minorities are likely to reflect the important role of part-time higher education provision in promoting the acquisition of professional and other vocational skills. It is also the case, however, that 92 per cent of those whose previous highest level qualification is at NVQ Level 2 and 96 per cent of those at Level 3 have progressed to part-time undergraduate courses at NVQ Levels 4 to 6. In both these regards, the situation in Wales conforms broadly to that reported elsewhere in the UK (see below).

Table 5 shows that the majority of PT students are female. However, there is a somewhat closer gender balance amongst part-time first degree students.

Table 5: Gender of Wales-Domiciled Part-time Students, 2007/08 to 2012/13

Level	% of individual students	
	Male	Female
All PG	37.1	62.9
First Degree	41.1	58.9
Other undergraduate	36.9	63.1
<i>All undergraduate</i>	<i>35.8</i>	<i>64.2</i>
Further education	32.7	67.3

There are important differences in the age profile of part-time students by the level of course they are on (see Table 6). Students enrolled on a first degree tend to be younger than students enrolled on other undergraduate and further education courses.

Table 6: Age Profile of Wales-Domiciled Part-time Students, 2007/08 to 2012/13

Level	Average age	% of individual students	
		18-39yrs	40yrs or above
First Degree	34.2	68.3	30.9
Other undergraduate	36.7	53.7	39.8
Further education	43.2	41.5	55.5

Further analysis shows that the age profile of part-time students is also changing over time. For example, Table 7 shows that there are proportionately more students under the age of 40 years in first degree and other undergraduate programmes in 2012/13 than there were in 2007/08. As Table 8 shows, this is largely attributable to two trends: a greater rate of increase in the number

of part-time first degree students aged between 18 and 39 years; *and* a smaller rate of decrease in the number of part-time other undergraduate students under the age of 40 years compared to those over 40 years.

Table 7: Age Profile of Part-time Students over Time

Level	% of students 18-39 years					
	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
First Degree	65.1	66.5	68.4	68.9	69.9	69.9
Other UG	50.4	53.5	56.2	55.2	56.0	51.5
FE (in HE)	39.9	43.9	39.3	46.1	46.2	36.1

Table 8: Changes in Wales-Domiciled Part-time Students between 2007/08 and 2012/13 by Age

Level	% change in number of students*	
	18-39yrs	40yrs or above
First Degree	40.3	20.3
Other UG	-3.0	-11.7
FE (in HE)	6.8	13.3

* calculated as the % change between 2007/08 + 2008/09 and 2011/12 + 2012/13.

Overall, just under 90 per cent of all part-time undergraduate students are ‘White British’; 5.3 per cent are classified as ‘non-White British’. The ethnic background of the remaining 5.1 per cent is unknown. The ethnic background of part-time students has remained fairly constant over time (see Table 9). However, it is important to note that the percentage of the overall population in Wales from minority ethnic groups has risen steadily, from 2.1 per cent in 2001 to 4.1 per cent in 2009.⁴

Table 9: Ethnicity of Part-time Students over Time

Level	% of students ‘White British’					
	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
First Degree	89.2	89.3	91.2	93.5	93.1	91.2
Other UG	90.1	89.5	89.2	89.3	89.0	89.3
FE (in HE)	50.6†	72.3	90.8	88.3	89.9	81.1

† It is important to note that the proportion of unclassified students in 2007/08 was 21.7%. In 2008/09 this fell to 11.5%, and by 2011/12 it was just 4.9%.

Over the six year period under consideration here, 72.8 per cent of all part-time Wales domiciled undergraduates had no known disability. Higher proportions were recorded for all other undergraduates (86.4 per cent) and further education (in higher education) students (82.3 per cent). However, as Table 10 reveals, these figures are likely to overestimate the proportion of

⁴ <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/population-estimates-ethnicity/?lang=en>. Published in 2011.

part-time learners with a disability due to the high proportion of ‘unclassified’ learners during the first few years of the data. Hence, the proportion of students with no known disability is much higher towards the end of this time period. Nevertheless, this analysis reveals that part-time first degree students are more likely to have a known disability than other part-time undergraduate and further education (in higher education institutions) students.

Table 10: Disability of Part-time Students over Time

Level	% of students reporting no known disability					
	2007/08†	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
First Degree	51.4	50.2	61.9	89.9	87.9	84.8
Other UG	82.2	79.6	81.8	92.4	92.5	91.0
FE (in HE)	45.5	85.6	83.2	94.6	94.7	91.5

† It is important to note that the proportion of unclassified students in 2007/08 was 25.2% overall, including 41% of all first degree students and 50% of all FE (in HE) students.

The Geography of Part-time Participation

The vast majority of Wales-domiciled part-time students are enrolled in higher education institutions in Wales (see Table 11). However, the proportion of students enrolled on undergraduate courses in higher education institutions in Wales is lower; and for first degree students, just over a third are enrolled in institutions in Wales.

Table 11: Where Wales-domiciled Part-time Students are Enrolled, %

Level	% of ‘instances’	
	In Wales	Outside Wales
All Postgraduate	64.4	35.6
First Degree	34.6	65.4
Other UG	79.2	20.8
<i>All undergraduate</i>	72.4	27.6
FE (in HE)	99.0	1.0

The main explanation for the apparently large numbers of Wales-domiciled, first degree students enrolled outside Wales is the registered location of the Open University (in South East England). As Table 12 shows, more than half of first degree students are studying with the Open University through distance learning (11,482). It is not possible to say whether any of the other students are also studying through distance learning. The largest proportion of other undergraduates are enrolled at Cardiff University (18,829); and the vast majority of further education in higher education students (excluding Welsh for Adults) are enrolled at the University of Glamorgan (now the University of South Wales) (11,699).

Table 12: Wales-domiciled Part-time Students Enrolled at Top 5 HEIs, %

First Degree		Other undergraduate		Further education (in HE) (excluding Welsh for Adults)	
University	%	University	%	University	%
The Open University	59.5	Cardiff University	17.5	University of Glamorgan	93.8
University of Glamorgan	11.0	University of Glamorgan	15.8	University of Wales, Newport	1.7
University of Wales, Newport	6.3	University of Wales, Newport	13.5	Swansea Metropolitan University	1.4
Glyndŵr University	4.1	The Open University	12.8	University of the Arts, London	0.9
Swansea University	4.0	Swansea University	9.0	University College Birmingham	0.8

There would appear to be considerable variations in the prevalence of part-time higher education undergraduate students by local authority. According to the ratios presented in Table 13, adults living in Ceredigion are approximately twice as likely to be enrolled on a part-time undergraduate course as adults living in Flintshire. However, much of that variation is in the number of part-time students on other undergraduate courses, as the ratio of part-time first degree students does not vary too considerably by local authority. Indeed, the ratio of part-time first degree students in the aforementioned two local authorities is the same. There are also considerable variations between local authorities in the ratio of part-time learners on further education course in higher education institutions. For example, over the six-year period analysed here, we estimate that there were 266 new ‘instances’ on further education courses in higher education for every 1,000 of the adult population in Merthyr Tydfil.

Equally, there are significant geographical variations in the changes in the number of part-time undergraduate ‘instances’ over time (as the final column Table 13 indicates). The number of part-time undergraduate ‘instances’ over time from some local authorities, particularly in north Wales (Anglesey, Wrexham and Gwynedd), has fallen considerably. In stark contrast, the numbers of part-time undergraduates from Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen have risen by over 40 per cent over the six year period. It remains to be seen, however, how far the latter changes are attributable to specific policy interventions, such as UHOVI.

Table 13: Geography of Wales-domiciled Part-time Students, 2007/08 to 2012/13

Local Authority	Ratio per 1,000 of adult population (16-64)†				% Change all UG*
	First Degree	Other UG	FE (in HE)	All UG	
Ceredigion	9	89	179	98	-25.6
Cardiff	9	75	43	85	1.8
Carmarthenshire	10	68	82	78	-16.0
Blaenau Gwent	10	61	8	71	40.9
Vale of Glamorgan	10	57	42	67	-6.0
Swansea	10	57	54	67	-18.0
Pembrokeshire	13	53	109	66	-1.0
Neath Port Talbot	11	53	52	64	-26.5
Monmouthshire	10	53	6	63	-2.1
Merthyr Tydfil	9	54	266	62	-10.0
Powys	11	50	97	61	-18.2
Torfaen	8	52	4	60	48.4
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	9	50	53	59	-9.1
Isle of Anglesey	10	49	154	59	-32.2
Newport	10	49	5	58	-1.3
Bridgend	12	46	48	58	-0.5
Denbighshire	11	45	157	56	2.8
Caerphilly	9	47	13	56	1.6
Conwy	10	45	192	55	-13.7
Gwynedd	9	43	206	52	-25.9
Wrexham	9	40	64	49	-26.1
Flintshire	9	37	91	46	-20.6

† This is calculated using the 2011 population estimates for working adults by local authority.

* Calculated as the % change between 2007/08 + 2008/09 and 2011/12 + 2012/13.

The proportion of Wales-domiciled part-time undergraduate learners from Communities First areas over the whole period between 2007/08 and 2012/13 was 19.2 per cent. However, this varied between 22.7 per cent of all first degree students and 18.6 per cent of all other undergraduates, with only 14.0 per cent of further education in higher education students from Communities First areas. The proportion of part-time undergraduate students from Communities First areas has increased by 10 per cent over the six year period. As a result of this increase in numbers from Communities First areas, but also the absolute decline in the number of part-time learners from other areas, the proportion of part-time undergraduate students from Communities First areas has increased considerably over the six years (see Table 14).

Table 14: Part-time Students from Communities First Areas

Level	% of students from Communities First areas						Overall
	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	
All UG	17.3	17.8	18.5	20.0	20.7	21.6	19.2

Subjects Studied

Table 15 shows the number and distribution of Wales-domiciled part-time undergraduate ‘instances’ by JACS subject area. The largest share of part-time undergraduate ‘instances’ are studying education-allied subjects (17 per cent of all undergraduate students), followed by subjects allied to medicine (11 per cent). However, the largest number of part-time first degree students are in Combined subjects, which can include combined, general or modular courses.

Despite the large numbers of Wales-domiciled part-time undergraduate ‘instances’ in Education, there has been a 10 per cent decline over the six year time period (final column, Table 18). Languages have seen a 72 per cent decline in ‘instances’. In contrast, engineering and technology, computer science and creative arts and design have all experienced around a 70 per cent increase in Wales-domiciled part-time undergraduate ‘instances’ over the six years.

Table 15: Number and Distribution of Wales-Domiciled Part-time Undergraduate ‘Instances’ by Subject

Subject	First Degree	Other UG	Number	All UG	
				%	% Change*
Medicine & dentistry	1	22	23	0.0	-
Subjects allied to medicine	2,112	12,183	14,295	11.3	5.6
Biological sciences	1,734	1,520	3,254	2.6	8.3
Veterinary science	0	3	3	0.0	-
Agriculture & related subjects	30	1,506	1,536	1.2	-17.7
Physical sciences	590	1,323	1,913	1.5	-3.2
Mathematical sciences	358	343	701	0.6	6.6
Computer science	795	2,641	3,436	2.7	20.5
Engineering & technology	1,416	5,198	6,614	5.2	70.1
Architecture, building & planning	574	2,268	2,842	2.2	7.8
Social studies	1,881	9,756	11,637	9.2	-12.3
Law	506	329	835	0.7	2.5
Business & administrative studies	1,402	9,152	10,554	8.3	-22.0
Mass communications & documentation	36	237	273	0.2	22.7
Languages	789	8,192	8,981	7.1	-71.7
Historical & philosophical studies	1,560	886	2,446	1.9	7.9
Creative arts & design	370	1,177	1,547	1.2	69.2
Education	1,390	20,065	21,455	16.9	-10.2
Combined	3,742	30,505	34,247	27.1	-4.8
Overall	19,286	107,306	126,592	100.0	-9.8

* Calculated as the % change between 2007/08 + 2008/09 and 2011/12 + 2012/13. These numbers are weighted to reflect combined qualifications.

Table 16 provides some key characteristics of undergraduates by subject. This shows, for example, gender differences by subject. Some subjects are dominated by males: engineering and technology; architecture, building and planning; physical sciences; computer science; and others

by females: subjects allied to medicine (including nursing); education; social studies; languages; biological sciences; historical and philosophical studies; combined subjects; and creative arts and design.

Table 16 also shows the proportion of students in each subject who were from Communities First areas. This shows, for example, that part-time undergraduate students from Communities First areas are more likely to be studying social studies subjects and computer science. In contrast, they are less likely to study agriculture, languages and education.

Table 16: Characteristics of Wales-Domiciled Part-time Undergraduate, by Subject, %

Subject	% Female	% Communities First
Medicine & dentistry	-	-
Subjects allied to medicine	86.1	16.7
Biological sciences	66.9	18.8
Veterinary science	-	-
Agriculture & related subjects	51.6	9.4
Physical sciences	34.8	18.8
Mathematical sciences	45.4	18.4
Computer science	36.1	25.1
Engineering & technology	10.1	22.2
Architecture, building & planning	25.7	21.1
Social studies	70.6	29.6
Law	62.3	22.5
Business & administrative studies	59.3	22.5
Mass communications & documentation	53.3	15.9
Languages	66.0	13.8
Historical & philosophical studies	63.0	20.5
Creative arts & design	62.2	16.3
Education	70.7	14.0
Combined	62.8	19.7
Overall	62.5	19.2

* Calculated as the % change between 2007/08 + 2008/09 and 2011/12 + 2012/13. The numbers these calculations are based on are weighted to reflect combined qualifications. Small numbers are removed from the table.

We are also able to look at the subject choices of Wales-domiciled part-time undergraduate students by the local authority where they are domiciled (Table 17). Here the JACS subject areas have been aggregated to STEM, social sciences, arts and humanities, and combined subjects. This shows, for example, that some areas of Wales are more likely to have students studying

particular subjects.⁵ Part-time undergraduate students from Ceredigion are twice as likely as the average student to study arts and humanities subjects. Similarly, Flintshire has a high proportion of students studying STEM subjects. Students from Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen are more likely to study social sciences subjects than the average student. And Cardiff has a large proportion of part-time students on combined courses.

Table 17: Subject Participation of Wales-domiciled Part-time Undergraduate Students by Local Authority

Local Authority	% of Wales-domiciled part-time UG students in each local authority			
	STEM	Social Sciences	Arts & Humanities	Combined
Isle of Anglesey	27.9	51.5	6.2	14.4
Gwynedd	26.9	49.3	8.1	15.7
Conwy	32.5	42.5	7.5	17.5
Denbighshire	39.8	35.9	8.5	15.8
Flintshire	43.5	30.4	9.5	16.6
Wrexham	39.7	29.7	17.2	13.3
Powys	26.1	41.9	12.1	19.9
Ceredigion	14.5	47.8	26.1	11.6
Pembrokeshire	33.1	39.6	10.8	16.5
Carmarthenshire	25.8	39.0	9.5	25.7
Swansea	27.1	26.3	13.5	33.2
Neath Port Talbot	31.8	30.2	9.6	28.4
Bridgend	34.9	35.3	8.0	21.9
Vale of Glamorgan	22.6	26.7	11.7	39.0
Rhondda Cynon Taff	34.1	36.2	7.0	22.7
Merthyr Tydfil	36.3	41.5	8.2	14.0
Caerphilly	28.0	46.7	7.3	18.0
Blaenau Gwent	30.0	57.7	4.0	8.3
Torfaen	30.8	50.0	5.8	13.4
Monmouthshire	24.9	35.5	7.7	31.8
Newport	24.3	45.0	7.0	23.7
Cardiff	14.3	16.8	12.8	56.2
Total	27.2	34.9	10.5	27.3

Part-time Students in Higher Education Institutions in Wales

Another perspective on trends in part-time participation in higher education is provided by looking at Welsh higher education institutions, rather than Welsh domiciled students. If we exclude the Open University from the analysis, then it can be seen from Table 18 that some 23 per cent of part-time undergraduate students studying at Welsh higher education institutions

⁵ It is important to note that this does not take into account variations in overall levels of part-time participation; see Table 11.

were domiciled outside of Wales. The greatest share of incoming students on part-time first degree courses are from England. However, the largest proportion of part-time students on other undergraduate courses come from outside the UK in the European Union.

Table 18: Part-time Students in Welsh Higher Education Institutions

Country of Domicile	First	Other UG	FE in	<i>All UG</i>
	Degree		HE	
Wales	6,676	85,034	142,896	<i>91,710</i>
England	1,295	7,793	3,838	<i>9,088</i>
Scotland	76	217	26	<i>293</i>
Northern Ireland	10	98	5	<i>108</i>
Guernsey, Jersey and the IoM	2	12	3	<i>14</i>
UK region unknown	49	566	772	<i>615</i>
Other EU	377	11,624	239	<i>12,001</i>
Non-EU	155	4,464	202	<i>4,619</i>
% from outside Wales	22.7	22.6	3.4	<i>22.6</i>

We have already seen that the number of Wales-domiciled students studying in Wales's higher education institutions has declined over the six-year period considered here. However, Table 19 demonstrates that there has been a faster rate of decline amongst part-time students from outside Wales. As a result, the proportion of part-time undergraduate students studying in Wales from outside Wales has steadily declined from 26.0 per cent in 2007/08 to 15.7 per cent in 2012/13.

Table 19: Part-time Undergraduate Students in Welsh Higher Education Institutions

Country of Domicile	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	<i>Overall</i>
Wales	17,569	16,586	13,878	14,270	14,706	14,701	<i>91,710</i>
England	2,391	2,177	1,226	1,091	1,163	1,040	<i>9,088</i>
Scotland	116	74	31	33	24	15	<i>293</i>
NI	18	35	16	6	17	16	<i>108</i>
G, J and IoM	2	6	3	0	1	2	<i>14</i>
UK unknown	283	148	141	24	15	4	<i>615</i>
Other EU	2,664	2,966	2,106	1,702	1,461	1,102	<i>12,001</i>
Non-EU	697	781	823	666	1,100	552	<i>4,619</i>
% from outside Wales	26.0	27.2	23.8	19.8	20.5	15.7	<i>22.6</i>

These trends can also be seen in Table 20, which shows cross-border flows of part-time undergraduate students. Although the absolute number of Wales-domiciled part-time undergraduate leaving Wales to study (Export) has declined over time, as a proportion of all Wales-domiciled this has remained relatively stable, 8.5 per cent in 2007/08 and 6.2 per cent in 2012/13. However, the number of students coming to study from outside Wales has fallen at a

considerably faster rate. This has meant that the net gain in numbers (import minus export) has fallen by more than 50 per cent from 4,543 in 2007/08 to just 1,762 in 2012/13. There has been a substantial fall in the number and proportion of part-time undergraduate students from the rest of the UK and the European Union, notably from England (52 per cent decline) and from outside the UK in the European Union (54 per cent decline). However, the number of part-time undergraduate students from non-European Union countries has increased by 12 per cent, although the absolute number of students from non-European Union countries remains modest.

Table 20: Cross-Border Flows of Part-Time Undergraduate Students

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	<i>Overall</i>
All Wales-Domiciled†	19,197	18,285	15,851	16,022	16,376	15,670	101,401
Staying in Wales	17,569	16,586	13,878	14,270	14,706	14,701	91,710
<i>% staying</i>	<i>91.5</i>	<i>90.7</i>	<i>87.6</i>	<i>89.1</i>	<i>89.8</i>	<i>93.8</i>	<i>90.4</i>
<i>% leaving</i>	<i>8.5</i>	<i>9.3</i>	<i>12.4</i>	<i>10.9</i>	<i>10.2</i>	<i>6.2</i>	<i>9.6</i>
No. in Wales HEIs	23,740	22,773	18,224	17,792	18,487	17,432	118,448
From outside Wales	6,171	6,187	4,346	3,522	3,781	2,731	26,738
<i>% in HEIs from outside Wales</i>	<i>26.0</i>	<i>27.2</i>	<i>23.8</i>	<i>19.8</i>	<i>20.5</i>	<i>15.7</i>	<i>22.6</i>
Export	1,628	1,699	1,973	1,752	1,670	969	9,691
Import	6,171	6,187	4,346	3,522	3,781	2,731	26,738
<i>Net gain/loss</i>	<i>4,543</i>	<i>4,488</i>	<i>2,373</i>	<i>1,770</i>	<i>2,111</i>	<i>1,762</i>	<i>17,047</i>

† All figures exclude OU students.

Next, we consider part-time undergraduate subjects being studied in Wales's higher education institutions (including the Open University). Table 21 shows a slightly different pattern from that seen in Table 15. In Welsh higher education institutions the subject most frequently studied on part-time undergraduate courses is 'combined subjects', most likely reflecting the nature of the Open University modular system. This is followed by education (similar to the pattern seen for Wales-domiciled students) and then languages.

Table 21: Number and Distribution of Part-time Undergraduate Instances in Wales HEIs (including the Open University) by Subject

Subject	First	Other	All UG	
	Degree	UG	Number	%
Medicine & dentistry	0	82	82	0.1
Subjects allied to medicine	2,092	11,322	13,414	9.3
Biological sciences	1,683	1,341	3,024	2.1
Veterinary science	0	0	0	0.0
Agriculture & related subjects	31	497	528	0.4
Physical sciences	576	1,081	1,657	1.2
Mathematical sciences	357	220	577	0.4
Computer science	793	3,494	4,287	3.0
Engineering & technology	2,086	8,407	10,493	7.3
Architecture, building & planning	466	2,380	2,846	2.0
Social studies	1,807	11,055	12,862	9.0
Law	475	223	698	0.5
Business & administrative studies	1,484	11,540	13,024	9.1
Mass communications & documentation	308	276	584	0.4
Languages	787	17,061	17,848	12.4
Historical & philosophical studies	1,684	1,700	3,384	2.4
Creative arts & design	340	1,413	1,753	1.2
Education	1,407	20,510	21,917	15.3
Combined	3,745	30,916	34,661	24.1
Overall	20,121	123,518	143,639	100.0

These numbers are weighted to reflect combined qualifications.

Table 22 develops this by looking at the net gains and losses into or out of Wales. This is calculated by comparing the number of part-time undergraduate ‘instances’ in Welsh higher education institutions by subject, with the number of Wales-domiciled part-time undergraduate ‘instances’ by subject. The resulting numbers either demonstrate a net gain (positive values) or a net loss (negative values). In the final column these net gains/losses are presented as a percentage of all Wales-domiciled part-time undergraduate ‘instances’ to aid comparison.

This analysis shows, for example, that all Wales-domiciled students studying veterinary sciences part-time, study outside Wales (not unexpected since veterinary sciences is not available within the Welsh higher education sector). But this also shows that Wales is a relatively large exporter of part-time undergraduate students on agricultural courses. In contrast, the higher education sector in Wales is a significant importer of part-time undergraduate students in mass communications, languages and engineering and technology. It is also an importer of large numbers of part-time students on to business and administrative studies, and social studies.

Table 22: Net Gains and Losses of Part-time Undergraduate Instances in/out Wales by Subject

Subject	Net Gains or Losses	
	Number	%*
Medicine & dentistry	59	256.5
Subjects allied to medicine	-881	-6.2
Biological sciences	-230	-7.1
Veterinary science	-3	-100.0
Agriculture & related subjects	-1,008	-65.6
Physical sciences	-256	-13.4
Mathematical sciences	-124	-17.7
Computer science	851	24.8
Engineering & technology	3,879	58.6
Architecture, building & planning	4	0.1
Social studies	1,225	10.5
Law	-137	-16.4
Business & administrative studies	2,470	23.4
Mass communications & documentation	311	113.9
Languages	8,867	98.7
Historical & philosophical studies	938	38.3
Creative arts & design	206	13.3
Education	462	2.2
Combined	414	1.2
Overall	17,047	13.5

These numbers have been weighted to reflect combined qualifications.

* Calculated as the percentage of Wales-domiciled instances.

The broad-brush account of trends in part-time higher education in Wales that we have presented in this section raises a number of questions about the social and economic processes underpinning the trends that have been described. Accordingly, in the next section, we review what previous research has told us about these processes.

Previous Research

Higher education policy has increasingly acknowledged the importance of part-time provision (however defined). This has been true internationally (at the European level, for example, through the Bologna Process since 1999), as well as within the UK. Certainly, the UK government and the devolved administrations (including, of course, the Welsh Government) have all made strong commitments to part-time provision in their strategies for higher education (for example, BIS, 2011; Welsh Government, 2013). The flexibility that it offers is seen as contributing significantly both to the up-skilling of the labour force and consequent increases in productivity and economic growth, as well as to enhancing the employment prospects and earnings capacity of individuals. It has also been argued that participation in part-time higher education has important social impacts, not only through contributing in a major way to ‘widening access’ to higher education and, thereby, to a more equitable distribution of life-chances, but also, more generally, towards the regeneration of communities and sustaining a democratic and inclusive civil society (for example, HEFCW, 2014).

Despite this relatively high profile in terms of policy, part-time higher education remains under-researched. In part, this may be attributable to the rather small proportion of part-time students within many higher education institutions (especially the more conventionally prestigious ones); as well as to the fact that many part-time students are registered on programmes that do not lead to degree-level qualifications. It may also be because part-time students are ‘invisible’, attending their courses outside of ‘normal’ working hours or at home (Jamieson *et al.*, 2009). Whatever the reasons, it is clear that there is nothing like the richness of the literature relating to full-time higher education for the part-time elements of the sector. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a number of areas in which there is evidence relating to part-time higher education.

Characteristics of Part-time Students

It is reasonably well established that part-time higher education students are quite distinct from full-time ones in terms of their social characteristics. Hence, they are more likely to be in employment and to be older. They are also more likely to be female; but less so to be from a minority ethnic background. In addition, a higher proportion of part-time students live close to their place of study than full-time ones. In terms of prior educational attainment, whilst some part-time students have relatively low levels of educational qualifications, another group has very high levels. (For example, Ramsden, 2006; Pollard *et al.*, 2012; Callender *et al.*, 2010).

It is less clear, however, what are the *systematic* relationships between these social characteristics and their participation in part-time higher education. Addressing this sort of issue would require comparison between individuals who do participate in part-time higher education (of various kinds) and those who do not (whether full-time participants or non-participants in higher education), whilst estimating the effects of their social characteristics on the different outcomes. As far as we are aware, no study has attempted this (presumably reflecting the technical difficulties in doing so).

Motivations to Study

A number of studies have emphasised the co-existence of instrumental and intrinsic motivations for undertaking part-time higher education. Hence, individuals report that they have undertaken

part-time study *both* to enhance their skills and future employment prospects (especially where they have low or no previous qualifications) *and* for reasons of personal enhancement (to pursue interests or to fulfil long-term aspirations, for example) (Feinstein *et al.*, 2007; Swain and Hammond, 2011). Fewer studies have addressed explicitly the question of why students have undertaken part-time study *as opposed to* full-time higher education. Those that have emphasise the importance of financial considerations, with most respondents saying simply that they could not afford to give up their jobs. Family commitments are also significant (especially for lone parents). (Callender *et al.*, 2006; Schuller *et al.*, 1999)

It should be noted, however, that the bulk of these studies refer to students on part-time first degrees. Much less is known about part-time students on other types of programme, with our knowledge of those on sub-degree, vocational programmes being especially patchy. Whilst it is reasonable to expect that participating in the latter is weighted more heavily towards instrumental motivations, it should be remembered that, at the secondary education level, the boundaries between vocational programmes and *general* educational outcomes have been shown to be highly porous, especially for some groups of pupils. In addition, many students participate in these vocational programmes at the instigation of their employers, rather than choosing to do so in any straightforward sense.

Experiences of Learning

Large numbers of studies have provided descriptive analyses of part-time students' experiences of higher education, based on the students' own accounts. These emphasise – for the most part – the students' sense of marginalisation within higher education institutions and the difficulties that they sometimes experience in 'fitting in' within the cultural environment of higher education (Callender *et al.*, 2006). However, such analyses are often focused upon rather small groups of particular types of student. Moreover, there is also somewhat contrary evidence: for example, the Open University consistently scores very highly in terms of student satisfaction, at least as recorded in the – admittedly limited – National Student Satisfaction Survey.

There is also some evidence that casts light on the difficulties that part-time students experience in completing their studies. For example, a recent study of part-time students in Wales is very interesting here, although again there are important methodological limitations on the robustness of the findings (relating to the representativeness of the sample) (NUS and Open University Wales, 2014). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, financial issues do not emerge as being overwhelmingly important here; although such issues are clearly of major significance for particular groups of students. Other concerns relate to the difficulties of managing the demands of higher education study, whilst simultaneously holding down jobs and/or providing care and support for families.

The difficulties reported by part-time students are reflected (presumably) in the very small number of studies of retention/drop-out and course outcomes for these students. Hence, for example, descriptive analyses indicate that drop-out rates are higher for part-time than for full-time students, although some care needs to be taken here to ensure that such comparisons are meaningful (and certainly, in some cases, there are not part-time and full-time versions of programmes that can be compared). In addition, the most robust studies systematically take

account of the differences in social characteristics of part-time and full-time students when comparing their performance. Hence, for example, it has been argued in one study that part-timers are some 15 per cent less likely to attain a 'good' degree than full-time students, even when a range of their social characteristics is taken into account (Pollard *et al.*, 2012).

We think that it would be helpful to develop these latter sorts of analysis further, extending them to a wider range of part-time students. However, it should be acknowledged that there are technical problems in doing so, largely associated with the availability of appropriate data.

Support from Employers

A specific factor that has been shown to be of considerable significance in promoting successful outcomes to part-time study in higher education is support from employers. Here, there is rather robust evidence that shows that employer support plays a significant role, not only in terms of financial support (although this is important), but also in creating circumstances that limit the pressures of time and other commitments on part-time students (who are in employment) (Mason, 2014).

However, there is also substantial evidence which shows that by no means all employers are prepared to support their employees' participation in part-time higher education, with larger organisations and those in the public sector being much more likely to do so. The latter finding may well have particular importance for Wales, given the importance of the public sector to the economy overall (Williams, 2010).

Employers' reluctance to provide such support has been attributed to quite basic issues associated with the relationships between human capital (qualifications, etc.) and the movement of individuals between firms; put simply, employers may be reluctant to support their employees' acquisition of qualifications that enable them to obtain a better job with another employer. However, it has been argued that there are also contingent factors at play, such as the impacts of very slow economic growth since the 2008-9 recession and the increases in tuition fees for many part-time HE programmes (Mason, 2014).

Economic Impacts

Some of the most pertinent questions about part-time higher education relate to its economic impacts. There is a very substantial literature that provides a robust analysis of the returns that individuals may enjoy as a result of their acquisition of educational and professional qualifications of different kinds. Characteristically, studies in this tradition compare the economic benefits that accrue to individuals who have a given qualification with those who do not, whilst taking account of a range of social characteristics of the two groups; they are thereby able to isolate the impacts of the qualification, with other differences being 'held constant'. For example, there is extremely robust evidence that graduates are more likely to be in employment and to enjoy a significant 'lifetime earnings premium' compared with non-graduates who are in other respects equivalent (for example, Conlon and Patrignani, 2011).

To the extent that individuals who have acquired their qualifications by part-time study are included in these analyses (it is often difficult to ascertain whether they are or not), then the

economic benefits that are shown to accrue to individuals who have given qualifications are shared by part-timers and full-timers. However, it should be remembered that these benefits are *averages* and, therefore, it may well be important to distinguish between full-time and part-time participants to see whether the averages are disguising systematic differentials between the two groups.

Unfortunately, there is very little research that enables this sort of distinction to be drawn. There are studies which report that respondents say that, after completing part-time HE programmes, they have enjoyed career progression, increased job satisfaction and enhanced earnings (Brennan *et al.*, 2000). More recent studies confirm this generally positive picture (Callender and Wilkinson, 2013).

However, it is important to see how far these benefits differ from those enjoyed by individuals who have not undertaken part-time study, but who are otherwise equivalent. We have been able to identify only one study that presents an analysis along these lines and this is limited by its reliance on the HESA Longitudinal Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey, which follows up both full-time and part-time undergraduates only six months and three and a half years after graduation (Callender and Wilkinson, 2011). Nevertheless, this study indicates that three and a half years after graduation, graduates from part-time study are as likely as full-timers to be in employment and to be in higher occupational categories; and they are more likely to be in permanent posts. They are also likely to be earning more than their full-time equivalents; although the rate at which their salaries grow is slower.

We think that further research of this kind is an urgent requirement. However, again there are significant technical difficulties primarily associated with the availability of appropriate data.

There are also important questions to be posed with respect to the *collective* economic benefits that may accrue to part-time higher education. In terms of conventional economic analysis, increasing human capital – by whatever means – has the effect of improving productivity and thereby contributing to enhanced economic growth. As we have seen, this sort of argument has provided an important element of the rationale for governments to support part-time (as well as other forms of) higher education provision. However, the exact nature of the actual social processes involved here are a matter of some dispute; and, in general terms, there is a dearth of direct empirical evidence relating to the social processes underpinning the statistical relationships that economic analysis has reported. *In what ways* does the acquisition of qualifications affect productivity within organisations? Certainly, there is very little empirical analysis that would allow us to determine whether the acquisition of higher levels of human capital through part-time higher education has equivalent effects in terms of productivity as for full-time higher education. Moreover, there appears to be almost an absence of empirically-based research that examines the extent to which different modes of human capital acquisition – full-time and part-time, in this case - imply distinctive processes for applying that human capital within work-places.

Social Impacts

A small number of studies have argued that there are distinctive social impacts that flow from participation in part-time higher education. Again these can be articulated in terms of individual

and collective impacts. Hence, at the individual level, it has been reported that respondents identify their own personal development as the most significant outcome of their part-time studies. Most frequently, they remark upon the increase in their self-confidence and self-belief; but reference has also been made to: becoming more aware and tolerant of the views of others; knowing more about the world; meeting like-minded people; and developing more positive attitudes towards learning (Jamieson *et al.*, 2009; Swain and Hammond, 2011). One study refers to respondent claims that their general sense of happiness and well-being had improved following their part-time studies (Callender and Wilkinson, 2012).

It has also been suggested that participation in part-time HE generates significant social benefits at the collective level. Hence, respondents report that they are more likely to participate in organisations and activities within civil society. In addition, they say that family relationships have improved; and, more specifically, that they feel better able to support their children's education and that their families are more interested in learning (Callender and Wilkinson, 2012; Jamieson *et al.*, 2009).

Given the importance of these issues, it is very welcome that the attention of researchers has begun to be directed at them. However, further work is clearly required. The studies that have been completed so far are not only few in number, but are also focused on particular types of part-time students (in general, those pursuing part-time first degrees). Moreover, the extent to which these sorts of impacts differ significantly between part-time and full-time students has not been analysed. More generally, we also need to explore the extent to which the social impacts that have been reported persist over time or are a merely temporary phenomenon.

The Need for Further Research

As we noted earlier, in spite of the importance of part-time higher education in government policy, it is striking that the research base for policy development remains rather thin. This is especially the case with respect to Wales. Clearly, there is no reason to believe that the more general findings reviewed in this section do not apply in the Welsh context. However, equally, Wales has distinctive features too, in respect of not only the character of its economic and social conditions, but also the form of part-time provision (that, in turn, reflects past and present policy decisions). As we have seen, however, very little attention indeed has been paid to part-time higher education in Wales (but see Williams, 2010; and NUS and Open University Wales, 2014). This is especially unfortunate, given the current policy controversies. It is to these that we turn in the next section.

Problems in the Provision of Part-time Higher Education: the views of the sector

In this section, we report on the views expressed by 'key actors' within the higher education sector in Wales on the most pressing problems currently confronting the provision of part-time opportunities.⁶ It should be emphasised that the data collected here provide only an initial account, given the very small number of respondents. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that many of the individuals whom we interviewed are themselves involved in the delivery of part-time higher education; and may therefore be considered to be strong advocates of this form of higher education provision. Nevertheless, in spite of these limitations, the interviews provided interesting insights into the state of play with respect to part-time higher education in Wales, especially in light of the current debates about the financing of part-time provision and its organisation more generally.

Perhaps the most pervasive view to emerge from our respondents was that there is a significant disjuncture between what was described as the rhetoric of official policy discourse and the reality of actual provision. As one respondent put it:

*The Minister's recent speech at the HEFCW conference on 'widening access', you know, gave a nod. Part-time is very important to all ages, is very important and so on, but ... if you actually look at the substance of the speech, he sort of makes a nod, then he moves on to mainly talk about schools, which is a million miles away from part-time issues it seems to me.*⁷

In other words, however strongly part-time provision appears to be supported in policy statements, this does not translate effectively into tangible support.

The clearest reflection of this was held to be in the area of finance. Here, there are two aspects. Firstly, providers of part-time higher education expressed the view that institutions are poorly supported to provide part-time courses, especially in comparison with full-time ones. Whilst it was recognised that HEFCW had continued to allocate part-time credit, it was argued that funding failed to compensate institutions for the extra costs associated with part-time provision. In consequence, higher education institutions experience pressures to limit part-time in favour of full-time provision. Indeed, the idea that what was seen to be quite generous financial support for full-time provision is 'squeezing out' support for part-time higher education was a continuing theme amongst respondents.

More and more of the money has been put aside for full-time. If you were to look at the proportion of full-time and part-time, there has been a significant increase in full-time funding and inevitably, therefore, sort of robbing Peter to pay Paul. There is an opportunity cost involved and part-time has suffered, so the part-time pot has gone down, and that is a major area of concern... The funding is a crucial issue.

⁶ This section is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of: four universities (two pre-1992, two post-1992); the Open University; UHOVI; two further education colleges; Colegau Cymru; and NUS Wales. In some instances, more than one interview was carried out. Unfortunately, Universities Wales was unable to participate.

⁷ Given the very small number of respondents, none of the quotations are attributed to individuals.

More specifically, a number of respondents argued that these problems with the funding of part-time provision have had especially deleterious consequences for the provision of courses below first degree level. This, it was argued, has important implications for the aim of up-skilling of the labour-force in Wales. It also implies that the progression routes to higher-level qualifications are being cut off at source, thereby reducing the capacity of higher education to support occupational mobility.

I mean, if the supply chain of part-time students at Level 2 and Level 3 is not funded and supported, then the numbers that universities can pull through is likely to diminish; and I think, you know, that's regrettable for those groups of individuals.

The second area of financial disadvantage for part-time provision is the support available to students for their studies. Here, a number of respondents commented on the historical imbalance in the support available to part-time students compared with their full-time equivalents. However, it was also argued that, even with the extension of financial support (tuition fee loans and course grants) to part-time students, the latter remain at a significant disadvantage. This relates, it was argued, not simply to the level of financial support available, but also to the eligibility criteria relating to previous educational qualifications and to course intensity. Hence, those who already have a UK honours degree are 'not usually' able to apply for course grants. Even more importantly, to be eligible for a tuition fee loan, individuals have to be studying at 25 per cent intensity and for a course grant, at 50 per cent intensity (Student Finance Wales, 2014). Meeting these latter criteria was held to create difficulties for many (potential) students. As one respondent commented:

Where we have people doing quite low intensity part-time study, at level 4 and above but they are doing low intensity part-time study, now the barriers that we see with that is that for people to get loans, under the new regime, they are going to have to study at a certain intensity. I think it's 25 per cent. Most of our students will be studying at a lower level than that, which means that we aren't really able to charge a commercial fee because they are not going to be able to get the support. So it doesn't really support the way in which part-time or our part-time kind of community engagement ... is funded.

Our own analysis provides significant support for this viewpoint. As we saw in an earlier section of this report, fewer than 50 per cent of undergraduate students are studying at 25 per cent intensity, which implies, of course, that the other 50 per cent of these students are not eligible for financial support. Only 30 per cent of undergraduate students are studying at 50 per cent intensity, which indicates that 70 per cent of students are not eligible for the full range of financial support being made available. In addition, those who do meet the eligibility criteria are more likely to be younger (under 40 years of age). However, it is possible that older students are more likely to be supported by their employers and/or to have greater personal resources on which to draw (although the latter needs to be set against the likelihood that they have greater responsibilities for family support, etc.).

It was acknowledged by a number of respondents that, given the diversity of part-time students, it is difficult to predict how the introduction of the new system of student support will affect the

propensity to participate in higher education. Certainly, there was a widespread perception of falling numbers of part-time students over recent years (although our analysis of trends, presented in an earlier section, suggests a rather complex picture). However, there was much less certainty – not surprisingly – as to likely future patterns. Nevertheless, our analysis suggests that the eligibility criteria in operation imply that a substantial proportion of individuals may well remain unaffected by the new support system for part-time students.

It is also important to note that the disadvantaged status that part-time students were argued to experience was not wholly attributed to government policy. Higher education institutions were held to have significant responsibility too. The central issue here was reported to be that institutions treat full-time students as the ‘norm’, with part-timers a – sometimes inconvenient – add-on. This, it was argued, is reflected in pretty much all aspects of students’ experience. Hence, for example, it is much more difficult to access basic information – especially in relation to key issues such as fee levels – about part-time courses than about full-time ones.

I'd say that for half the institutions in Wales, you cannot find out how much they'll charge for it [part-time study]. So you've got to be really determined and, generally, if this is about social inclusion, those people are not going to be that confident and, you know, know how you apply for it.

Respondents also indicated that the organisation of teaching programmes is sometimes badly adapted to the needs of part-time students. One respondent reported:

You get into things such as availability, your hours, what the opening hours are of labs or libraries. There again, often they're planned with full-time students in mind. You get into the awareness of lecturers and how, you know, often teaching staff are accustomed to a full-time student that has a lot more free time, as such their communications are geared towards someone who can do things at much more short notice... You essentially have a part-time student living in a full-time student's world.

There was a widespread view that higher education institutions prefer to recruit full-time students not only for financial reasons, but also because they are easier to manage.

[Higher education providers] can get nine thousand pounds for a full-time undergraduate per annum and that undergraduate is less messy administratively, because they're only able to sign them up once, possibly only once for three years, actually. UCAS brings them along on an escalator. Whereas with part-time students, you don't get anything like that income or maybe less than half that income, in fact. Plus you've got to go out and win the part-time student year on year. Once a part-time student has finished their module, passed their module, thirty credits, sixty credits, you've to go out and win them again. There's no guarantee they'll come back at all.

Perhaps not surprisingly in light of these points, respondents believed that part-time students often question the legitimacy of their status as ‘students’ at all.

The issues are always going to be around their own feelings of legitimacy. Do I belong? Is this for me? Persuading them that they can be part of that, takes some time. But the barrier will always be that sense of legitimacy...

In short, then, what respondents viewed as necessary to achieving a more effective disposition of part-time provision of higher education is a much greater parity of esteem between the two modes of delivery. As one respondent rather eloquently put it:

I would say we need to ask: 'What is the role of higher education? What are the purposes of higher education?' Obviously, you know, to create a highly skilled citizenry or workforce; research and production of knowledge... and cultural and civic contributions to life in Wales and also HE as a global perspective, not just a focus in Wales. So I think we start from those, from those purposes of HE and then you go on to say there is a plurality of modes of study for students. So I don't think there's HE and then there's part-time. I think there is HE, some people may study full-time, some people may study part-time. You know the difference between them is pretty blurred in the middle now.

However, achieving this sort of parity of esteem was recognised to require significant changes not only in terms of government policy, but also in the organisational strategies of higher education institutions too.

Areas for Further Research

As we emphasised at the outset, the principal aim of the work reported here has been to ‘scope the field’, rather than to present analysis that we would regard as in any way finished. Indeed, an important part of our remit has been to try to identify areas where further research is required; and which the Review may consider undertaking. In what follows, we provide a list of such areas.

Part-time Higher Education at Sub-degree Level

As we have seen, part-time higher education has attracted little research compared with its full-time equivalent. However, the overwhelming bulk of the work that has been done has been concerned with part-time participation on first degree programmes. Clearly, this is an important group; and we could usefully extend our knowledge about them. However, as our earlier analysis clearly shows, the bulk of part-time students are not engaged at this level, but rather on sub-degree programmes. Moreover, it is these latter which have undergone some of the most significant changes over recent years. *We regard it as a matter of urgency to undertake analysis of what underpins these changes at sub-degree level, especially in the context of the importance of these forms of provision for economic development at the regional and more local levels and for the development of progression routes to higher-level qualifications and the occupational mobility that these may support.*

Returns to Qualifications Gained through Part-time Higher Education

In the context of the current debates about student finance, the issue of the economic returns to qualifications is of major significance. These returns at the individual level are frequently couched in terms of the ‘graduate premium’, but, especially in the context of part-time higher education, it is actually important to understand the returns that accrue to different levels of qualification (and, indeed, participation in learning that does not attract qualifications too). Whilst we do not underestimate the problems posed by limitations in the available data, *we think that there is a pressing need to investigate the scale of such individual returns, using as comparator groups not only equivalent individuals who not undertake the qualifications at all, but also those who do so through full-time programmes.*

The particular context of the Welsh economy is of considerable importance here. Previous studies of the ‘graduate premium’ have suggested that it is somewhat lower in Wales than in other parts of the UK, reflecting the specificities of Welsh economic conditions (although this picture shifts somewhat when the effects of differential living costs are taken into account) (O’Leary and Sloane, 2008). It is important to understand how far the returns to the whole range of qualifications are affected by the particular features of the Welsh economy.

Moreover, *there is also a pressing need to understand more clearly the extent to which the accumulation of human capital through participation in part-time higher education contributes to economic growth more generally.* Again, the particular characteristics of the Welsh economy are likely to play a significant role here, especially given the evidence of extensive ‘over-qualification’ in Wales’s labour market (for example, Felstead *et al.*, 2013). More generally, we need to address the question of whether human capital accumulation through the part-time mode

works differently from its accumulation through full-time study. This sort of investigation is likely to involve the systematic analysis of the roles paid by employers (of different types) in supporting part-time participation; as well as of the processes through which enhanced human capital is actually utilised in the production of goods and services.

The Impacts of New Financial Support Systems on Part-time Participation

We have suggested earlier that the eligibility criteria are likely to restrict the impact of the enhanced financial support available to part-time students in Wales. However, further analysis is needed to confirm this. More specifically, *it is important to establish the extent to which the availability of loans and grants for part-time students affects not only the levels of participation in higher education, but also the composition of the part-time student population.* This will necessarily involve asking questions about the role played by other factors (fee levels, the availability of support from employers, perceptions of the viability and value of participation and so forth) in shaping patterns of participation in part-time higher education.

The Social Impacts of Part-time Participation in Higher Education

Despite the claims made in advocacy and policy documents, what we know about the social impacts of part-time participation in higher education is limited. Hence, for example, *the relationships between part-time higher education and social mobility (through access to higher-level occupations) remain largely unexplored.* This is true both at the national level, as well as in the context of local labour markets, where the connections between geographical and social mobilities are likely to be very significant.

It is also increasingly claimed that *participation in higher education has valuable effects in terms of fostering participation and engagement with institutions in civil society, thereby enhancing democratic citizenship.* Again, the extent to which these positive impacts flow from part-time participation in higher education remains largely unexplored.

The Educational Effectiveness of Part-time Participation Relative to Full-time Equivalents

Somewhat surprisingly, there is very little research that would allow us to compare the educational effectiveness of part-time participation with its full-time equivalents (where they are available). Clearly, it is difficult to conduct well-founded evaluations of the relative costs of different modes of higher education provision in the – almost complete – absence of systematic analysis of the effectiveness of the two modes in delivering learning outcomes. Whilst we acknowledge that there are frequently difficulties in establishing equivalence between part-time and full-time programmes, *we nevertheless think that there is a pressing need for investigation of how successfully given learning outcomes are delivered through the different modes.*

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