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**The student experience of Foundation Degrees: a case
study of a cohort in a Foundation Degree in Educational
Administration**

Helen Wendy Thelwell

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is the result of a qualitative case study of a group of ten part-time, mature, non-traditional learners enrolled on a Foundation Degree. The thesis identifies how students think, communicate with one another and manage the learning processes. It explores the attitudes of students who are a new type of cohort entering Higher Education.

The thesis commences by identifying entry barriers to Higher Education and how these were overcome. Despite earlier failures, students retained a belief in their abilities, were motivated and maintained aspirations to achieve a Higher Education qualification. The research then identifies how this group of adult learners developed strategies to support them in their quest for continuing success and achievement, including developing supporting relationships with other students. Students were also very pragmatic in the way they handled the complexities of learning whilst at the same time coping with multiple roles.

E-learning contributed to the learning experience and achievement and the research identifies new patterns and modes of learning for this group of students. Insights into human adaptation to a new learning environment are revealed and the research shows how students utilised technology in order to be successful in their learning. For example, students used discussion boards and email to continue social interaction, communication and relationships formed at day schools.

Other issues that arose from the research are gender issues as well as student change. For example, students reported they felt they had gained confidence. This increased confidence manifested itself in the way they approached their academic work and approached their jobs. In addition, students also believed employers saw their value as enhanced. Students were goal driven yet highly interested in the process of learning, very much in line with mature female goals.

This is a study, therefore, not only of a new type of degree but of new kinds of students following the huge expansion of entrants into Higher Education.

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Enormous thanks also go to my husband who patiently supported me through the seven years and this support has been invaluable. Finally I wish to remember my late father, Mr Horace Holmes, who sadly did not live to see the completion of this thesis but whom I know, would be very proud of the achievement.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Fdf	Foundation Degree Forward
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HUBS	Huddersfield University Business School
LEA	Local Education Authority
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
SWOT	Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
WBL	Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is the result of a two year case study of the experiences of a group of part time mature students enrolled on a Foundation Degree in Educational Administration at Huddersfield University. The aim of the research was to explore the experiences of a new cohort of students who are not traditional Higher Education students entering university straight from school. The thesis examines the attitudes of these students who, in their background and expectations and in their experiences, differ from students in the past. The research takes a phenomenological approach and all data is derived from the student conversation and perspective. The following indicates the issues that have arisen from the research.

The work-based Foundation Degree is a new sub-degree but leads to an Honours Degree and what this thesis identifies is a new way of student thinking. Students are shown to have different aspirations and attitudes towards learning in Higher Education and, although there are many findings from this holistic research, this is an overarching theme. This indicates a change from what has been accepted to be the traditional aim of Higher Education students. These part-time mature students were not solely studying a subject for its own sake but for what it could offer them both in terms of increased knowledge and for subsequent career progression. Students had pragmatic tendencies in the way they handled the work and reward was for the sake of future employment as well as personal

benefits such as increased self-esteem and confidence. The students were married with partners and families. This is also a distinct change from the traditional undergraduate. These students had a different way of thinking as they tried to continually gauge how to balance their roles and deal with the new academic situation they found themselves in whilst at the same time, maintaining and dealing with their other life roles. Part time mature students currently form a significant number of new students within Higher Education.

1.2 Aims of the Research

It was identified in the Government's report "Higher Education and the Learning Society" (1997) that Higher Education research should aim:

1. To add to the sum of human knowledge and understanding;
2. To inform and enhance teaching;
3. To generate useful knowledge and inventions in support of wealth creation and an improved quality of life, (Dearing, 1997).

The research aims to adhere to these three criteria and to conduct a case study into the experiences of adult students as follows:

1. From the student perspective, to identify how they handle the complexities of working, being a parent, entering Higher Education and undertaking the Foundation Degree.

2. To study previous educational experiences and the impact these have on aspirations, investigate how students tackle Higher Education for the first time and also how students overcome entry barriers into Higher Education.
3. To research the student learning experiences on a blended learning course in order to advance knowledge of how students cope with blended learning techniques on a part-time basis. This will include difficulties and how these are overcome, e-learning, distance learning and issues of support.
4. To collate information on student perceptions of changes to their lives during the course of their study and how the new Foundation Degree is enabling these changes to occur.

1.3 The Foundation Degree

Foundation Degrees are aimed at widening participation into Higher Education, particularly for non-traditional entrants and to “*help students to become familiar with work and help them reflect on such experience*” (DFEE, 1998), as well as up-dating skills at the “*higher technician and associate professional level*” (Foskett, 2003). This is also in line with the Government’s aim to ensure Britain’s ability to compete in the global market (Hope, 2006).

The following extract from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) further outlines the purpose of Foundation Degrees:

Foundation degrees were intended to provide the knowledge and skills that are necessary to enable employees to be versatile and adaptable in progressing to and within work. Employability is a key aspect in Foundation Degree programmes and its inclusion should equip and assist learners to enhance their employment opportunities, and/or allow them to prepare for a career change.

(Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2004).

Therefore, in the current climate of the Government's drive to 'up-skill' the nation, provide opportunities and reduce exclusion, the Foundation Degree plays a part in meeting these aims and also forms part of the reforming of the qualifications framework (Pring, 2004). The Foundation Degree is aimed at meeting the perceived skills gap at advanced technician level and also to rationalise the range of qualifications below honours degree level. The Foundation Degree is also expected to become the dominant qualification at this level. The research is deemed important and timely as Foundation Degrees are a new initiative and, therefore, there is little published research into the learner's perspective which according to Tyler-Smith (2006) is '*scant*'. The research is also apt as it has been carried out with a first generation of Foundation Degree students. There were only two male students out of a cohort of forty eight and this gender bias is also important to the issues of widening participation and access. Making an administrative post the subject of a degree itself also indicates a new direction within Higher Education.

The pathway for the Foundation Degree in Educational Administration consisted of twelve modules. Nine were delivered through a mixture of on-line learning and six day-

schools each year and three through substantial work-based projects supported by a personal tutor. There was a minimum of three years' part-time study although students could elect to undertake fewer modules each year and, therefore, extend the time for completion. A few students opted for reduced modules and two of these are included in the research cohort.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The student cohort in Higher Education is changing as a paradigm shift has occurred in the move from elite to mass Higher Education and whilst there is a lot of interest in some aspects of the student experience in Higher Education there is far less research. The Foundation Degree is not just an additional qualification but demonstrates the transformation in emphasis that is taking place within Higher Education. This is not just a matter of a different level of qualification to study. The mass Higher Education system is evolving and this thesis identifies aspects from the view of the student experience that attract critical attention and have a bearing on the overall debate.

E-learning, so much a part of this new experience of education, has attracted attention even if usually dominated by technical issues rather than the actual use made by students. In terms of the multiple demands on them, the experience of women as students has developed a research tradition but adult education has been slower to integrate such feminist research in practise. (Hayes et al, 2000, p3).

In the following, the first section is about the Foundation Degree itself; the second section E-learning, the third considers women learners in Higher Education and the fourth is the experience of learning within Higher Education and are these presented as follows:

- 1 The Foundation Degree
- 2 E-Learning
- 3 Women Learners
- 4 Learning and Higher Education.

1 THE FOUNDATION DEGREE

1.1 Background

Foundation Degrees are a new development in the United Kingdom; they are aimed at students who have had little or no previous experience of Higher Education and require a full time study commitment of two years (or equivalent three to four years part-time). They have been identified by the Government as their main drive towards widening participation and increasing participation in Higher Education. They have also been part of the promotion of the concept of ‘lifelong learning’. The Foundation Degree has a progression route to an Honours Degree and is also intended to bridge the academic/vocational divide (FdF, July 2007). It therefore synthesises a number of policy aspirations. At the heart, however, is the Government’s drive for future economic success through a skilled workforce:

“Our ability to compete in an increasingly global marketplace depends on our ability to equip people with the skills employers need now and in the future.”

(Hope, 2006).

The following extracts from the Foundation Degree qualification benchmark (QAA, 2004) further explains the purpose of Foundation Degrees and reveals some of the assumptions behind them:

23. Authentic and innovative work-based learning is an integral part of Foundation Degrees and their design. It enables learners to take on appropriate role(s) within the workplace, giving them the opportunity to learn and apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired as an integrated element of the programme. It involves the development of higher-level learning within both the institution and the workplace. It should be a two-way process, where the learning in one environment is applied in the other.

We see here the desire for an integration of higher-level learning and the acquisition of skills. The employment of the word ‘applied’ is telling and the workplace is to the fore. Such a commitment attracts a number of sycophantic phrases like ‘authentic’ and ‘innovative’.

25. Foundation Degrees are intended to provide students with the knowledge, understanding and skills that employers need. In order to achieve this it is important that employers are fully involved in the design and regular review of Foundation Degree programmes. It is beneficial if employers are involved, where possible, in the delivery and assessment of the programme and the monitoring of students, particularly within the workplace.

The emphasis is far more on the employers than the students themselves. It is they who should ‘design’ and ‘review’ and ‘assess’.

33. Degrees are intended to provide the knowledge and skills that are necessary to enable employees to be versatile and adaptable in progressing to and within work. Employability is a key aspect in Foundation Degree programmes and its inclusion should equip and assist learners to enhance their employment opportunities, and/or allow them to prepare for a career change.

The keynote here is versatility and adaptability, which makes the content as such difficult to define.

1.2 Research Cohort

Widening learning implies including non-traditional learners. An analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of the learners enrolled on the Foundation Degree chosen for this research showed that they had the characteristics of one of the two groups identified in a Review of Foundation Degrees carried out in 2004: they were female, mature and employed. This same report also identified students on Foundation Degrees “*differ from the overall profile of Honours Degree students in England*” (QAA, 2004). Foundation Degrees are attracting a new cohort of learners and thus providing an opportunity for non-traditional learners that did not previously exist. This is due to the nature and mix of work-based and academic learning and the flexibility that e-learning affords.

This Review furthermore states this group of students had “*a much more diverse range of qualifications, with 48 per cent recording a variety of level three qualifications from the National Qualifications Framework of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). These include NVQs, QAA-recognised Access to HE certificates and other access qualifications*” which is also in line with the students in this research whose qualifications also ranged from Level two and Level three qualifications plus other nationally recognized qualifications eg Certificate in Building Society Law and Practice and an HNC Theology and Identity Studies. These qualifications were wide ranging; not just low level and untraditional.

1.3 The Foundation Degree in Educational Administration

The title of the Foundation Degree used in this study is, “Foundation Degree in Educational Administration”. It was aimed attracting students employed in educational establishments across a range of schools, Further Education and Higher Education establishments and delivered on a part time basis. The course structure included six day schools per year and the use of a Virtual Learning Environment, Blackboard (Blackboard Inc). This was used to support learners by providing access to learning materials, as well as the use of discussion boards for informal communication and formative assessment. This meant issues concerning the growing use of technologies were important for the research and in particular by identifying the limitations or enhancement to academic achievement. Communication with tutors was also available by email.

Although the Foundation Degree title of Educational Administration might suggest the students were learning administrative skills, this is not the case. Students were in fact studying and learning how their jobs fitted into the wider fabric of work, how political decisions and management of educational decisions are made, working with others, law, funding and employment eg learning the ‘why’ rather than ‘how to’ skills. This is an important factor, not perhaps understood by those who would demean work-based learning and opportunities provided for students to learn in the academic world and gain a foothold on the academic ladder.

1.4 Blackboard

The Government has stated its intention to use the Internet to deliver the vast bulk of new spending and new target groups in Higher Education (HEFCE, 2000). It promotes a move towards ‘blended learning’ and ‘flexible delivery’. The Internet is popular with policy makers as it can contribute to the widening participation agenda but as with all new innovations there are consequences which may be unanticipated.

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used in the delivery of the Foundation Degree was Blackboard (Blackboard Inc), an Internet based software system which is used to support teaching and learning in face-to-face and distance courses. It provided tools and facilities for online course management, assessment management as well as online collaboration and communication. Blackboard was used to provide access to learning materials and information about modules and assessments. In addition, discussion boards were created so that students could upload their work for formative assessments as well

as for communicating with other students informally. Discussion board is a general term for any online bulletin board where electronic messages can be left with an expectation to see responses to messages that are uploaded.

The use of Blackboard provided a learning mechanism for cognitive development by providing students with academic and theoretical reading materials and related developmental tasks as well as a means for students to communicate ideas, share concerns and worries and support each other by active learning methods, (The Higher Education Academy) and those that stimulate the affective domain (Bloom, 1964). The impact of technology on Higher Education is changing the way courses are delivered, changing student expectations and experiences as well as increasing the demands on tutor time and changing tutor roles. According to Aspden and Helm (2004) engaging with such educational technology also has the effect of “*drawing staff and students closer together (both physically and virtually)*” and shown in this thesis. Blackboard itself has also been the focus of research: Bradford, Porciello, Balkon and Backus (2008) explored Blackboard from two standpoints of both student learning and faculty instruction and concluded it complemented traditional instruction which this thesis corroborates. However, in contrast Weatherly, Grabe and Arthur (2003) conducted a comparative study on the performance of students in a class with access to information on Blackboard compared to that of students in a class without such access. Their conclusions included both the positive aspects of using Blackboard and negative ones which this thesis also raises. Their research, however, was conducted with students who were full time undergraduates and not mature part-time distance learning students who do not have the

option of regular meetings and lectures. The research is of interest, however, because it may indicate that Blackboard is not necessarily a benefit to all students all of the time and also emphasizes the importance of face-to-face meetings, in line with the findings of this thesis.

1.5 The Nature of Foundation Degrees

The Higher Education Policy Institute conducts annual research on demand for Higher Education which is updated each year in the light of the most recent information. The current review is up to the year 2030. The purpose of the report is to discuss the influences and uncertainties surrounding the demand for future Higher Education and to illustrate the impact of some of these on future numbers. The Government proposes “*a major increase in participation by part-time and mature students*”. These are the targets of the most recent government initiatives in Higher Education, which aim to encourage employers to be much more active in seeking to up skill their employees, and to encourage universities to respond to the anticipated demand from employers. When Foundation Degrees were first implemented, the idea was to bridge the academic-vocational divide (FdF, July 2007). However, the debate regarding vocational studies and academic studies is now being superseded by a debate on academic studies and the learning of skills deemed by the Government to be necessary in the 21st century (Leitch, 2006) which this thesis uncovers and which demonstrates a shift in Government strategy.

Evidence from an evaluation of Foundation Degrees by York Consulting (2004) reported that institutions felt that at both operational and strategic levels, Foundation Degrees

were, in fact, contributing to the widening participation agenda. The DfES report “Widening participation in Higher Education’ (2003a) states, “*the evidence suggests that the principal barriers to access are attainment, aspiration and application.*” The QAA reported in 2005 that students on Foundation Degrees “*Differ from the overall profile of honours degree students in England,*” (QAA, 2005) and this supports the evidence that Foundation Degrees are attracting a new cohort of learners, thus providing an opportunity for non-traditional learners that did not previously exist. The traditional route to Higher Education is a progression from school, with suitable academic qualifications. In the past, adults have been dissuaded from joining universities by cultural norms. UK universities can appear remote and “*other-worldly*” (Marks, A, 2002) and as a place solely for well-qualified teenagers (Bell and Tight, 1993, p25). Although the Foundation Degree is reaching out to non-traditional learners it is, however, unsurprising that these mature adult learners showed a tendency to be insecure and anxious at the start of their experiences of Higher Education.

Contemporary literature on the subject of Foundation Degrees has a diversity of approaches to the subject and many differing perspectives. These are; the knowledge economy (Webb, Brine and Jackson, 2006), delivering the Foundation Degree (Thurgate, MacGregor and Brett, 2007), meeting employer needs (Little, 2005), risk (Rowley, 2005), work-based learning (Edmond, Hillier and Price, 2007 and (Morgan, Jones and Fitzgibbon, 2004), reconfiguring Higher Education (Wilson, Blewitt and Moody, 2006) and finally, progression to Honours Degree (Greenbank, 2007). These critical discourses tend to focus on political, sociological

and employment issues rather than educational issues, which although important and having implications for the future successes of Foundation Degrees, do not directly relate to the student experience which is the focus of this research.

The following research studies, however, have been identified that feature the student experience on Foundation Degrees. The first identifies motivation, background and the impact of undertaking the Foundation Degree, as well as barriers and benefits (Tierney and Slack, 2005). Their findings confirm many of the findings emerging from this research although the breadth is not as wide ranging. For instance, the research does not consider the experience of student learning, technologies used to support learning and methods (eg course structure), communication and support (although tutor support was mentioned). The second was to gather demographic and educational information on Foundation Degrees in the North East of England, as well as investigating the issues of access, on-course support, and progression (Whitham, 2005). This research was carried out with 500 students enrolled on part-time Degrees delivered in thirteen Further Education Colleges. The findings reported that forty eight percent of these students said they felt work experience helped with gaining a place on the Foundation Degree. The authors say, however, a large number of learners that were intending to leave the course early were female and mature and quoted difficulties of coping with work, looking after a family and adapting to Higher Education after a long period away from education. The additional pressure of studying, whilst at the same time maintaining a home, placed too much pressure on these students. However, this

finding differs from the findings of this thesis although it should be noted that the Foundation Degrees in the research were delivered in Further Education colleges.

Issues of time management were identified by Bennett and Marsh (2003) in their research with adult non-traditional learners on a Foundation Degree, as being the most important strategy to coping with multiple roles and conflicts over their time. Bennett and Marsh also articulate that when combining study, family life and full time work, time is a precious commodity which impacts on the amount of time and how the time is utilised by students. Why some students seem to be able to cope with conflicting demands, however, whilst others do not, was studied by Kember (1999). His rationale was that some students were able to employ ‘accommodation mechanisms’ and some were not. These ‘mechanisms’ were firstly; support from employers, family and friends; secondly, both student and others in the student’s environment need to make sacrifices; thirdly, the need to renegotiate previously accepted social positions and status (eg the taking over of roles performed by the student) thus releasing time. Some students are prepared and able to meet these requirements whilst others are not. As the drop-out rate for the Foundation Degree in question in this thesis was negligible, students were able to meet these demands and this research shows clearly how these were carried out.

The twin themes of the Foundation Degree and the knowledge-driven economy were investigated by Webb, Brine and Jackson in 2006. In relation to this thesis two points emerge as being particularly insightful. The first notes, “*new women*

students are being drawn into learning . . . the impact of these qualifications on employment in the knowledge-economy, needs empirical evidence”, which this thesis provides. Secondly, in terms of employer commitment they refer to the work of Gibbs (2002) and question, “*what evidence there is that employers act in the interests of learners, rather than themselves?*” This thesis points to the benefits of doing the Foundation Degree to the individual (increased self-esteem, achieving aspiration and perceived self-importance within their employing organisation). This then leads to increases in feelings of self-worth and self-esteem thus leading to “*greater self understanding, a clearer sense of identity and independent thinking*” (Hammond, 2004). There is, however, one outstanding issue which is whether Foundation Degrees are benefiting employers. This is in contrast to Feinstein and Hammond (2004) who claim there is a lack of research into the benefits of adult education apart from the economic returns eg enhanced earnings or productivity. Stickland (2006) argues there needs to be a greater understanding of the value, importance and success of the Foundation Degree from the student’s perspective which this thesis produces.

It might be assumed that employers themselves promoted the Foundation Degree, as employer involvement is high on the agenda for Foundation Degrees but students reported they themselves had been instrumental in searching for some time for something to meet their learning needs and this fact also affirms that other available qualifications were not perceived as relevant to their needs (Gorard, Smith, May, Thomas, Adnett and Slack, 2006). Research carried out by Beaty, Gibbs and Morgan (1997, p72) with

Open University students and students from Surrey University. They state, “*For many students, however, their own reasons for joining the university are affected by outside pressures from, for example, family, school or employment*”. Although in one or two instances employers were guiding forces towards the students seeking to gain a degree, in this instance of the Foundation Degree for most this was not the case.

The DfES White Paper, “*The Future of Higher Education*” (2003b), noted the development of Foundation Degrees as a major area for future growth in student numbers. Evaluation of these courses (York Consulting, 2004) has suggested they are particularly attractive to people lacking more formal qualifications, such as A-levels. Gorard, in research for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), highlights that research is required to show whether Foundation Degrees are indeed “*attracting new learners who would have accessed other provision if the Foundation Degree programme had not been available*” (Gorard, S. et al 2006). This thesis shows that students had been looking for a suitable course to meet their needs, in some cases for a long time.

2 E-LEARNING

At the heart of the Foundation Degree is the major component delivered by the Internet. This is not only part of the Government's intention but a very important change to the nature of Higher Education generally. E-learning has, therefore, attracted a noteworthy amount of attention. E-learning encompasses a mix of diverse components. For example, the VLE to provide access to learning materials, for research and other important course information: discussion boards that allow students to post work and respond to others: and the use of email between tutor and student and student to student. In all, they comprise different ways of communicating and as a consequence a change to the way students and tutors communicate and work. In the following these issues are explored later as they relate to the thesis.

In 2005 the UK Government, realising the significance of e-learning to education, established within the Department for Education and Skills, a cross-sector e-learning strategy with four objectives: personalised learning, inclusion, flexible learning opportunities and productive time. In 2000 the European Council in Lisbon declared that by 2010 Europe would become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world and the European Union carried out a review of all e-learning projects falling within the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci programme. This programme was established to encourage innovation across Europe within vocational and educational training (Littig, 2006). Littig presents some of the findings of this review and of particular interest is to this thesis is "*what is wanted is a stronger focus on the learners and their needs*", rather than what is more common, a concentration on technical and

narrowly-defined subject areas which the research states are still the main areas for consideration. The phrase '*learner orientation*' (Littig, 2006) is used to suggest a focus upon the learners' needs, their aims for learning, learning content that reflects their interests and whether e-learning is more motivating for the learner than traditional learning methods.

The following concentrates on e-learning and precedes a review of the literature on the combination of face-to-face learning at day schools and e-learning known as blended learning. Sub-chapters are presented under the following headings:

- 2.1 Technology and Learning
- 2.2 The Changing Learner
- 2.3 The advantage of the VLE
- 2.4 ICT and the changing role of the teacher
- 2.5 Discussion Boards
- 2.6 Blended Learning

2.1 Technology and Learning

The research for this thesis provides evidence of the benefits to students of online learning particularly from a social learning viewpoint. Laurillard (2007) makes the point, however, is that if e-learning is to be worth having it must achieve worthwhile changes that cannot be achieved without it. Although the main focus of Laurillard's report is to consider the cost-effectiveness of on-line courses, she reports that from a costing study

conducted in the US, the benefits to students from a design of pedagogical approaches to achieve more efficient learning using technology were shown to be:

- Higher grades
- Better performance on tests of content knowledge and understanding
- Reduced drop-out, failure and withdrawal rates, and
- Movement from passive to active, learner-centered pedagogy.

The benefits of e-learning to the student can thus be identified: the flexibility of when and where to study, wider access to material and more significantly to improve opportunity to study especially for ‘time deprived’ students. The students in the research for this thesis were, however, already confident computer users due to the nature of their employment (Educational Administration). The advantage of computer literacy is highlighted in work by Garland and Noyes (2005). This shows that confidence with technology is a precursor to successful learning via the computer which may explain why students found adapting to the e-learning aspects of the Foundation Degree generally easy. Alexander and Boud (2001, p4) make a valid point, however, that technology does not actually improve learning. They say, “*Most of what we know about learning is applicable in all learning environments, including online*”. However true this may be, in this thesis one of the more energising points about the inclusion of technology in a learning context is the emerging importance of social learning aspects and the social structures. Reinforcing this point, Daggagh and Bannan-Ritland (2004) say computer technology is capable of

providing the context for collaboration and social interaction in which learners will construct the knowledge, reflecting their view that learning is a social process.

May and Short (2003), in contrast, stipulate in their research into on-line learning “*technology is not as nearly as important as other factors*”. These factors they state are:

- learning tasks,
- learner characteristics,
- student motivation,
- the instructor, and
- the attitude and thinking of the faculty or instructor is a key instrument in the success or otherwise of online learning.

The last two identify the importance of the tutor and a lack of enthusiasm will affect how much effort and time an instructor is prepared to put into communicating with students. The importance of tutor communication is highlighted in this research as students reported on the importance of receiving speedy replies to emails and on the importance of tutor feedback and is discussed below in 2.4.

2.2 The Changing Learner

Current research and the research that underpins this thesis shows there is little difference in the way students actually learn in both a traditionally taught course (face to face) and online, a point presented earlier in this literature review (Richardson and Newby, 2006)

and (Durrington, Berryhill and Swafford, 2006). A conclusion from this thesis also shows it is the environment that is different. As an example, because of the earlier educational experiences students came into Higher Education with expectations and some students reported their initial preferences were to be told what to do by a teacher standing at the front of the class but that this preference changed as students realised the benefits of online learning. Dabbagh and Bannan-Rigland (2005) propose the classic model of the isolated independent study student is, in fact, now giving way to an “*emerging online learner*” – one who possesses skills in the use of online technology, learns through socially mediated and collaborative online activities and becomes a self-directed learner, very much in line with the results of this thesis. Self-directed learning is a term coined by Malcolm Knowles (1975) and in their research, Watts, Croston and Durkin (2002) address the needs of adult learners particularly in relation to self-directed learning, which they say differs from the more teacher-centred pedagogical model described by the students in the research for this thesis. In 2000, Hibbert carried out research with distance learning registered nurses. In her dissertation she quotes the work of Tough (1979) who postulated that the self-directed learner needs support from a wide variety of people which is substantiated by this thesis and further demonstrates the importance of people and contact with others in the technological age. Furthermore, it questions the importance the Government is placing on technology over and above traditional face-to-face learning.

The importance of forming communities of learners is discussed by Brown (2006). This can affect student satisfaction, retention and learning and she raises the issue of how

students actually define such a community. Eom and Wen (2006) contribute to the notion of the changing learner: “*E-learning systems place more responsibilities on learners than traditional face-to-face- learning systems*” causing a different learning strategy and the learners must “*self-manage the learning process*”. These authors also emphasise the importance of self-regulatory attributes and processes to changing learner roles from passive learners to active learners. Self-efficacy they say is important as it influences choice, effort and volition. In this thesis, the above three dispositions, self-directed learning, self-regulation and self-efficacy are identified as important factors in successful student achievement in the Foundation Degree.

2.3 The advantage of the VLE

The VLE (Blackboard) gave students access to course and learning materials which also gave them the advantage of seeing the objectives in advance, which Tannenbaum (1998, p409) says is a benefit to students and aids learning. This is because being able to see and read materials in advance helps learners know what they will be expected to learn thus causing students to become more proactive and encouraging self-directed learning. This thesis also identifies, however, student preference for printing learning materials for reading off line. Two articles have been identified that discuss student preferences for reading printed materials. Carr-Chellman and Duchastal (2000) attempt to identify the key components of an ‘*ideal on-line course*’ and in doing so raise the important point regarding the preference for reading from print rather than online materials. Shaikh’s (2004) research into the reading habits for five document types across a variety of participants found participants preferred to read only longer articles as hard copy. Preference for printing out journal articles and learning materials is a sign of studying

with traditional modes of reading, undermining some of the implicit intentions. Being able to see other students' work, whether current or from previous years, is also a unique opportunity afforded by the provision of the Internet and the VLE. As cited by Carr-Chellman et al (2000) this has two benefits: it provides evidence of the level of work required and the chance to identify significant 'higher others', but also standards and quality of work the tutor expects. Dutton, Cheon and Park (2004) identify the term 'computer-centric work patterns' a term meaning the increase in time students spend at the computer fuelled by the need to work online, communicate with students virtually and by emailing - a distinct change, which this thesis shows, to traditional student learning modes.

Most of the students in the research cohort were first-time e-learners. Tyler-Smith (2006) points out there is little research from the perspective of the learner or the learner's experiences and point of view and little research on the direct experience of first-time e-learners. This adds substance and relevance to this thesis as its aim is to present to the reader a snapshot of e-learning, the difficulties and challenges that students overcame, challenges to their belief system about their preferred modes of learning as well as the particular problems that asynchronicity, text based discussions, multiple conversations, information overload and isolation and lack of body language has on communication and consequent learning and motivation.

The importance of support for students has been identified during this research. Support, according to Wheeler (2006) may be the most important issue affecting the success or

failure of online learning as students struggle to cope with, *'full-time jobs, domestic commitments, and other agendas that compete with the amount of time available during a standard week* (Willis, 1993). According to Kember (1995), however, on-line learning on its own is not overly conducive to maintaining student motivation as online learners tend to drop out of online instruction much earlier or more frequently than they do in traditional classroom instruction. Critics of distance learning in general cite poor achievement and retention rates (Hawksley and Owen, 2002) although these range from 70-80% (Flood 2002) to 20-50% (Diaz 2002). More recently, Tyler Smith (2006) considered factors that contribute to attrition rates of adult learners on e-learning programmes. He is also unable to uncover any reliable or consistent reasons for e-learning drop-out and this is in line with the variance with the earlier figures quoted above. This thesis, however, provides evidence that the blended course or a mix of both face-to-face student/tutor and student/student contact and e-learning provides a better learning environment in distance learning resulting in reduced attrition rates.

Neill (1995, p184) fears "*the savage inequalities of the past will extend into the wired savagery of the future*" and Selwyn and Gorard in their discourse on widening participation via ICT (2003) foresee, "*there is neither empirical nor theoretical reason to believe this scenario will change for the better*". This view casts a shadow on the success of the imperative to encourage more learners into Higher Education but as this thesis shows in its findings, other things are more important to students than how they are taught and by what method.

2.4 ICT and the Changing Role of the Teacher

Despite earlier fears about the marginalisation of the teacher and the Internet (Selwyn, 2002), the importance of the role of the tutor and tutor support on an online course has emerged as a major factor in successful student learning and this is corroborated by this thesis. In addition, according to research carried out jointly by the National Extension College and the Learning and Skills Development Agency (Hawksley and Owen, 2002, p7), tutor contact is a critical factor for distance learning. Wlodkowski (1998) advocates five behaviours to guide the motivating instructor:

- offer expertise,
- have empathy,
- show enthusiasm,
- demonstrate clarity, and
- furnish a safe learning environment in which students feel respected.

Beffa-Begrini (2002), however, doubts whether all of these attributes can be addressed in an online environment. These are difficult attributes to get across without face-to-face contact as body language (accounting for up to seventy percent of communication) is absent.

Later in this thesis the importance of online teaching and learning and the impact and change this is having on the role of the tutor is raised. This topic is also discussed by

Smith (2000) and Wheeler (2001). Smith describes the use of the Internet to support learning as creating new boundaries for course designers who must take on board new technologies to support and create learning and to survive the information overload new technologies can easily create. Wheeler, on the other hand, discusses the way ICT is changing the nature of teaching and learning and the consequential impact this is having on the role of the teacher. This change he describes from being, '*an imparter of knowledge*' to becoming guide or moderator, organiser and enabler. Tutor support needs to encompass certain factors: speed of initial contact and close monitoring of student's progress. This point is also made by Canning in his research into Scottish Vocational Qualifications, new technology and flexible learning (Canning and Loots, 2000) and it is also suggested by Hawksley and Owen (2002, p 29) that the tutor often takes on the role of surrogate parent, a point raised by the course tutor for the Foundation Degree in Educational Administration. All these give a clear indication of the impact on the tutor role and also the impact technology is having on the way tutors and students behave and communicate within the current educational paradigm. This is both liberating but at the same time constraining.

"Most teachers see their job as extending well beyond teaching" (Salzberger-Wittenberg, Henry and Osborne, 1983). Whilst this may perhaps be true for school teachers, lecturers in Higher Education have also traditionally encompassed a research role and some may not see their role as a nurturing or supportive one. However, the nature of undergraduates is changing. Mature students are entering Higher Education in increasing numbers and Foundation Degrees are helping this to come about. This, along with technology, has

impacted on the role of the lecturer as this research highlights. Lecturers now also have to be innovators (Hannan, 2001) due to the new cohort of students on Foundation Degrees who come in large numbers but e-learning is, according to Conole (2004), still marginal in the lives of most academics.

2.5 Discussion Boards

With a growing student to staff ratio, Tysome (2006) says discussion boards are a mixed blessing. Discussion Boards were utilised in the Foundation Degree both formally, as part of course assessment and informally, allowing students to be able to share ideas, worries and concerns. This thesis highlights the importance of discussion boards for reflection, data gathering and thinking as students can in their own time view others' contributions prior to uploading. The characteristic of being able to reflect on messages and on the topic under discussion before replying has been the topic of research by Salmon (2002) who writes, "*the time passing between their log-ons and reading and posting messages, encourages them to think rather more about their replies to the messages they have received than they otherwise would in a classroom situation*". Salmon also makes the point that rather than waiting for their 'turn' in a classroom, students can structure their thoughts and then also make them available. Further research about the availability of discussion boards to promote student online social networks and the ability to communicate with one another on a regular basis is noted by Choy, McNickle and Clayton (2002). They articulate that students are able to overcome feelings of isolation and disengagement with the learning experience as they create their own communities

both within the confines of the online material and beyond, which this thesis corroborates.

2.6 Blended Learning

The term ‘Blended learning’ for the purposes of this thesis is described as a mix of learning experiences combining traditional teaching in the classroom with online learning activities utilizing the strengths of each to provide a unique learning experience. Blended learning is a mixture of technology and oral and written communication. Although there is a plethora of articles on the topic of blended learning, those relevant as appropriate to the focus of this research have been selected, as follows.

Blended learning is described by Foundation Degree Forward (2005) as “*an assortment of learning and teaching methods where students are taught face-to-face, online or in the workplace*”. Here the workplace is prominent and this focus on the workplace places some responsibility on the shoulders of employers. However, resulting from this thesis, it would appear employer support is not as forthcoming as the Government initially intended which may have consequences to the ability of the student to meet the objectives of the Foundation Degree. Blended learning, however, is appearing in more contemporary literature as the electronic age permeates learning in all areas and this convergence of classroom and online education is described by Young (2002) as, “*the single greatest unrecognized trend in Higher Education today*”. Young also makes the valid and important point that no two blended learning designs are identical signifying that blended learning is not a single methodology but a complex mixture requiring a

complete rethink of design. This signals a huge shift in thinking to what has traditionally been established as the norm. As learning institutions are encouraged to provide for a larger and more diverse cross-section of the population, blended learning is becoming the preferred solution.

Whether a 'class' where students meet together and listen to a lecture is needed at all is discussed by Dillon and Granger (1998). As the authors deliberate they question whether the time spent on such lectures could be better spent for discussion, the syllabus could be better utilised as a study guide with appropriate links in the Internet thus making it a much better resource, and that the availability of the Internet be used to provide up-to-date and relevant materials, eg case studies etc. The authors also say technology is changing universities: "*My University is not a physical plant with classrooms and trees, but a 'hub' of resources no longer constrained by time and place. My students are no longer 'my' students but we are all students together*". This is a significant paradigm shift on teaching and learning within Higher Education.

3 WOMEN LEARNERS

The Foundation Degree is attracting a large number of women students. In a changing world women are often earning alongside their partners and expectations are that they are able to participate fully in the workforce. As this thesis shows, these women learners identify their learning needs, participate in learning opportunities whilst at the same time, working and continuing to look after their families. In this new paradigm, a curriculum has been expanded to provide opportunities to include work-based learning, the learning of new skills underpinned by academia.

The important issues about women as learners for this thesis are why women undertake the Foundation Degree, what their aspirations are, how they cope with multiple roles, the consequences this has on their thinking and how they manage the learning process.

Literature on women learners traditionally concentrates on issues such as ‘barriers’ rather than on how women learn. Women are not, however, a homogenous group but they do experience similar difficulties or obstacles when entering Higher Education as a mature student. Women’s needs and ways of learning are not identical but gender related identities and social roles affect women’s learning and are different to men’s. Literature on women learners has been included for this thesis that reflect many of these and other issues arising from this student driven research. Of particular resonance to this thesis, Hayes, Flannery, Brooks, Tisdell and Hugo (2000) provide an academic discourse on issues surrounding women’s learning. They say their idea of writing the book was due to a lack of research or literature into the scholarship of women’s learning (also confirmed

by a literature search conducted for this research), that “*most literature on adult learning and adult education treats women’s learning superficially*” and most literature appears to concentrate on educational programmes designed for women, teaching methods or strategies to increase women’s participation rather than learning. The authors also assert that due to social and economic factors, changing social norms and roles for women, the growth in the number of adult women participating in formal education has increased substantially yet there is little understanding of women’s needs in practice and that “*adult education has been slow to integrate the feminist research of the last twenty-five years*”. (Hayes et al, 2000, p3). The authors take a political stance, challenging the view that gender and learning is not simply about “*adding women to the pot and stirring*”. Therefore, their assumptions confront and are underpinned by what they see as unequal power structures and that thinking about women and learning must be action and behaviour driven. Nevertheless the themes they advocate have also been raised in this thesis which, therefore, lends credence to their position. As an example, the authors assert learning is culturally contextual and tends to “*reinforce a western, middle-class, white masculine value system*, (Hayes et al, 2000, p6). This, as the authors then point out, is important as it affects women’s ‘voice’ and hence, identity and power and form the basis of the ensuing discourse.

The way women communicate is highlighted as being different to the way men communicate. Women, these authors say, use rapport talk (building and maintaining relationships) and men report talk (focusing on individual control and power rather than relationships) (Hayes et al 2000, p 82). This is important as it can both affect the way

women students feel and may affect ability to learn if men's talk dominates. However, the authors do conclude the 'norms' in the classroom have the strongest influence on both men's and women's self-perceived class participation. Such norms as, "*my peers listen attentively*" and "*students respect each others views*" (Hayes, et al, 2000, p86) are more closely aligned with the characteristics of female-associated rapport talk than with male-associated report talk. As most students in the research cohort were female, and the whole population of the Foundation Degree almost 100% female, the findings from the thesis also support such claims as it has identified that students form co-operative 'friendship circles'.

Discussion Boards where students can post messages asynchronously are typically associated with isolation as students cannot see one another or interact with each other but these authors report that using discussion boards as a means of 'talk' actually helps female students by the fact that participants cannot interrupt one another (Hayes et al, 2000, p90). Findings on the subject of discussion boards and communication are discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis where it has also been shown some students use this facility to not only assess their performance and that of others but organise themselves into supporting groups. Whether these are purely a female associated activities cannot, however, directly be substantiated by this thesis which is not a comparative study.

In summary, although the book covers a multitude of important issues, a few are of special relevance and significance to this thesis and in particular to women and learning in the technological paradigm. These are:

Identity and self-esteem,

Voice,

Connection, and

Transformation.

The issue of women learning (as opposed to men's) is a distinctly troublesome question as it is highly subjective. Hayes (2001) argues that rather than stereotyping learners by gender, a better approach would be to foster enquiry within learners to challenge their own assumptions about their learning that have affected them and also gender beliefs that might limit them as learners. This approach would require a cultural change to the way students, both male and female, perceive themselves and each other and is an important step towards creating equal opportunity in the classroom (whether real or virtual) and has implications for course designers.

Higher Education for non-traditional female students has a different perspective or need from the usual participants. This claim is substantiated by Reay (2003) and Reay, Davies, David and Ball (2001) who conclude women frequently refer to the process of Higher Education programmes as being more important to them than the final outcome. They say this may be rooted in previous educational experience, as well as in the desire to improve jobs or have more rewarding careers. In contrast to this view, Green and Webb's (1997, p143) research into women returning to education produced evidence they were often prompted by work-related factors. The question remains whether some of these

attitudes are restricted to women. This is an assumption often made but it could be argued that the changing nature of a mass Higher Education system itself causes new approaches.

According to Von Plümmer (2000, p25), geography and isolation have been identified as limiting the educational opportunities of women. This situation is being changed by the use of the Internet to support learners as it allows access and communication to all. This research shows how important this is to widening participation to include female students.

Part-time study in Higher Education for mature students requires a special array of skills (eg multiple roles, juggling, prioritising, choices between home and study). Darab studied the practical ways mature adults in Higher Education had of coping with multiple roles: *“Even with paid work responsibilities, women continue to do the bulk of the unpaid work in families and in the community”* (Darab, 2004. p 7). Darab concludes that support from employers, colleagues, family and friends were important to success. The difficulties students faced and support mechanisms are now constantly identified.

There is no single argument defining learning for women as being different. Women are not a homogeneous group. The thesis has identified the impacts on women’s learning in the current electronic and expanding mass education paradigm, factors which are generally, corroborated by the literature researched.

4 LEARNING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Mature adults entering Higher Education have had many previous learning experiences at school, through work or by independent study, both formal and informal, as well as life experiences and this has impacted on the way they adapt. Adapting to Higher Education is one of the themes raised by the research. Students sometimes displayed a tendency towards surface learning due to the perceived excessive pressure to meet, achieve and pass module assessments. Marton and Säljö's (1976) work on different student approaches to learning identified two approaches to learning; deep and surface. Deep learning, they stated, involves the critical analysis of new ideas (the espoused aim of Higher Education) and surface learning, the acceptance of information and memorisation of isolated or unlinked facts. Students adopted one or the other but the authors also say students need to be encouraged to develop a deep learning approach in order to learn effectively and as such teaching needs to be designed to do this effectively. This would consequently impact on the design of teaching and learning materials, teaching and the teaching/learning environment both online and traditional face-to-face.

Lave and Wenger's approach to learning, however, is from a social learning aspect and is important to this thesis which signals the importance of social learning to students in the electronic age. Rather than asking what kind of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved they ask what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place (Lave and Wenger 1991. p73). They state that adapting to Higher Education requires students to begin to transcend the complexities of being a newcomer, engaging in and absorbing the cultural practices of being part of Higher

Education, working their way towards being a full member of a learning community. In this thesis, both adapting to Higher Education and social learning have been identified in relation to classroom based relationships but also to the transference of relationships to the Internet. The term social learning, however, stems from Bandura's earlier interest in social modelling and behaviour (Bandura, 1977). Bandura posits people learn through observing other people in a social setting, particularly by modeling, which is achieved from observing others. This allows people to form an idea of how new behaviours are performed. Modelling behaviour by observing other students' actions on discussion boards has been identified in this thesis and far from isolating learners, which online learning on its own tends to do, social learning would appear to be creating cohesion between learners. An example found in this thesis is the creation of support groups which are transferred online from the classroom.

Bandura also wrote on the topic of self efficacy and posited that high levels of self-efficacy also results in higher aspirations (Bandura, 1997, p215). Self-efficacy is the belief in one's own academic ability. For this research it provides an explanation as to why the students continued to aspire to gain a degree, despite difficulties and barriers.

The experience of student learning from various viewpoints, including those of the lecturer discussed previously and also psychological research on learning was examined by Entwistle (1984). Most of his work is based on Higher Education and includes ideas by many leading theorists including Marton and Säljö, Dai Hounsell and Diana Laurillard. This literature is particularly useful in its definition of the purpose and aims of

a university education. Lecturers at Lancaster University were interviewed and asked for their views. From this the author defines what the university lecturer says about the purpose of Higher Education. He summarises these views into the unifying theme of 'critical thinking'. However, widening participation, the Government's drive for increased skills (Leich, 2006) and the Internet, result in a changing cohort of students with different expectations. James (2001) in his paper on the complexity of student expectations and the consequences of these discusses the issue of Higher Education in both shaping student expectations and also being influenced itself by the character of student expectations. The concern he says is that students are becoming more detached, wanting also to be spoon fed or achieve 'value for money'. This is perhaps an unjust interpretation of the 'new' student whose wants or needs may be different. The thesis acknowledges the new ways of student thinking but attributes this change as a consequence of the demands placed on the learner (eg home, work, family and learning) rather than a deliberate strategy to exhort or extract value from the delivering institution.

What this thesis has uncovered is a pragmatic approach to learning which lends students to become self-monitoring in their thinking. It has identified strategies students adopt to cope with the academic standards that they perceive they should achieve. Boud's view is that the learner needs to take responsibility and make decisions about what they should be learning and how they should be learning in order to be autonomous it (Boud, 1981, p 17). Boud portrays autonomy as a goal of education, to develop learners to make their own decisions about what they think and do, which is a shift away from teacher centered pedagogy.

Data analysis uncovered two learning theories which have been partly discussed earlier. These are self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 1990) and self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975) and (Tough 1967). Zimmerman says self-regulated learning is a personally initiated process and response designed to improve their ability and their environment for learning. Self-directed learning, however, defines the characteristic of the adult learner as different to that of a child and has its roots in Andragogy (Knowles 1968). Self-regulated learning has more recently been discussed by Vovides, Sanchez-Alonson, Mitropoulou, and Nickmans (2007) in relation to e-learning management systems. According to them, self-regulated learners can demonstrate '*personal initiative, perseverance and adaptive skill in pursuing learning*' (Zimmerman 2002), which is substantiated by this thesis and is particularly relevant to adapting to new ways of learning via the Internet. Web-based instruction can support students in becoming self-regulated learners as self-directed learning requires that students self-diagnose learning skills, formulate learning goals, and choose and implement appropriate learning strategies, very much in line with the demands of web-based learning. This thesis identified 'gauging', a term used to describe behaviours as students try to self-diagnose what they needed to know, what the level is, determine what their level of performance is and adjust this in the light of their perception of the academic standards. This is also very much in line with Brockett, Stockdale, Fogerson, Cox, Canipe, Chuprina, Donaghy and Chadwell, (2000) who, following a content analysis of 122 articles published between 1980 and 1998, propose that to advance knowledge of SDL the focus should now be on '*studying how people engage and manage their self-directed learning*' (Merriam, 2001).

Both theories have found their place in adding to the debate about adult learning and blended learning in the 21st century.

Summary

The aim of this literature analysis was to identify seminal work in the areas of the research as well as providing a mechanism for identifying areas for further discussion of the research findings in Chapter 5. Much of the literature reflects the change learning is undergoing driven by technological advances which affects both deliverers and students alike. These changes are driven at the macro level by the demands of the global economy and the Government's reaction to this and at the micro level in meeting the needs for skills at work. The main focus of this research is on the student and the range of literature covered demonstrates that these forces affect the opportunity afforded to learners. Opportunity for learning is an outcome of the research but to this must be added personal aspiration. The following thesis identifies how this new cohort of students handle the multiple tasks of various life roles as well as learning in order to equip themselves with their desired goals, the pressures they face and how this affects the way they think and, therefore, approach learning.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology underpinning the research for this thesis. The research was conducted over a two year period using qualitative research techniques in order “*to understand the meaning or nature of the experiences of the persons which lends itself to getting out into the field and finding out what people are doing and thinking*” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). A grounded theory approach was selected because it allowed the researcher to work inductively with data and to apply an iterative process of data generation and analysis which it was felt would provide a reliable method of exploring student experiences without bias or pre-conceived ideas. In line with grounded theory’s focus on an inductive style of theorising, open-ended interviews were conducted and recorded so that the spontaneous feelings and thoughts of the participants could be obtained and a theoretical analysis of the student experience developed. From a theoretical perspective, this places the research in the interpretative paradigm.

Initially, e-learning was considered to be a potential major area of the research, due to the fact the Foundation Degree in question drew heavily on the Internet and the support given to students by Blackboard, the Virtual Learning Environment and also because this was of personal interest having recently completed an MSc in Multimedia and Education in 2001. However, what became apparent as the research data grew and themes developed was that other issues were appearing equally important. Initially these changes caused

some discomfort but as explained by Charmaz (2006, p156) a changing argument and one that is different from what was originally anticipated “*shows that you have grown*”, that the research is “*original and meaningful*” and also “*an initial purpose brings you into the study but seldom suffices for an argument for a finished manuscript*”.

The following firstly deals with Grounded Theory, which is followed by Demographics, Ethical Issues, data Collection and, Data Preparation and Data Analysis and are presented under the following headings:

- 1 Grounded Theory
- 2 Demographics
- 3 Ethical Issues
- 4 Data Collection
- 5 Data Preparation and Data Analysis

1 GROUNDED THEORY

Charmaz (1995, p28) advocates grounded theory has a simple appeal for both novices and ‘*old hands*’ because the methods of grounded theory help in structuring and organising data gathering and analysis. It is also important with grounded theory that the researcher begins with an area of study and allows theory to emerge from the data throughout.

Grounded theory is due to the original work of Glaser & Strauss (1967) and was a strategy for conducting qualitative research in sociology that requires the managing of the parallel processes of data collection and theory construction. Thus, rather than conceptualizing theory and then testing it with data, in the grounded theory method, the conceptualization of theory is derived from the data (Rennie, 2000). Since the 1960's the original work has been developed by the authors and other researchers. For example, Glaser (1978) advocates '*theoretical sensitivity*' sampling which involves simultaneous collecting, coding and analyzing data in order to develop theory. However, a debate currently rages about the use of grounded theory and has as well as advocates opponents who challenge the "*conceptual uncertainty and changing terminology associated with grounded theory*" (Greckhamer and Koro-Ljungber, 2005). Those in favour of grounded theory strongly suggest that it is the only true method of research (Stern, 1994). However, Glaser and Strauss have always maintained a grounded theory is relative to the perspectives of the person(s) producing it. This means different investigators may derive different perspectives. To this end, the researcher must admit to having certain tacit knowledge or '*gestalts*' (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999) through which information is filtered, meaning is made and the formulation of responses made. In this context, it is felt important to give an account of such possible tacit knowledge and the bearing this will have made on the initial research proposal, data gathering, questioning and analysis. I, therefore, declare my interest is in the area of adult learning due to my own experience as a mature learner, lengthy experiences teaching adults in Further Education, Higher Education and as a part-time tutor on the Foundation Degree in Educational Administration, in business and as a mature student in Higher Education, where I gained

my Certificate in Education (Further Education) in 1995, BA (Hons) in Education and Training in 1997 and MSc in Multimedia and Education in 2001.

2 DEMOGRAPHICS

The students enrolled on the Foundation Degree in Educational Administration were part time students, employed either part time or full time across the range of educational establishments of Further Education, Higher Education and in schools, some in more responsible posts than others. They were all working adults with family and social lives. In the year of enrolment 2002/2003 there was forty eight enrolled students and a gender bias which favoured females (only two male students).

Ten students were selected to represent a valid cross representational probability sample, representing 20% of the first year cohort across the socio-economic and academic profile eg by age, gender, qualifications, employer type, full time/part time employment and living distance from the university. Interviews were carried out over the first two years of the Foundation Degree (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p94), approximately 6 months apart to allow time for interviewing, writing up, thematic generation, coding and analyzing (*'theoretical sensitivity'*). Consideration was given to interviewing the whole cohort singly but this was discounted in favour of an ethnographic study which could be carried out in greater depth and over a longer period of time using a smaller sample (Spradley, 1979. p.54).

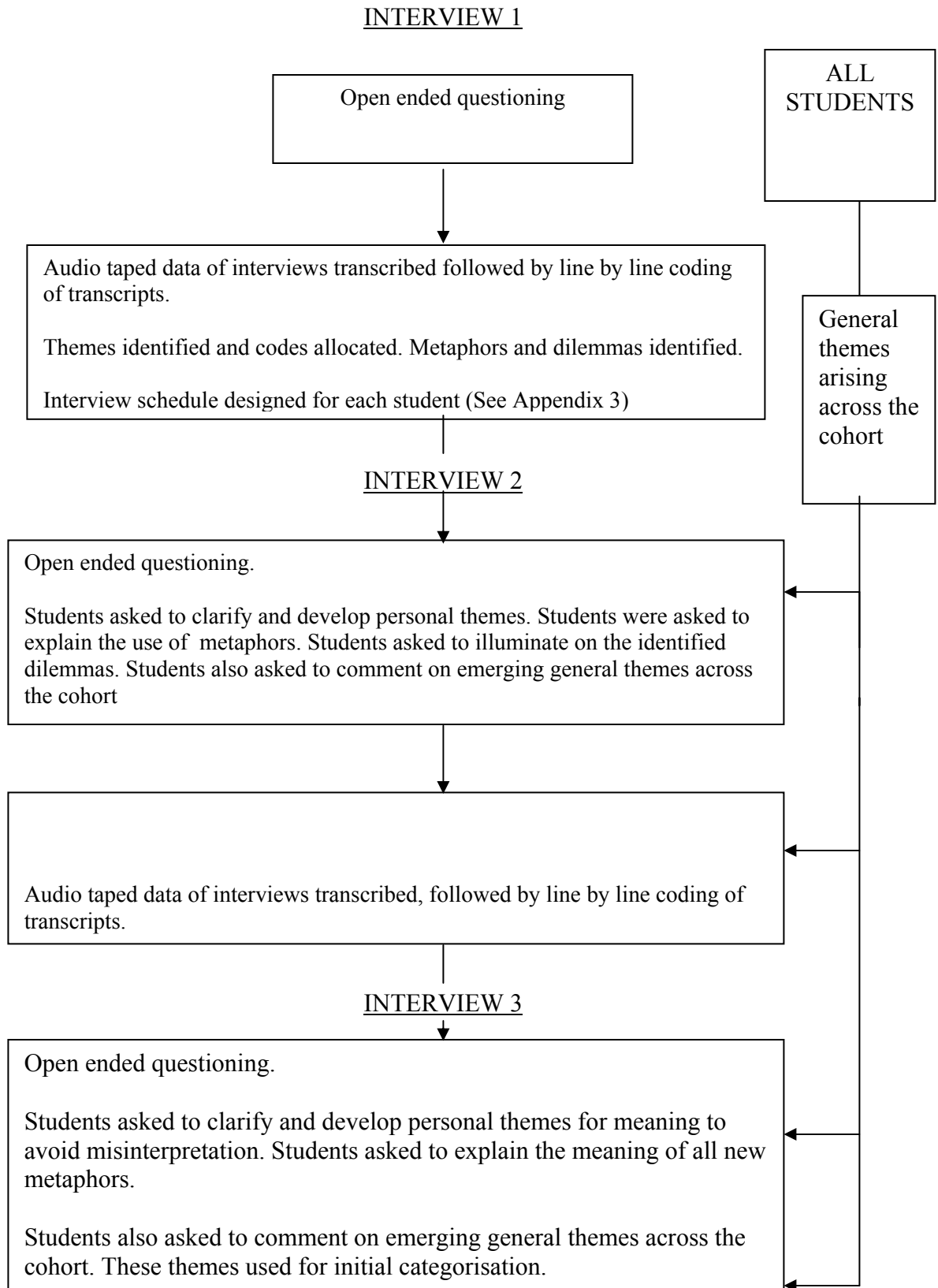
3 ETHICAL ISSUES

Students were asked if they were agreeable to taking part in the research and the purpose and length of interviews explained verbally and also by way of an ethics document attached as Appendix 1. This document also included information on the mode of data collection, as well as a confidentiality statement and special instructions. Both parties signed this document. Individual and private interviews were conducted at the students' home, college, school or employing university by agreement. This was done so that the students felt comfortable and to minimise the perceived effect of 'power' (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p37) which might impact on the student's ability to respond accurately but also to minimise disruption and inconvenience for the student. Therefore, the researcher travelled to various parts of the North of England to conduct interviews. Throughout the period of the research and at each interview, students were also reassured and reminded their transcripts would remain confidential and anonymous and used only for the purposes of the thesis. The researcher sought throughout the research to avoid bias and remain as ethical as possible in order to uncover the true feelings and perceptions of the students to their experience of the Foundation Degree.

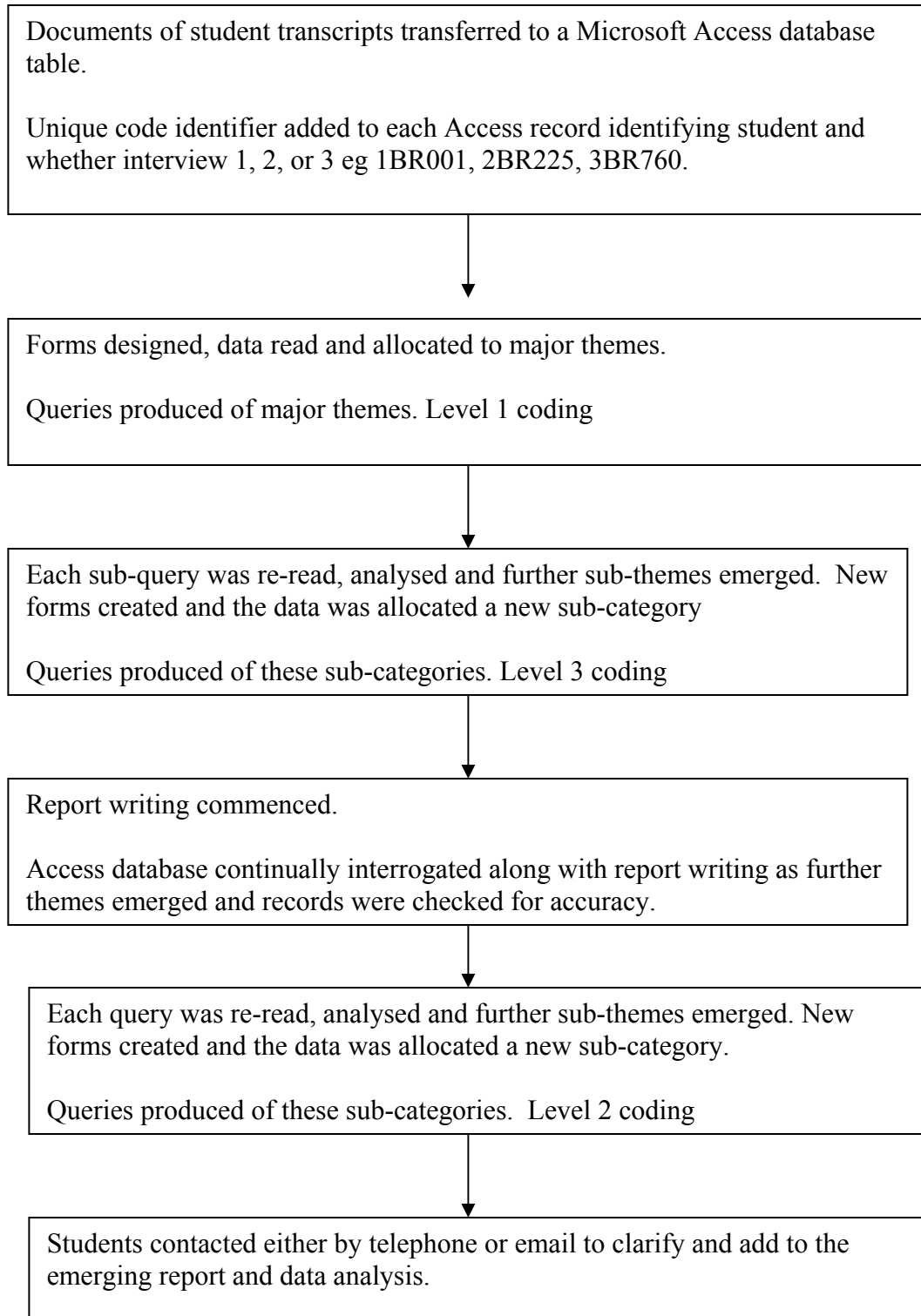
Before describing in detail the research methodology, Figure 1 shows the model in diagrammatic format. Although the approach towards data collection was based on grounded theory and an inductive approach, the methods used, the data analysis techniques and the design of a database to aid with thematic development were all devised and developed for this research project. They are, therefore, an outcome of this research.

Fig 1

Model of Research Methodology



POST INTERVIEW 3



4 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was carried out by interviewing the students on an individual basis in order to try to understand the experiences students have and how they themselves make sense of these experiences. These were recorded. The approach is, therefore, phenomenological and as such there were no pre-set questions and all data arose through analysis of the student conversation. At first interview and in order to begin a dialogue, students were encouraged to talk about their previous educational experiences. This discussion was student led and followed an open line of questioning and this was done for two reasons: The first to relax the student and to enter into a comfortable dialogue as this would be a familiar topic and secondly, to begin the process of interview and thus identify the student's perceptions of these experiences. Most students were very willing to share these experiences and the data generated many eventual themes, for instance, 'barriers', 'motivation' and 'aspiration'.

Interview one was then fully transcribed by a word processor, allocated line by line coding, assigned thematic coding, metaphors were highlighted and any dilemmas identified. Line by line coding helped to keep the researcher engaged with the data and forced an analytical approach, reducing influence of preconceived ideas and also gave opportunity to constantly analyse and question the data. This was felt very important to the research so as to avoid bias and misinterpretation. Codes were added at the same time, metaphors were identified and students were asked to explain their use of them in a subsequent interview. Dilemmas were also noted and solutions noted. Where a solution or remedy was not already offered by the student, this was then raised at subsequent

interview. In this way, a thorough analysis was achieved throughout the research period and ensured a more accurate interpretation of the data.

As Grounded Theory is an iterative or intermeshing approach themes emerging from the data were followed up by further interviewing (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p73). In order to avoid bias and misinterpretation, students were asked at subsequent interview to clarify all data of the previous interview data which is good research practise allowing the respondent the opportunity to reflect and confirm but also a method of achieving a greater depth of interview data. This was achieved by asking students to explain further what they meant by an earlier statement, metaphor or coded data.

All themes and codes were, therefore, thoroughly investigated and followed up at subsequent interview and added to this, metaphors were explored further to verify interpretation: *“All factors, rather than a limited number, have to be taken into account”* (Cohen et al, 2000, p 138).

A detailed interview schedule was developed for each student for the second and third interviews and this was closely followed during interview. This ensured the researcher followed the same line of inquiry and range of areas for each student, yet each interview was unique. This consistent approach was carried out to ensure a degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness yet not uniformity (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p119). Although it is recognised that quantitative research can be replicated and the same results occur, in qualitative research two researchers may have different findings of the same data, yet

both are reliable (Cohen and Manion, 1989, p119). As an example, Appendix 2 is a schedule used with one student in the second interview. It was considered important to pursue general themes with all students in order to verify or discount them as being important. For instance, where a few students raised a particular issue, this was then raised with all research students in order to identify whether it was a valid issue across the cohort. This is in addition to the processes described above. As stated by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p150) it is important to also consider negative issues in order to modify theory and this is why it was thus felt important not to just follow individual themes, issues, metaphors and dilemmas with each student but also to include other issues raised by different students and is another example of the thoroughness and rigour of the research.

5 DATA PREPARATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Following the third and final interview, when all the transcripts were typed up, allocated line by line coding and codes allocated, a way had to be identified to handle the huge amount of data that had been generated and due to the natural ability of computers to handle data, thought was given to the use of a database as this would allow the data to be 'interrogated' (a database technical term to mean querying eg exploring, collating, sorting, grouping) and allow patterns to be identified.

A Microsoft Access database was subsequently created to manage the transcripts which could then be interrogated, themes collated together and also searched for repetitive words or synonyms. Reports and queries were produced from the database for data

analysis which also allowed further reading for content analysis and the development of sub-themes and categories. The database was instrumental to the accuracy of this research as the researcher could easily check student responses, search for key words and revisit records as each record was allocated a unique code eg 2STU2203 (in order to be anonymous real names have been changed in the thesis to STU1, STU2, STU3 etc). As stated by Manion and Morrison (2000, p106) the processes of research are as important as outcomes and at all stages of interview and data analysis, in order to maintain neutrality, care was taken to remain objective and unbiased.

As all the data were given a unique code in the database these are used throughout the thesis (changed as stated above for this thesis due to confidentiality purposes) but these have an additional use. Each interview was given a unique number to identify whether it is interview 1, 2, or 3 eg 1STU312345 is from the first interview with student 3, 2STU34566, is from the 2nd interview with student 3 and 3STU367585 the third interview. This was useful because demonstrated where findings were early in the first semester or as in the case of interview number two in the third semester of year one and finally, number three from the mid point in the second year and important to identifying any changes. Wherever appropriate, during data analysis and thesis writing, consideration was given to responses as whether they are early ones or indicated change. Finally, students were contacted either by telephone or email at the end of the second year and beginning of the third year.

In this Chapter, the methodology underpinning this research has been presented in order to demonstrate the rigour and ethical manner in which the complex data has been treated. This empirical research produced copious amounts of detailed data and the way the data has been analysed, interpreted and clarified, has been fully explained. The model described in this chapter was devised for the research into the student experience in a Foundation Degree and is an outcome of the research. Although this has been developed for this particular Foundation Degree, it is considered suitable for use in the future with different case studies, for instance other Foundation Degrees, or alternative adult learning and distance learning provision.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION

This chapter details the data gathered from the research and includes data analysis. The chapter has five sub-sections. The first section deals with student motivation; the second section the learning experience; the third is about E-learning, the fourth concerns personal and home life issues and the final sub-section discusses issues around work and student future aspirations. These are presented under the following headings:

- 1 Motivation
- 2 The Learning Experience
- 3 E-Learning
- 4 Personal and Home Life Issues
- 5 Issues of Work and the Future

1 MOTIVATION

This first section of data analysis gives consideration to the impact of previous educational experience on student motivation and identifies how students, new to Higher Education, overcome barriers but includes the value to the student of attempting a Higher Education Degree. Aspirations and previous educational experience are then considered and this is followed by a specific look at why students have chosen the Foundation Degree to satisfy their sometimes long held aspirations to gain a degree.

In this first sub-section the main themes and findings are presented under the following section headings:

- 1.1 Previous Educational Experience
- 1.2 Choosing to do the Foundation Degree

1.1 Previous Educational Experience

Previous educational experiences were recalled by the students and identify the factors that may have contributed to their motivation or interest in pursuing academic qualifications at a late stage in their lives.

A summary of noteworthy early experiences is organised in Appendix 3 and an example is given in Table 1. The responses were chosen because they reflect the fact that despite earlier experiences at school or post 16 education the students retained a belief in their abilities to attain a Higher Education Degree.

Table 1

Example of student earlier education experiences

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES	NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES	AMBIVALENT EXPERIENCES
<p><i>“I went to a grammar school and I just went through Grammar School not finding it very hard.”</i> 1STU32991</p>	<p><i>“At school I think they were interested in pushing those who had been accepted by Oxford and Cambridge if they got the grade and I felt neglected.”</i> 3STU21026</p>	<p><i>“I would imagine that I would be remembered as a pupil who never did anything wrong but perhaps never did anything remarkable that I would be that well remembered for. Perhaps one of these pupils that slip into the background a little bit because I never did anything bad but never do anything really good.”</i> 1STU511922</p>

The students have a variety of educational experiences but data analysis generated several general underpinning themes. The early educational experiences left the students with a residue of belief systems about themselves and their abilities. It is not so much the actual experiences that are of interest to this research but the effect they had on the student's motivation and in explaining why they have chosen to enter Higher Education.

The majority of students talked about negative or ambivalent experiences at school rather than positive ones. However, despite feeling '*neglected*', or '*disappointed*' with themselves, lack of previous successes, lack of perceived motivation, failed 11 plus, lack of achievement and '*not enjoying school*', the students still felt sufficiently motivated to be able to enrol upon a Higher Education Degree. At this point the data were analysed further and this generated three further variables: Students retained a self-belief in their capabilities (coded 'self-belief') but appeared to have either internalised reasons for not continuing with their education after leaving school (coded 'internalising'), or externalised them (coded 'externalising') leading to an unfulfilled ambition. Further analysis of the data revealed reasons for this internalisation or externalisation. These variables are now presented and discussed.

Self-Belief (Self-Efficacy)

Students are self-assured, assertive and also confidently aware of their learning strengths and weaknesses when talking about their previous experiences (See Appendix 4). Self-belief is not specifically corroborated by a direct quotation but born out of the fact that despite earlier failures they still retained belief in their abilities.

Internalisation versus Externalisation

Students appeared to have failed to achieve their educational goals earlier in life and this was rationalised as being due to either external influences or internal influences. In other words, they either internalised the reasons or externalised them. As an example, some students perceived things outside their control influenced whether or not they continued into Higher Education after leaving school and others perceived the fault lay with themselves. An example of this is given in Table 2. It should be noted the majority talk about external barriers. These are parental support (money, expectations, and beliefs), educational support and guidance, and the educational system at the time. Full extracts are contained in Appendix 5.

Table 2

Example of Internalisation and Externalisation

INTERNALISING	EXTERNALISING
<i>“No I think I let myself down I am not doing it for anybody else I am doing it because I think I want to achieve something for me to say that yes I could have done it then and yes it has taken me 20 odd years [laughs] to get round to it.”</i> 3STU65531	<i>“I came from a working class family and my parents come from working class backgrounds when I look back they had this feeling of inadequacy too but we were working class we weren’t meant to be educated we weren’t meant to get jobs that paid us good money we were meant to be the labour force for other people and I have two brothers who are a few years older than me and I just followed in their footsteps. We just left school when we were 16. We left school and got a job there was never any question of going to college going into FE, HE – nobody at my school did that and I never remember any encouragement from teachers at school that you could go to college, no guidance whatsoever.”</i> 1STU511980

Unfulfilled Ambition

As part of data analysis and theme generation, consideration was then given as to whether students left school with unfulfilled ambition. The data were then interrogated for examples of responses to support this possible theme. An extract is shown in Table 3 with further extracts contained in Appendix 6.

Table 3

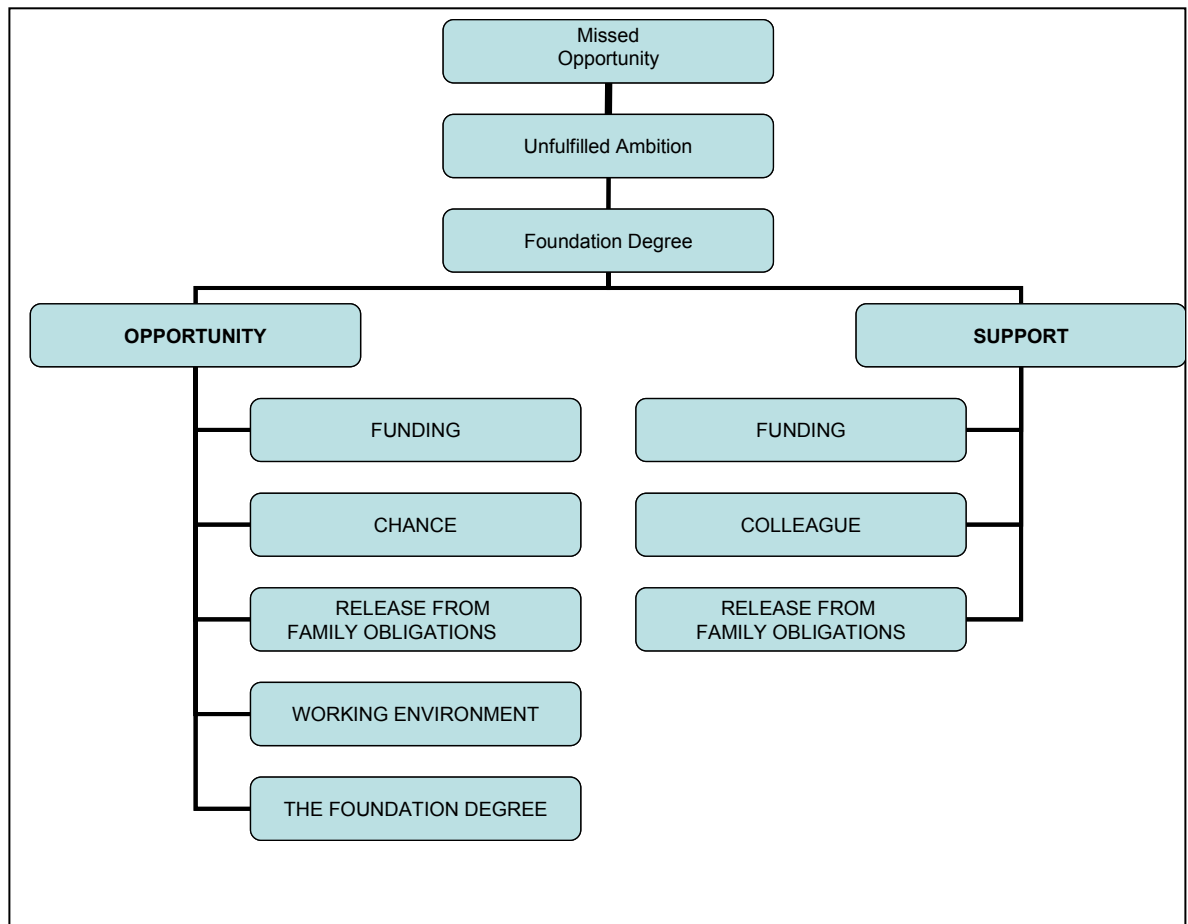
Example of student responses to Unfulfilled Ambition

1STU19900	<i>“I am doing the course because I always knew that I should have got more qualifications when I was at school and it is a way of proving to myself not to anybody else that I can do it and I should have done it before”.</i>
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From the data it is evident students desired to achieve more than their previous academic achievements at school and continued to have aspirations. Data were then interrogated for factors that have enabled students to now begin to realise their ambitions and two variables; ‘Opportunity’ and ‘Support’ emerged. These are shown in Fig 2 and following this is a discussion of these variables.

Fig 2

Twin themes of Opportunity and Support



The themes of ‘Opportunity’ and ‘Support’ identified in fig 2 are discussed as follows:

Opportunity - “*Grasping the opportunity*” (2KA12267)

Data analysis for ‘Opportunity’ provided evidence of a variety of opportunistic events or enticements which occurred, allowing students to achieve their ambitions or aspirations. These covered a range of opportunities from a chance reading of course information, funding opportunities, reducing family commitments; their working environment and “*just for me*” course (the Foundation Degree). An example is given in Table 4 and further extracts are contained in Appendix 7.

Table 4

Example of student response to the theme of Opportunity

1STU915779	<i>“I have looked around for the last two years at all the prospectuses and not managed to pin anything down and I got the leaflet from this and read through it and thought Oh yeah that’s for me that’s just for me.”</i>
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Support

All students said they had incidences of support in some form or another enabling them to do the Foundation Degree. However, funding was also an issue raised during the interviews and this is closely linked to support as without it, even though the opportunity arose, students would have found it difficult to pursue the opportunity. This is a key factor in motivating students. Table 5 contains a sample student extract and further extracts are given in Appendix 8.

Funding Issues

Table 5

Examples of the important of Funding

1STU110771	<i>“I wouldn’t have been able to. Single parent so in no way I . . .</i>
1STU110069	<i>The [Local Authority] are paying for 12 places and I was really pleased I got on.”</i>

Colleague Support

Other support that motivated students to begin the degree came from partners or peers at work:

3STU814608	<i>“I don’t think I would like to do this, as I have said before, if I was doing this course on my own. I have got support of my other two colleagues so I think I would be very isolated if I was doing it by myself and not going to any day schools and doing it online. I don’t think you get the feedback if you are on your own.”</i>
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Lessening Family Commitments – ‘A time for me’ (2STU41747)

As well as support from colleagues, a further theme is the release from family commitments allowing students to pursue their own goals. The following is an example:

2STU41747	<i>“Right. [laughs] Right. Obviously when my children were at home I spent a lot of time taxiing them from here to there and everywhere and prior to that I was a sports’ person which I then gave up because I spent more time with my children taking them from A to B whereas now they have gone off and done their thing and they are at university actually – I felt that now it was time for me.”</i>
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Summary

Students have had aspirations to achieve a Higher Education qualification since leaving school where many felt they had been denied the opportunity. However, they retained a belief in their abilities and displayed an underlying sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is aligned with motivation to establish and achieve learning goals (Zimmerman, 1995a, p217) but the opportunity of the Foundation Degree has allowed these students to realise their Higher Education qualification goals.

Support is important to students and especially financial support. Without this, the evidence is that at the very least it would have made their decision to do the Foundation Degree difficult and possibly impossible for some, as in the example of single mothers or low income families.

Having established a background and explanation of the initial motivation and previous educational experience, this thesis considers why students chose the Foundation Degree.

1.2 Choosing to do the Foundation Degree

Thematic development included the theme of the Foundation Degree and where students discussed the issue of the degree itself the database was coded accordingly. The data were then re-read and from this the theme of 'student needs' arose. The first group of needs that were identified are personal needs and the second group related to work. Students described their personal needs as the need for self esteem (eg achievement, satisfaction, fulfilment) and self-actualisation as well as peer or family expectations, some of which were long held. The second group of identified needs were work related ones as students reported a desire to be able to do their work better or anticipated the degree would enable them to progress at work.

It was also felt important at this stage to identify the principal factors motivating students to embark upon the Foundation Degree as opposed to other qualifications and in order to do this, students were asked to identify what the Foundation Degree meant to them. Their responses confirmed they understood the Foundation Degree is at a lower level than a

Degree and this raises two questions: Is it because the Foundation Degree is at a lower level that students have chosen to do the Foundation Degree and is there a security in knowing it is at a lower level? Students were asked to identify whether they would have embarked upon a full degree instead of a Foundation Degree.

The evidence would appear to suggest the students understood that the Foundation Degree is a precursor to a full degree, at a lower level but that gives the opportunity to enter Higher Education, giving a grounding and preparation. Its meaning to the students is also opportunity, allowing them to work upwards towards a full degree, develop skills or further a career.

Examples of students' responses are given as follows. The full Table is given as Appendix 9.

3STU65500	<i>“Basic, a lower level, grounding”</i>
3STU814084	<i>“Maybe a basis, a stepping stone”</i>

The main benefit to the student is that it is a *‘stepping stone’* to a full honours degree and the Foundation Degree has given some students the confidence they need to progress. Six out of the ten student cohort had intentions to continue to the full Honours Degree.

“Grasping the Opportunity” – (2STU512267)

The preceding section has identified some of the motivational aspects of bringing the students to a point where they felt able to achieve their academic potential. The question

now is to ask why at this point in time and why the Foundation Degree. Extracts from the transcripts show two broad reasons for the choice and these are summarised in Table 6, under Personal Need and Work Related Need:

Table 6

Summary of the two identified reasons for enrolling on the Foundation Degree

PERSONAL NEED	WORK RELATED NEED
<u>Internal Needs</u>	
Achievement	Advancement
Satisfaction	Employment
Fulfilment	Well qualified
Self proof	Formal qualification
Challenge	Self investment
Regret	Relevant
Self esteem	
Lost time	
<u>External needs</u>	
Keeping up with the Children	
Fill the gap	
Changing personal circumstances	
Age	

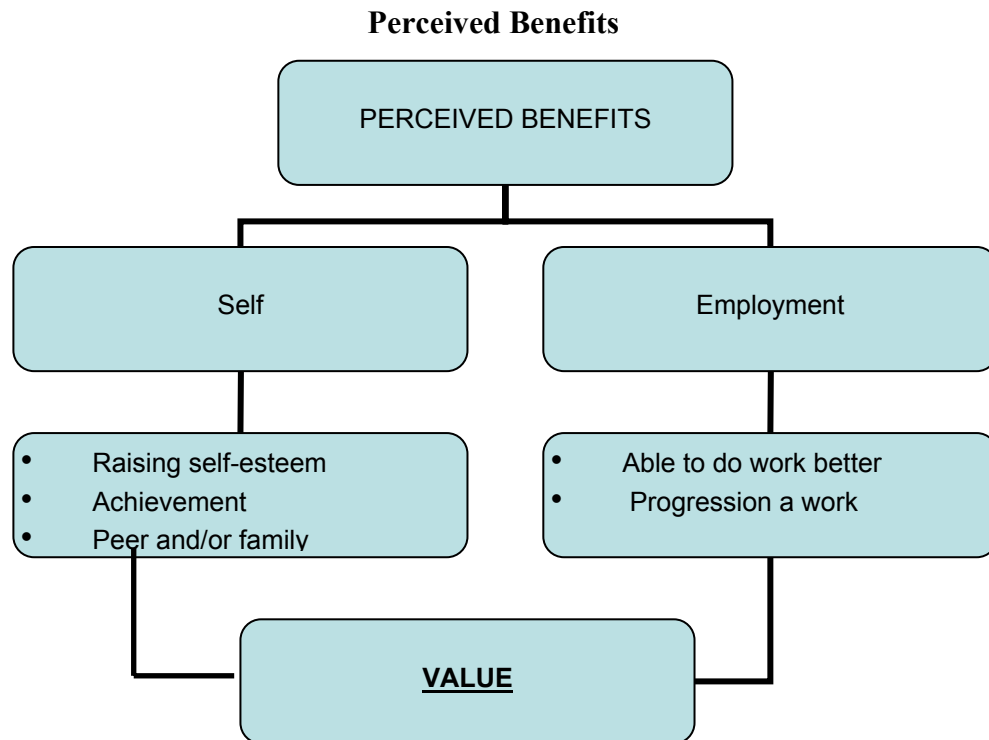
Personal needs can be summarised into two main groups: to satisfy internal needs such as fulfilment, achievement and to satisfy external needs for example changing family commitments. As can be identified from Table 6, work related needs mostly applied to gaining qualifications or becoming more qualified in order to benefit their work.

Perceived Benefits

Figure 3 indicates a further theme that has been identified which is closely linked to Table 6, and that is Perceived Benefits. Perceived benefits are divided into two categories and students quoted both sets of benefits as being important to their decision to embark

on the Foundation Degree. The first set is personal benefits to themselves and the second benefits to their working lives. Both sets of data provide emerging evidence as to the value of the Foundation Degree to students. These two variables of ‘Self’ and ‘Employment’ are presented in Fig 3.

Fig 3



Actual benefits and whether perceived benefits are met or exceeded are discussed later in this thesis on pages 170, 211, 244 and 248. An explanation of Perceived benefits and Figure 3 above is now presented:

Self

Some students quoted one of the following three themes: ‘Raising self-esteem’, ‘Achievement’ (see following extracts) and ‘Peer or Parental Expectations’ as a perceived benefit. For other students, perceived benefits were more aligned with work

issues, for example, advancing their career. Examples, of the first three perceived benefits are given below:

1 Raising Self-Esteem and Confidence:

“I want to be able to tell everybody I have got a degree. I think that’s very important to me.” 3STU42556

2 Achievement:

“I am doing the course because I always knew that I should have got more qualifications when I was at school and it is a way of proving to myself not to anybody else that I can do it and I should have done it before.”
1STU19900

3 Peer and Parental Expectations:

A strong motivational theme for the students to embark on the degree is peer as well as parental expectations. Some of these are long held and quite clearly have great significance and importance.

“I think a lot of this stems back from my parents and it was a chip they had on their shoulder to the day she died my mom felt that she hadn’t had opportunities so the fact/she would be so proud of the fact that I am taking an opportunity now.” 2STU512341¹

¹ (Please note that a forward slash in a quotation indicates a break in the flow or a change of direction of speech.)

“Well my friends have degrees and I think oh I haven’t got one but I have always said I don’t think you need one and I still think you don’t but I think you do learn a lot from one as well.” 2STU916197

It is significant the way in which they are motivated can be as a result of a ‘chip on the shoulder’ – making up for what is perceived as lacking, whether this is parents or peers.

Students who were not included in the perceived benefits above to the ‘Self’ all appear in the Work related benefits category. The twin themes of ‘Able to do work better’ and ‘Progression at Work’ are discussed as follows, whilst still on the theme of motivation and choosing to do the Foundation Degree.

The following examples are given to show where benefits to their employment are envisaged:

1 Able to do work better:

Students thought they could learn how to perform better at work. This theme is developed further on pages 155-158 and 161, as students reflect on the actual benefits they have gained.

“This is more practical because I am building knowledge of something I can use here and I can bring in um/develop with colleagues and things like that. So I suppose they are the two things I like about learning the enjoyment factor of

what I did to begin with and this being more of a practical based thing I can actually incorporate and use.” 1STU2180

The linking of ability and pleasure is typical.

2 Progression at work:

Some students stated the need to do a degree to be able to progress at work and saw the Foundation Degree as an opportunity to do this. What the research has identified, however, is that the actual benefits are, “*wider ranging and that these actual benefits exceeded*”:

“Qualification. A way to further a career really”. 3STU111099

“I think that the reason I am doing the degree is because if I want to advance I need the degree”. 1STU64757

As part of ‘Perceived Benefits’ and arising from the above twin themes of the ‘Self’ and ‘Employment’, the question now raised is how do students place a value on the degree and what is its perceived value?

Value

Earlier in this chapter the meaning of the Foundation Degree for students was clarified and the evidence appearing from the research suggested a central outcome is opportunity – opportunity to raise self-esteem, to achieve perceived potential as well as to satisfy

earlier missed opportunities, to address peer as well as family expectations or opportunities to be able to make progression at work and further their careers. One fact that is also evident is the two male students, who had previously achieved Higher Education qualifications, fell into the latter category and did not admit to any regret or need to address earlier missed opportunities or failures. The benefit or worth to them was mainly career focused.

A further value to students is summed up by this student:

“It gives you something to think about something to talk about. It broadens your knowledge of things.” 3STU65675

In this section of the thesis factors that contributed to students choosing to embark upon the Foundation Degree have been identified as well what the degree means to them, its value and what their perceptions were of the potential benefits. In the next section the theme of barriers is presented in order to add further evidence of how students successfully embark upon the Foundation Degree.

Overcoming Barriers - *“Having the ‘guts to go for it’ ”* (3STU916492)

The theme of ‘barriers’ evolved during the iterative process of interviewing and data analysis and was addressed by asking students at a subsequent interview to identify any barriers they felt they had had to overcome in order to do the degree. Data analysis identified internal barriers (motivation, self-belief, confidence) and external barriers (financial support, family commitments, time) but also generated data that also were

enablers, both internal (self-belief) and external (peer support, parental pressure and being set an example). These are shown in appendix 10. Students had to overcome barriers they themselves perceived over their ability to be able to do the degree. This was not only their academic ability but also in terms of time, balancing home life, work life and doing the work for the degree as well as the ensuing additional pressures they felt would be put on their lives. They have concerns over coping, either with the work in terms of time but also ability and meeting the challenges of academic work.

As shown in the following extract, an enabler for some was reducing family commitments as children grew older and became more independent and consequently less demanding in terms of time. Financial help in terms of funding for the course was still important for some students although it would appear from the research it was the younger students with young families or single parents who were in most need of financial support – in the past for some, financial matters, had been a deterrent.

“I wish I could have done this a few years earlier before that I spent 15 years bringing up the children so/I have said with hindsight I should have put some time aside and done an Open University at the same time as bringing the children up but in reality when I think back I did not have the time. Whatever time did become free I was tired or we were out socially. It was hard working bringing up the three children - it was a full time job.” 2STU108969

The contradiction between the realities of what this student had to do and the constant aspiration is clear.

2 THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Issues around how students adapted to Higher Education are now considered as well as the type of support learners required in order to overcome the difficulties they faced. Changing skills and abilities are investigated and the importance of peer support to motivation and achievement is raised. This is followed by Course Organisation and Assessment Issues which are considered from the viewpoint of learner motivation.

In this section the themes and findings are presented under the following section headings:

2.1 Adapting to Higher Education

2.2 Course Organisation Issues

2.1 Adapting to Higher Education

Adapting to the course is a major theme emerging from the data. This adjustment takes the form of a) self-assessment which is primarily internal needs and b) adaptation which is mainly perception of adaptation to new things. As a preview to the data, these two themes are listed in Table 7 along with supporting codes and this is followed by a discussion of the two themes.

Table 7

Table of Adaptation to the Foundation Degree

SELF-ASSESSMENT OR NEEDS	ADAPTATION
Needs: - Gauging - Tutor support - Feedback - Drafting - Peer Support	Academic work Coping Knowing why Increased confidence
Capability – knowing whether they are capable	
Progress: Understanding Strengths And Weaknesses	
Level In Group	

Self Assessment - Needs

In this first section student needs are identified as they adapt. Many of these needs take the form of self-assessment as students struggle to find their feet.

The research indicates students are aware of their needs or requirements at the start of the course. The first category under the theme of ‘needs’ is now discussed. This is ‘gauging’.

Gauging

Gauging is one of the early needs raised by students. For example, knowing what is wanted. The two male students who had previously achieved Higher Education qualifications did not voice this need which suggests that they have previously addressed

this issue during earlier Higher Education experiences or that only new students need to go through this process.

Extracts supporting this theme follow:

“Knowing exactly what they want and expect of us . . . that’s what I need/what exactly they want. I suppose looking at the outcomes and one thing and another you sort of get an idea and I sent some work in and he said that’s fine so I hope it’s on the right lines, hopefully.” 1STU76102

Students show uncertainty and take a risk.

“I still find it difficult to interpret what I am supposed to be writing but I think that’s a confidence thing.” 2STU916126

For this student it is not a lack of ability but a confidence issue.

Data analysis identified that students use and develop a series of pragmatic strategies in order to ensure their work is of the appropriate standard and this is important feedback which allows students to self-monitor and self-regulate their learning (Zimmerman, 1990, p10). For example one student asked the tutor for access to other people’s work in order to gauge the required standard. In the following, strategies of how students attempted to address their needs are identified:

Tutor Support

Tutor support was sought as a means of ‘gauging’:

“I do like to get feedback from tutors though you will find that I am constantly emailing my tutors saying am I doing this right and I am always looking for positive reinforcement in what I am doing”. 1STU511996

This student admits to her lack of confidence and uses the tutor for confirmation.

Feedback

Feedback is another identified need and this is also referred to in the previous quotation and in the following:

“I have been emailing [tutor] to say am I on the right track or whoops this hasn’t happened and he would email back”. 1STU108118

Instant feedback by email is important to students.

Drafting

Students sent in drafts to tutors and this is also part of gauging. By sending in a draft, students received feedback as discussed above but as the following extracts also show, these are examples of where students are using drafts not only to gauge the required level but access to help and for reassurance:

“The thing I am not looking forward to getting the first draft in and seeing what comments come back.” 1STU2189

“I do like sending the drafts in because at least when we know you are handing it on the deadline date it is something like/you haven’t got any more alterations to make to it so it’s actually being marked before you hand it into the assessor.” 2STU813849

Insecurity and ‘playing the system’ are evidenced by this last extract, In addition it demonstrates the pragmatic behaviour and approach towards achieving educational aims and goals and to overcome potential obstacles.

Peer Support

Peer support is expressed in the next extract where initial peer support was also instrumental in helping people stay motivated in the early days. Further extracts are shown in Appendix 11:

“There is a lady who does work for [LEA] and she’s in my afternoon group and if she was not in my afternoon group I think I would feel very lost in the afternoon group but she works at a primary school which is similar size and in a similar are and we are doing very similar work so I feel that she is probably the closest contact”. 1STU110053

Students look for others in similar working environments to provide support.

Students find entry into Higher Education a troublesome time so in order to reduce anxieties and find out the levels required, they resort to using a variety of strategies including tutor support by sending in drafts and asking for feedback. This gives them reassurance. Seeing other people's work is sought but peer support also plays a part of reducing anxieties and helping students learn. In the early days, peer support also helped maintain motivation.

Capability – Knowing whether they are capable

The following extracts show the student's self-belief of their capability. Self-belief and self-efficacy were discussed earlier in terms of previous educational experience where it was identified that students early on in the course had belief in their ability to succeed. Brief extracts further supporting this follow under the headings of 'positive' and 'negative'.

Positive

"Yes, I have still got that belief." 1STU33144

"I now know I am capable of doing it." 2STU2562

Negative

"I was always bright enough to do it and I always had the outside distractions that so I didn't do what I was capable of doing because I was always distracted".
3STU65519

"My fears are that I don't pass it and I will be seen as a failure." 1STU64887

"I didn't think I could do it". 3STU109349

“I suppose I worried about if I would be able to do the work . . . if you had said to me last year you could do that I would have said don’t be so daft.” 2STU916273

These last three extracts show more slightly pessimistic traits. In the first one, the student clearly refers to her previous educational experience and consequently only signed up for two modules out of four in year one and also year two and remains very concerned about her motivation:

“On a personal level it is relevant and I think that is possibly why I am doing two modules a year and doing it very slowly so that I am not going to be bogged down, not interested in it and end up not completing it.” 2STU65085

Lack of confidence also influenced the second student, who signed up for three modules in year one but her confidence increased and in year two signed up for all four modules and regretted her failure to do four from the outset. This has affected her chances of moving on to do the full Honours Degree as she is one module behind throughout the course. However, the third student’s lack of confidence did not affect her decision and she signed up for all four modules.

Progress

Still on the theme of self-knowledge and adapting to Higher Education, students’ perception of their progress manifested itself in a variety of ways. This chapter has already looked at the importance of tutor support and feedback on progress in terms of

gauging and knowing what is required of them but here students were able to reflect on their progress. Appendix 12 shows that this was mainly positive as indicated by the following example:

“I haven’t done any education over 25 years and I have realised that perhaps I am not using my potential any more and it is given me the opportunity to think about things more and I am certainly looking at things differently now since I started the course I am questioning things much more than I ever used to.” 1STU41566

This student clearly identifies early in the on the benefits of doing the Foundation Degree to the way she thinks.

Understanding strengths and weaknesses.

Students’ understanding of their own strengths or weaknesses emerged as a development from the theme of ‘Progress’. Full extracts are given in Appendix 13 but in this example shows where students recognise their abilities as well as strengths and weaknesses:

I learn best by doing actually something I would rather get on and do it myself and learn from any mistakes that I have made than somebody else telling me what to do and watching them do it. 1STU19801

The willingness to learn from mistakes, as if they were used to it and a normal part of experience is significant in their attitudes.

Ability in the Group

As the following extract highlights, in some instances their perception of their level of ability in the group is a concern to students. What is particularly interesting about this is that this student already has an Honours Degree in History. Anxiety is not solely the product of the lack of earlier achievement.

“Quite worried at first this morning because somebody had put on there [discussion board] and there quite a few of them commented that they had read this. I think they had printed these two big documents off, which I skimmed read. . . . My God they are reading these documents from cover to cover and I were thinking I have never done that I have never read anything from cover to cover I just skim read.” 1STU2289

As exposure to the course continues, competition with other members of the group continues as students seek to know whether the level they are working at is sufficient. This is important to them. This knowledge comes from different sources and as Table 8 shows, this is mainly from other students.

**Table 8
Evaluation of Performance**

OTHER STUDENTS	TUTOR FEEDBACK	OTHER
<i>“No the very first one when I first read it I thought gosh I don’t think it’s going to be comparable with everybody else’s . . .” 2STU41896</i>	<i>“The fact that I have drafts returned to me saying ‘no changes needed’ tells me that I am working at the required level.” 2STU512283</i>	<i>“I didn’t. It was my first seminar paper and I thought mine was not very good at all compared to everybody else’s”. 2STU813537</i>
<i>“In comparison with how people put things across and make sure you are doing similar level similar style . . .” 2STU65316</i>		

<p><i>“When you are working isolated you are not sure whether the work you are producing is of a relevant standard . . . I wonder how it is in comparison with others”.</i> 2STU512275</p>		
<p><i>“You didn’t get a score on it so I don’t know whether I was high up in the group or the bottom of the group.”</i> 3STU65794</p>		

Table 8 gives us evidence of the way students evaluate their own performance by comparison to other students to provide them with ‘self-efficacy information’. One of the alternative ways students could identify how well other students were doing in order to gauge their own progress and level, was by looking at the discussions on the discussion boards that were part of the formative assessment. From this students could identify their own standard and standards of other students as well as identifying high achievers. As the next extract shows this had an impact on motivation:

“Sharing ideas with the others, the other students and chatting with them at the day schools makes you realize that yes they have got the same worries they produce similar sort/I am looking at people’s work as well sharing seminar papers. When you are working isolated you are not sure whether the work you are producing is of a relevant standard and sometimes you think well I think it sounds OK but I wonder how it is in comparison with others.” 2STU512275

The importance of social learning, learning from other students is evident.

Adaptation

Adaptation is the second issue in adapting to the Foundation Degree shown in Table 7. Adaptation to learning in a university requires students to surmount the complexities of learning in a different way, develop new patterns of learning and adapt to academic standards and working. The following is now a discussion of the themes emerging from the data:

Academic Work

The difficulties students encountered were academic referencing (Harvard), coping with word counts, handling new ideas and new skills, and incorporating them (eg structuring a report, applying new analytical or research for instance flow charts or SWOT analysis). This is in addition to learning to:

- assess the level of their own work,
- know where to rephrase to achieve a higher standard,
- become more aware of academic standards in general, and
- adjust their work accordingly.

An example of the students' responses that have helped to exemplify this theme is given as follows and further references are contained in Appendix 14:

“I worry about the references, the referencing that is really hard and I think knowing what I am able to put into assignments and what I am not able to put in

about referencing it I am little bit unsure about that. That really is worrying me.”

1STU41598

Anxiety is not only to do with perceived lack of ability.

Reading

Students' reading skills changed as they adapted to Higher Education. One of the ways students believed they had to adapt their reading skills was by learning to 'skim read'. This is described in the following extracts. Students also reported perceived developing reading skills:

“I can skim a book now. At the start of the course I looked at the reading list. I thought how on earth are you expected to read all these and then I realized that's not what you do it's just finding the relevant pieces that suit the work that you are doing at that time”. 2STU512251

“When I thought about the reading list for example I would think oh goodness I can't possibly read all that and now I can quite confidently pick up a book – just general confidence”. 2STU512537

The above all points to the real life experiences of students as they adapt and familiarize themselves with the requirements of a Higher Education degree and shows also how the students themselves feel about their progress. They become pleased, more confident as learners as their academic skills develop and reveal things to themselves about their

ability to cope and adapt. They also demonstrate that some of the skills learned are short-cuts as with skim reading.

Coping

The following extract illuminates that this student struggles to try to cope with the work for the Foundation Degree.

“But I have said to her [Head teacher] I am really struggling to get my work done and it’s important to me so yea.” 3STU916873

Examples of the further difficulties students present are listed in Table 9, along with reported solutions:

Table 9

Examples of student responses with solutions on the theme of ‘Coping’

DIFFICULTY	SOLUTION
<i>“But it is up to you to get the work in . . . but I have still got to balance that with a 9 month old baby.”</i> 1STU2138	<i>“I could not have done anything full time because of obviously my work . . . whereas I feel this is more in my own time.”</i> 1STU2138
<i>“I know when I did the ICT assignment [tutor] recommended because I was struggling to find text.”</i> 2STU2372	<i>“Can’t remember but it was such a text that it also mentions lots of other people because then you can look at the bibliography and then look at their books.”</i> 2STU2372
<i>“I find having to concentrate on two or three, three particularly is just a struggle.”</i> 3STU34222	<i>“I like the module system and it is better/it appears to be better this year because you can sort of hit a module and forget it.”</i> 3STU34222
<i>“It’s the input from other people and the support there and know that everybody else is struggling as much as you are.”</i> 2STU110814	<i>“It would be impossible to do it without Blackboard.”</i> 2STU110814

<p><i>“At the same time where somebody who is struggling in one particular subject.”</i> 2STU915851</p>	<p><i>“Somebody else might not be so they can help them and it might help them the other way round so I think you are all helping each other . . . you kind of pull each other through it.”</i> 2STU915851</p>
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Coping as a theme has many dimensions for the students: coping with the work for the degree, coping with managing a home as well as a job; in general juggling with complexity of their different roles and role issues. Two students talk about having to be “*very disciplined*”, having to “*compartmentalize*” and “*prioritise*” (1STU33140/1STU915960)

Another student describes coping as juggling everything around:

“Just coping – just juggling everything around, you juggle your home life your work, my degree and at the moment everything is swimming all right.”
2STU813717

This shows resilience and that coping mechanisms are being effective.

Juggling was raised by the above student but ‘juggle’ has many meanings to students, for instance organizing, coping, dealing with, handling, surviving, arranging and balancing. A search of the database in the student response field and the code field for the word juggle and derivatives produced a great deal of data. However, analysis and reading of this data produced evidence that this was mainly in connection with coping and balancing

roles eg work, home life and doing the degree rather than adapting to Higher Education, discussed later in this thesis.

Knowing Why

As students adapt to Higher Education they become aware of the changes to their ability and the following quotation cites relevant instances:

“I think it’s gaining subject knowledge and forming my own opinions from what I have read because if I gain knowledge then I am more confident about what I believe in so I can form opinions better about what other people are saying – I can pick up and say that’s a really good point but I can see what he or she means but I don’t agree with that because I think such a thing. I have learned how to if I have an opinion why do I have that opinion I have learned how to develop the skills to back up my opinions.” 2STU512380

Developing skills are evident.

Increased Confidence

Summing up the adapting to Higher Education includes reported increases in confidence as the next extract demonstrates. Full extracts are given in Appendix 15.

“I think it did definitely have an effect. Now because I am reflecting on it yes possibly I possibly would not have thought that at the beginning but

definitely now – I have got more confidence, I have got much more confidence.” 2STU42107

This suggests confidence is itself a powerful factor.

Summary

Evidence of the complexities of adapting to Higher Education, the problems students faced and how these were often overcome by good support either by the tutor or other students has been presented. Adapting has significance for attrition rates as students demonstrate persistence in the face of challenge. In order to cope, students relied on tutor feedback which gave them knowledge about their progress toward goals but knowing they are, “*all in the same boat*” helped to foster a caring and supportive group. Students were also able to reflect upon their learning and thus display characteristics of the self-regulated learner. This is important because these skills can be transposed to learning via Blackboard which requires the learner to learn independently and this is discussed more fully later under E-learning.

2.2 Course Organisation Issues

This section of the chapter focuses on the themes emerging from analysis of the data from the point of view of the learning environment. Course organisation and the impact on student motivation is analysed with a view to providing insight into some of the factors that motivate students. How the course is constructed has an impact on how

students interact, learn from each other, use and develop relationships, communicate and learn.

The following section considers the impact of course organisation on student motivation and this is followed by the sub-sections on the issues of Day schools, Support and communication issues.

Impact of Course Organisation on Student Motivation

In appendix 16, data reflecting the students' opinions about the organisation of the course, day schools, the module system of working and support are given. This data indicates very few negative opinions. However, one of the marked influences arising from this data is the importance of Day Schools. The course has six full day schools per year held approximately one each month over each of the three years. The importance of peer support, tutor support, support groups and face-to-face contact has already been mentioned previously in relation to motivation to embark on the Foundation Degree, maintaining motivation during the early days, reducing feelings of isolation and also allowing students to gauge their own level within the group. The following data builds on these themes already discussed and demonstrates the importance to students as well as tutors and for face-to-face communication in the growing paradigm of electronic learning.

Day Schools – *“Circumstances force you to do an e-learning degree – day schools bring you together.”* 3STU42277

Day schools are very important to group cohesion and motivation. Some students referred to the importance of receiving information and help to complete the degree at day schools, others commented on the balance between the six day schools and the other means of communicating. The following is an extract from Appendix 17.

“That’s a link with others and it’s interesting that I commented about not being as motivated without the monthly day schools so although I am happy to come away and get on with the tasks that we have been given I somehow like to go back and have some central form of communication with people that is a little bit reassuring and to discuss with other fellow students that this where were are up or I did this or I found this useful um, I would not want to do a course that was just virtual learning in isolation.” 2STU512360

The importance of day schools, allowing students to meet face-to-face, is evident. Students gained confidence and reassurance from meeting their peers and they could also gauge their own progress by assessing the progress of their peers. Day schools gave students the opportunity to monitor their learning and develop learning strategies. In the extract above, a pragmatic approach is identified (3STU109461) as the student has clearly identified that s/he can achieve learning outcomes by systematically regurgitating information relayed at day schools.

E-learning in isolation does not give students the opportunity to actively engage in a social-environmental way but a major part of the Foundation Degree embodies e-learning. This means that students do not have the comfort in knowing they will meet together, so they are forced into developing strategies to cope with the lack of personal contact, to continue the support and dependence on one another.

Peer Support derived from Day Schools

The importance of peer support derived from attendance at day schools arose through further analysis of the relevant data and the database was then queried for the combination of day schools and peer support. The following short extract serves to support this theme. (Full extracts are contained in Appendix 18).

“I can say to [colleague] what do you think about this or what do you think about this and it’s one to one whereas the discussion board you do lose a little bit of personal touch but that’s why I like the school days [emphasizes] I do like the school days. I find them very advantageous.” 2STU41779

Peer support is important to students and what they gain from personal communication at day schools is the ability to share ideas and share experiences. This gives them increased motivation by reassurance that they are having the same difficulties and concerns, plus the benefits of learning in groups by sharing ideas. Discussion boards also play a comparable role.

Day Schools, Group Work and Peer Support - “fish out of water” (2STU41884)

As part of the organisation of day schools, students broke into tutor groups. This gave students the opportunity to meet in smaller groups, get to know their group members, gain confidence in speaking to a smaller group of people and also learn from one another by sharing information. From this, students soon realised they had commonly shared experiences and this encouraged and supported them. In the following first example, the student voices this by describing the students as “*fish out of water*”.

“I think also it’s the confidence of the group I have been in – you get used to the same people. I am sure it would not bother me – at fifty we have been split up and when we are doing our seminar papers we are small groups but because I’ve know those people/we are all in the same boat at the end of the day and I have realised that that is probably one of the things I have learned most that everybody is equal in that sense because we are all doing a course/we are all like ‘fish out of water’ ”. 2STU41884

Recognising and sharing common experiences is reassuring.

This same point was also made by second student although the student used the metaphor that “*everybody is in the same boat*”. 2STU2481

The familiarity of meeting with the same smaller group of students adds quite considerably to the student experience. Without such a means, students would lack the opportunity of closer supportive relationships.

Learning from one another is an important benefit to students and students have come to recognize this. This is achieved universally from all facets of the course: Day schools, Email and Discussion Boards (discussed later), tutor groups and '*friendship circles*'. Furthermore, students supported each other by networking and using these support mechanisms. In this section of the thesis, support and '*friendship circles*' is restricted only to day schools and tutor groups. The next extract demonstrates that students recognized the benefit of group support and social learning is evident.

“Probably where there is quite a few of us working together, group learning, perhaps workshops that type of thing where everybody is putting a bit in because you get to learn from other people and you think that’s a good idea. They might say something to you and you might say oh that’s a good idea and you learn from each other.”

1STU76343

In the following the student verifies the importance of the tutor groups for friendship and support.

“Yes, yes and I met somebody on the first day and we got chatting but then last time we didn’t see each other because she was in a different group in the morning and in the afternoon so it would have been nice to chat to her and see how she was getting on .” 1STU110037

Peer support is not only limited to attendance at day schools but appears again under the following general theme of support whether peer support, tutor support or other support mechanisms eg family or work colleagues.

Support

This section of the thesis looks specifically and in more depth at support and builds on issues raised earlier. Support is scrutinised from a more functional view, identifying what students want, how and when they want it. In talking about support, students generated a number of metaphors and these were investigated further at interview for clarification. They revealed three overall themes: Practical gains, perception of themselves and the group and communication issues. Deeper issues surrounding support are thus identified and this reaffirms the importance of face-to-face contact in promoting a good supportive learning environment. Data analysis is presented as follows:

The theme of support appears as a major factor influencing student motivation and learning. Although a salient feature of the Foundation Degree was the availability of the Internet to deliver the Foundation Degree and support students, as part of course organisation the six day schools were incorporated to allow face-to-face contact between

students and between tutors and students. One student, who had already completed two years of a part-time degree with another university (where there was weekly contact), comments:

“About the course at [another University] it was so disorganised and I didn’t realise at the time but in retrospect now that I am on this course and see how much time the tutors are giving to us and how well structured it all is and how well it has been thought through I realise how bad that course was and no wonder but you know when I gave up that course two years out of six I had done and I came out with the certificate in HE so I stuck out the two years so I could get that but I thought I can’t do this any more and I felt such a failure I really felt disappointed.” 3STU512928

Despite apparent failure this student’s persistence is obvious.

The importance of good support and a well structured course are noticed and valued by students and this leads to good motivation and retention. Tutor support and organisation are the two main themes emerging from this student’s account and reflection. From a traditional perspective of the role of Higher Education, this is unusual but reflects the needs of a non-traditional cohort of students whose needs are different, expectations are different and modes of study are different and this has an impact on the role of Higher Education if these needs are to be met.

Although the following student researcher refers not to a Higher Education course but a practical skills' based course delivered totally online via the Internet, lack of support and especially tutor support had similar demoralising effect on motivation.

“I have done an e-learning course with [online provider]and because the subject I wanted to learn was FrontPage doing web pages because I designed a web page I wanted to know a little more and I did this particular course it was literally sitting there it would give you some information and a little test afterwards the information is very basic you couldn't ask further questions and there was no way you could say “that's interesting” or “how can I do this” “how to you go back on with that” you couldn't do that. I didn't have the tutor support I was I supposed to have. Every time I emailed I didn't get anything back and basically it was appalling and I didn't finish the course. It was awful.” 1STU915747

The twin themes of tutor support and organisation arising from the above two students' accounts, are presented as follows:

Tutor Support

Good tutor support increased student confidence. The theme of tutor support is discussed in three broad categories: The first is students' needs; the second the way in which students obtained tutor support and the third, the reason to ask for tutor support.

Student needs?

“If I am stuck on what I want to do firstly then to check what I picked is OK.” 2STU2785

Students needed to know if what they were doing was correct. Although ‘gauging’ is important as it refers to the students attempts to find out what was wanted as they adapted to Higher Education, students also used the tutor to guide, give them ideas, prompts, and provide reassurance and confidence.

One student identified a drawback when using Blackboard (the VLE). The example is given to show that although email is a preferred solution, it is not always the answer and doesn’t give students all they need, all of the time.

“Because although it’s there and you can read it if you have got any queries there is no one there to ask questions so you can’t ask Blackboard a question if you are not sure of anything. You can I suppose email your tutor but it’s not the same if you want to know then.” 3STU77468

How Students Gain Tutor Support

This category shows how the following students adopt a no-nonsense and practical approach in obtaining tutor support.

“The communication is very good. I mean I can email – well I send bits and bobs from here and either the same morning or certainly the same day. I would go as far as to say within a few hours I have got a reply . . . I have it back and it’s been marked . . . but it just the way this e-learning works it is so, so instant, it’s very good.” 2STU108748

“The emailing of drafts is possibly better than traditional tutorial because you do get the feedback on that.” 2STU33859

These extracts confirm that email is a preferred and instant means of communicating but to be effective, tutors need to respond immediately to students.

Reason to ask for Tutor Support

“It’s normally when I am doing assignments.” 2BR785

Q “When do you contact a tutor for help?”

A “When I think I have taken something as far as I can go.”

2STU111069

Although a lot of communication is done by email, on occasions students find it preferable to use the telephone:

“He said you are not doing enough ring me tomorrow which I did and he was really helpful over the phone and talked me though things so there is no problem there.” 2STU813816

Students were genuinely surprised at the quick response in replying to their emails.

“The e-learning is to that extent and I have enjoyed it and the support has surprised me, getting the emails the response back so quickly. No problems at all.” 2STU108930

The norms for responding to students’ requests for help, support or feedback on progress, were established by the course leader early on in the course. Wherever possible, student emails were at the very least acknowledged the same day as they were received. Good tutor support was deemed essential to the success of the Foundation Degree and it clearly worked. Students were appreciative of this. This use of instant communication using available technologies is clearly a new student experience.

Peer Support

Peer support has already been discussed earlier under the theme of Day Schools where evidence was found of the importance of peer support in motivating students initially and, therefore, important for maintaining student motivation rates. Peer support was mainly achieved through attendance at day schools through which students developed supportive friendships circles. Students also reported the importance of peer support to their motivation as well as to remaining on the course. *“If it wasn’t for the others doing it I would feel completely alone and probably would not have the confidence to complete it. If that was the case I might give up”*. 1STU813521

Further analysis of the data for support, however, revealed a large number of metaphors that students used to describe peer support:

“pulling in the same direction” 3STU21277

“bit of company”,

“little chat”, and

“sounding board” 1STU41671

“throwing ideas at each other” and

“become a unit” 2STU41771

“out on a limb of my own” 2STU813568

“same boat”, and,

“fish out of water” 2STU41884

“own friendship circles” 3STU42898

“store that away” 2STU33261

“drag people on” 2STU915851.

In follow up interviews students were asked to explain the use of the metaphor and analysis of the above data for support generated three main themes:

- 1 What **practical gains** students get from other students eg “store that away” and “throwing ideas at each other”, “sounding board”, and “drag people on”.

- 2 How students **perceive themselves and the group** eg “become a unit”, “pulling in same direction”, “same boat”, “fish out of water”, “own friendships circles” “out on a limb of my own” and what this gives them for instance confidence.
- 3 **Communication**, “bit of company”, “little chat”.

Practical Gains

The following extract gives an indication of the type of benefit students gain from peer support. Full extracts are contained in Appendix 20.

“Well, throwing ideas at each other and I think I am lucky because I have got [name] in school and although I still enjoy going onto the discussion board and talking to others, I still find that one to one and I don’t think that can be replaced.” 2STU41771

Students used each other to help with idea generation, storing and retrieving information and, in fact, using other students as additional brain power, calling upon them for retention as well as memory difficulties and giving them ideas that on their own they might not have considered or generated by themselves.

Student Perception of the Group

Good peer support developed a caring and supportive learning environment and students quickly recognised the benefits of this. One of the results was increasing confidence. Full quotations are given in Appendix 20.

“Probably where everybody is giving you their experiences or saying what they think where everybody is contributing to the conversation so you are picking things up and somebody might say something and you think, Oh yea, that’s a good idea and you jot it down. It’s something you’ve not thought about.” 2STU76577

Students learn from each other.

Students recognised also others were sharing the same experiences and had the same goals. The whole group of students is perceived as sharing the experience but students also form their own smaller groups or “*friendship circles*” (3STU42898) which are relationships formed during day schools. What students gain from this support again is confidence from receiving and giving help and by sharing. The following gives further insight into the concept of sharing and how it benefits students.

Sharing

Some students gained substantially from being able to share in people’s ideas, experiences and knowledge, as well as sharing in resources which saved them time and

energy. Seeing other people’s work has already been discussed earlier but is raised again here when a student talks about using ‘references’ to generate further reading materials.

“When I say competition I/we try to share resources.” 3STU42313

“I think you have the ability to acquire information from fellow students when they put on that they have found something really relevant like reference wise . . .”

2STU2650

Appendix 20 contains full quotations.

Colleague Support

Another level of support for some students comes from work colleagues who are also on the course. The type of support colleagues give one another has been structured as positive support and negative support (Appendix 21). An example is given in Table 10. Although still peer support, colleague support brings a different dimension as communication and interaction continue at the students’ places of work.

Table 10

Examples of Colleague Support

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
<i>“We helped each other a lot in the initial stages. Where do you find this where do you find that. How do I click on this?”</i> 2STU108655	<i>The support is still there because er because [name] says to me I don’t know how you feel about this [name] but I always send my things through to [name] to have a look at and she does it to her and they hadn’t been doing that to me so . . .”</i> 3STU814628

Most support from colleagues was positive and helpful but in one reported instance a student felt left out of the support mechanism and another student observed that sometimes it might be better not to have colleagues on the course as this would avoid conflict over material in order to complete the same assignments.

Communication Issues

Communication is raised as it relates specifically to peer support. In the following sample extract the student refers specifically to communicating person to person as opposed to communicating with groups of people. Being able to talk directly to another person is reassuring. Knowing there is someone they can rely on for support when they need that extra personal support. Being in a supportive group also gives students confidence that others are feeling the same as they are and they have shared experiences but some also rely on individual support and so that they do not feel isolated.

“But having [colleague] there I can say to [colleague] what do you think about this or what do you think about this and it’s one to one.” 2STU41779

Increasing Confidence

A strong theme emerging from the research is ‘confidence’ and in particular increasing confidence as students find their way through the experience.

“I have got those abilities – they were always there it’s just that the course has brought them out.” 2STU42118

Students talked freely about growing confidence in terms of academic ability as the following transcripts in Table 11 show:

Table 11

Student confidence and academic ability

CHANGE	OUTCOME
<i>"More comfortable."</i> 2STU2504	<i>"Know what I am doing."</i> 2STU2506
<i>"Know I am capable of doing it now."</i> 2B4526	<i>"How to structure things."</i> 2B4526
<i>"I am really enjoying it."</i> 2STU110121	<i>"I feel more confident."</i> 2STU110121
<i>"Got the confidence . . ."</i> 2STU41995	<i>". . . to do research."</i> 2STU41844 <i>I just say it now, it doesn't worry me."</i> 2STU41995
<i>"I have been involved in a work-based project."</i> 2STU41995	<i>"I think that has built confidence."</i> 2STU41995
<i>"I have more of an ability . . . just writing something."</i> 3STU42667	<i>"Knowing it is in a better format because you are getting into that way of writing things."</i> 3STU42667
<i>"I have got so many ideas I can go straight in there with the ideas now."</i> 2STU512207	<i>"Because I have gained such a lot of knowledge."</i> 2STU512207
<i>"It's gaining subject knowledge and forming my own opinions from what I have read."</i> 2STU512380	<i>"I have learned how to develop the skills to back up my opinions."</i> 2STU512380
<i>"I think I am more confident now."</i> 2STU813784	<i>"I am getting my brain into gear of how to phrase things . . . how I wanted it to be worded . . . not using too much wording."</i> 2STU813784
<i>"I think it has given me more self-confidence."</i> 3STU814160	<i>"I know a bit more about what I am talking about."</i> 3STU814160
<i>"I don't dismiss things without looking at them properly."</i> 2STU110639	<i>"Whereas now I might read a few pages before I think that's . . ."</i> 2STU110639
<i>"Don't panic and look too far ahead."</i> 3STU513152	<i>"Break it down into smaller steps and deal with that . . . move on to the next one."</i> 3STU513152
<i>"I think It's given me more confidence."</i> 3STU814160	<i>"I know a bit more about what I am talking about."</i> 3STU814160

Student confidence and academic ability

Confidence in terms of academic ability can be summed up by the following student who stated that what the course had given her in terms of confidence and academic achievement is in fact “*confidence in ability*”:

“I am not a confident person it’s having the confidence in my ability.”

(2STU512207)

Summary

The importance of course organisation on student motivation has been identified and this encompasses support, both from tutors and peers, colleagues as well as face-to-face tutorials and small group work. Confidence in ability has grown and students have learned to acquire the skills to meet the challenges of Higher Education. One issue that emerged was in relation to the impact of the introduction of grading in the 2nd year of the course. This caused problems for students between work colleagues. Confidentiality and sensitivity is important to student motivation and the distribution of graded work needs to be handled in a private manner.

3 E-LEARNING (*The 'wow' factor – 1STU512101*)

The initial research proposal for the thesis stated there would be a particular emphasis on e-learning issues because the Foundation Degree had a significant e-learning element and this section of the report will address the findings emerging and document how e-learning contributes to the student learning experience. One of research findings is that for most students adapting to e-learning was not particularly troublesome nor provided the students with particular difficulties but there is, however, also evidence to suggest that the inclusion of e-learning contributes to learning, motivation and peer support.

This research found evidence that e-learning has helped these students learn through idea generation, by giving peer support and especially support for less confident learners. It also helped by increasing motivation across a wide range of factors such as flexibility, availability and aiding memory and retention. There are, of course, differences between classroom based teaching and e-learning. As communication is at the heart of teaching and learning, this is one aspect that differs considerably. For some students, communication was successful. For others, it posed problems, such as lack of body language and not understanding what was written as well as the difficulties of putting opinions across in a text based environment. What has emerged from the research throughout, however, is the adaptability and pragmatism of students as they meet new challenges. For most, it was not just a positive experience but actually critical to achievement and retention rates.

A description of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Blackboard is given in Chapter 2 but is felt important at this stage to provide an example of the way Blackboard was organised and how the learning materials were presented. Blackboard was used to give access to learning materials in the form of written documents prepared to present students with a body of related instructional material, hot links and hyperlinks to relevant external web sites, learning activities and discussion boards. An example of a main module interface is given in Fig 4:

Fig 4

Example of a Blackboard interface

	TOPIC	TASKS	DAY SCHOOLS
	Introduction NOTE: The chapters below include links to external web sites. These are optional and are an additional resource to meet different learning styles and needs.	Print off all Tasks	Day School 1 - 17 September Brief Introduction to People and Teams Module
1	Groups	Click Here for Task 1 Here for Task 2	
2	Teams	Click Here for Task 3 Click Here for Task 4	

Clicking on the link would open up the written materials. Related tasks could be accessed in the same way.

Some of the related tasks required students to access a Discussion Board and join in a discussion on a relevant topic. This gave students the opportunity to engage in collaborative activities, discuss, argue, negotiate and reflect:

“We were introduced to Blackboard then. My initial reaction was ‘wow’ this is fantastic and I went home and spent the first couple of weeks

looking through the content of Blackboard . . . I am really, really impressed with it and the way we can look at the work for weeks in advance if we want to and you can recap and keep going back over the topics over the previous weeks. I just think it is really well designed.”

1STU512101

This quotation introduces us to some of the reported and exciting benefits for students in using a VLE to support learning; being able to see the whole picture; the ability to recap at your own pace and time. This section is presented under two sub-headings:

3.1 Previous Experience

3.2 The VLE Blackboard

3.1 Previous Experience

In order to ascertain whether students had had any previous experience of e-learning that might impact on their attitudes, students were asked two questions early in interviewing: firstly, whether the students had any previous experiences of e-learning and secondly, what was their expectation of e-learning prior to starting the course. This second question was to ascertain whether they had any negative views of e-learning that would impact on motivation and if so, whether the actual experience changed these views.

Table 12 is an example of prior experience and expectations with full extracts contained in See Appendix 22.

Table 12

Student previous experience and expectations of e-learning

PRIOR EXPERIENCE	EXPECTATION
<i>“No I had not really experienced it before.”</i> 1STU2154	<i>“All I expected were contact with a tutor via email with any problems we have got and small number of students.”</i> 1STU2154

All but two students had had no previous experience of e-learning. One student had experience of an online course and her negative experience has already been reflected on.

Expectations from those who had experience of e-learning ranged from *“not having any”* to *“being very happy . . . I email my friends all the time”*. Students thought there would be use of email and the use of the Internet. No one had a negative view and also when asked later what they thought of the Internet, their responses were positive as Table 13 shows.

3.2 The VLE - blackboard

As students progressed, they reported being mainly very positive about Blackboard. The example transcript in Table 13 (see Appendixes 23 and 24) shows a positive advantage of the use of Blackboard to support learning. Reported negative aspects are given in Table 15.

Table 13

Advantages and disadvantages of Blackboard to support learning

POSITIVE	FEATURES
<i>“Well there are some things I am quite impressed with like I have been on today and I have been able to get documents off the IT module and I have also been able to go one to Onelog and actually download journals and print them off which is fantastic it saves me travelling through to Huddersfield.” 1STU2269</i>	ACCESS TO MATERIALS SAVES TIME

What can be identified from the data in Appendix 23 is the inclusion of Blackboard to support this small group of learners had a positive and motivating contribution to their successful learning experience.

Most of the advantages in Appendix 23 are also concerned with additional benefits to students over and above traditional teaching methods via lectures. These have been organised into four groups shown in Table 14:

Table 14
Additional benefits of the use of Blackboard

COMMUNICATION	ACCESS	USER INTERFACE	EMOTION
Converse with others	Saves Time	Easy	Dissolved fears
Immediate Response	Available any time	Well set out	Motivating
	Convenient	Reliable	
	When you want to	Animated*	
	Flexible		
	Access to materials		
	Recap		
	Get ahead		

** Even though you are only scrolling up and down it is changing it is animated.*" 2STU111019

Table 15 presents an example (see Appendix 24) of how students also reflected on negative aspects of using Blackboard.

Table 15
Negative aspects of Blackboard

NEGATIVE	FEATURES
<i>"Because you can interact with people better. If somebody says this you can actually ask them questions. Now I know on a discussion board you can do that but people don't open up in the same way in a discussion board as they do in a group situation."</i> 3STU42470	PEOPLE DON'T OPEN UP

Only two students had very negative comments regarding Blackboard. These were mainly concerned with communication issues compared with talking to someone and raise the issue of difficulties of communicating asynchronously and possible misinterpretation. Lack of feedback and being impersonal are also mentioned.

Blackboard was employed primarily in two ways: The first was to provide a learning package in the form of written learning materials and the second, the inclusion of discussion boards as part of formative assessment and for students to communicate with each other on specified topics. An example of this is that students were encouraged to carry out tasks relevant to the module they were studying. This gave the students the motivation and opportunity to read more widely and also to view their ideas and thoughts with other students.

Some of the advantages of using a VLE to support learning are emerging but as data analysis and generation of themes was continually iterative, during this process several questions were raised concerning e-learning and eventually specific questions were asked of each student on the emerging themes. These questions and the responses are now discussed, firstly by looking at Blackboard and learning materials and secondly, the Discussion Boards.

Blackboard Learning Materials

The following question develops the theory that the VLE supports learners and was also used to discover student perceptions and actual experiences of using Blackboard as well as identifying differences, advantages and disadvantages.

Question One (Read out to Students Verbatim)

(About Blackboard substituting for lectures). Do you agree with this statement? Blackboard is better than lectures because all the information you want is stored and available to look at any time.

Table 16

Is Blackboard better than lectures?

AGREE	DISAGREE	AMBIVALENT
2	6	2
3STU65743/5723 and 3STU111503	3STU42782, 3STU34274, 3STU77468, 3STU109543, 3STU513060, 3STU916729	2STU21120 and 3STU814452

Table 16 shows quite a mixed response to the question. Students who answered yes or were in agreement, preferred to “*look at things on computers*” (3STU111503), said there is “*a bit of interaction*” (3STU65743), and said you can “*read them when you want to . . . go back*” 2STU65723. Their perception was mainly concerned with the interface features and benefits of using educational multimedia technology.

Students who answered no were more concerned with the lack of “*feedback*” or the opportunity to “*ask questions*” (3STU916729) have “*personal touch*” (3STU513068), not “*immediate*” (3STU77472) and, “*somebody explaining*” (3STU42782). These responses indicated a focus on a preference for real time contact with people eg tutors as in traditional teaching methods but these same students also knew it would be impossible for them to achieve the Foundation Degree without the use of the VLE to support them as this allows them to work when they want or can. As shown later, students referred to the inclusion of e-learning to support them; such as the ability to recap, see the course up front, dip into materials and do the work when you want. Generally, the students were enthused by Blackboard and the ability it gave to them complete the Foundation Degree. It gave them added value over and above a traditionally taught course.

Ambivalent responses were to do with benefits of technology providing additional resources to back up traditional teaching methods, eg the ability to print off resources outside of teaching time. This view of technology backing up traditional teaching methods was raised by students many times during their interviews. Students talked about

printing off documents from Blackboard but what did this give them and why did they do it? One obvious reason may have been to ensure that they have hard copy in case of technological problems such as a systems failure or the system being offline. Before further discussion of this, however, the second question given to students also provides evidence of their need to print off materials.

Question Two

Students were asked to complete the following sentence:

Reading the course materials on Blackboard is easier than notes given out at lectures because . . . ?

On the whole, students did not agree with the statement but also said they printed everything off in hard copy. The reasons for this they said were:

“I don’t agree with it because everything that’s on Blackboard I print out anyway because I find it easier to read in hard copy than read it on Blackboard so I would rather have a hard copy.” 3STU77476 and “Can highlight bits – you can’t if you are reading it on screen.” 3STU77480

“Probably pulling them off yes because if you are making notes yourself you may miss something.” 3STU814456.

Why do students print off hard copy?

Overall six of the ten students in the research cohort said they regularly printed off all materials on Blackboard. This was a substantial undertaking. A further search was then conducted on the database for evidence of students printing off all the course materials, what the benefits of providing them online were and reasons why students chose to print off substantial amounts of materials into hard copy?

Several reasons emerged: One was to be able to annotate, which it was not possible in this instance to do with the online materials, and also to be able to sort and organise. Another was that it is easier to read than on the screen – a familiar way of working but also that it gave them the ability to read whenever they wanted to, at home, in bed or elsewhere. Internet learning embodies the notion of anywhere, anytime learning but the ability to print materials extends this by allowing students to take materials literally anywhere there isn't a computer; sitting in the doctor's waiting room or waiting for a bus. This theme provides evidence of both advantages and disadvantages of online learning. (See Appendix 25).

Other answers to question two were:

The ability to “*look them up at leisure*” and “*flick through them at your own pace.*” 3STU109559.

It's “*all there in one go.*” 3STU513080.

Making notes yourself you may “*miss something.*” 3STU814456.

Students were positive or at the very least fairly ambivalent about the use of Blackboard to support the Foundation Degree and most had little expectation or experience of on-line learning. The benefits and disadvantages of the VLE are emerging and it would also seem that for most the experience is positive and in some cases very motivating.

Students reported advantages such as:

- Being able to see the whole course in one go,
- The convenience of being able to access materials at any time and at their own convenience and,
- That the materials by being there all the time act as a reminder the course still exists when they do not meet for several weeks at a time,
- Acts as a prompt for assessment deadlines.

The evidence supports the claim that Blackboard supported learning by making it available, flexible, motivating and reassuring. This student's account sums this up and also adds the dimension of support and knowing "*everybody is struggling*".

"It's the input from other people and the support there and know that everybody else is struggling as much as you are and it would be impossible to do it without Blackboard." 2STU110814

Knowing other students are struggling as much as they are gives students confidence and reassurance.

One further advantage of providing online materials is that it gives reinforcement and it is always available to students. This concept of “*always there*” is also reassuring and means the course and the group are still there, that students are not abandoned, alone or isolated and maintains a link with the course during the gaps between day schools. This is described by the following students:

“To me there would be the reminder that the whole Foundation Degree is still there because Blackboard is there. Two or three times a week I will go and look at it and that just reminds you that oh yes by 19th March I have got to finish C&IT project.” 2STU33867

“Well it makes you feel as though you are not working in isolation. I generally go on the discussion boards every day just to have a quick look at everything and yes I always do that.” 3STU513124

Discussion Boards

Question three was developed from data derived during interviewing and in response to the amount of information being provided by students on discussion boards and the impact on them.

Discussion Boards were used for students to complete voluntary learning tasks, also for formative assessment as students were required to upload required assessments and also comment on other students' contributions.

One specific task in the first year for the Communication and Information Technology module asked students to debate on the discussion board their experiences of virtual learning, with particular emphasis on:

Feelings of isolation,

Motivation,

Power to do work when you like,

Sense of community – is it possible to create one?

Students took advantage of this to voice their concerns, worries and fears and received valuable feedback from other students.

The data confirms some of the evidence already provided earlier, that the use of a VLE to support learners is reassuring and, therefore, motivating as indicated in the following extract from the discussion board.

“The system, I have adopted when logging onto Blackboard is to check for announcements, then read the course documents for the week, to make sure I’m up-to-date with the tasks, and then check the discussion board. I don’t read every message in detail but do open them up and have a brief glance. I think

Blackboard is a good tool as it is reassuring to know that I am not alone with my concerns. I'm looking forward to putting faces to names at the next day school."

3STU513269

The evidence tends to suggest that discussion boards, once mastered, are highly motivational and a means for students to communicate their fears in a much more frank and open way than they would have done face-to-face in the formal day school settings, where the norms may prevent such an open discourse.

Question three then turned to the question of motivation and the use of discussion boards.

Question Three

How do you feel the Discussion Boards motivate you to complete the course?

Table 17 shows the responses to question three for both voluntary tasks and formative assessments. These are presented in two categories: What students feel is good about discussion boards and negative issues.

Table 17
Positive and Negative aspects of Discussion Boards

<i>POSITIVE</i>	<i>NEGATIVE</i>
<i>"They are very good."</i> 3STU77488	<i>"I think there is nobody on at the same time."</i> 3STU77488
<i>"It's nice to see what other people write."</i> 3STU109563	<i>"You can put something on but you might not get anything back."</i> 3STU77488
<i>"I like the discussion boards. . . gives me ideas [very positively]. . . know I am looking in the right direction."</i> 3STU111538	<i>"Very repetitive . . . that you can't add anything more."</i> 3STU109563

<p><i>“Shared information . . . good when you get personal comments . . . reinforcing what your thoughts are . . . good to have that reinforcement and shared information.”</i> 3STU513120</p>	<p><i>“You feel that you can’t add anything more/if you are one of the late entrants.”</i> 3STU109563</p>
<p><i>“Makes you feel as though you are not working in isolation.”</i> 3STU513124</p>	
<p><i>“You could reinforce your learning by looking back if there was something you couldn’t ‘quite remember and you could reread something.”</i> 2STU512299</p>	

Students reported sharing information on a discussion board gave them “*ideas*”, “*reinforcement*”, “*confidence*”, is “*inclusive*”, and because it is “*always there*”, they are able to re-read materials. Negative responses included, “*it’s repetitive*”, “*inability to contribute*”, “*lack of dialogue*” and “*isolation*”.

Although students were asked the specific question regarding discussion boards and both positive and negatives responses to this have been shown, it was not until the third interview during the second year of the Degree. Prior to this students had given information on this subject. The database was subsequently searched for “*discussion*” both in the data field and in the code field to extract relevant data. Data were then coded into the following categories and these are discussed below:

- Feedback – level
- Gaining ideas
- Advantages
- Peer Support
- Time
- Interaction
- Understanding

Feedback – Level

This thesis has already reported on the importance of feedback, the importance of students ability to ‘gauge’ their level in the group and the impact this has on motivation. In this section it is identified where Discussion Boards allow these processes to be instrumental. The following extracts confirm discussion boards are an important mechanism for both feedback and in identifying the level of the group and the students’ perceived own level.

“Sometimes you think “Oh my God these people they know way much more than me or I am doing something wrong here” and “you see some people and God where you have got time to do all that from.” 3STU21138

“I think gosh they really know/they are really keyed up on what they are talking about and I sat there as a silent observer really.” 2STU65373

“I posted something on one of the discussion boards about what I had done and when I read somebody else’s I thought “mine is awful mine is rubbish” it wasn’t good enough.”1STU813386

“Yes, yes, yes it does I think um/if I think [student name] has done something and I have not done it [laughs] there just a few sort of key people/oh has she got that far.” 3STU109587

Competition has already been raised earlier in the thesis as students adapted to the degree and tried to determine their level in the group but competition is further highlighted in these last quotations along with the themes of insecurity and uncertainty. Students appeared to have a strong sense of self-belief but were also lacking in confidence, were uncertain and insecure and needed the reassurance gained from feedback and by communicating on the discussion boards, which give the opportunity and chance for this to occur.

Gaining Ideas

Discussion boards also allowed students to gain ideas from other students as illustrated in the following extract:

“I listen to others, yes, I like to listen to others that’s why I am a bit of a mix up . . . so I did think back and listen to what people commented on in the discussion board, how they were going to do their project, how they were going to address certain tasks and then I decided how I would do mine.” 1STU41534

Students were also able to identify who was a good student or high achiever and use this knowledge to gauge the level of their own work:

“It’s just reinforcing what your thoughts are and it’s sometimes that will be certain people I will look at. You get to know who will make a good contribution

to the discussion board and look at that or I might chose to look at . . . I tend to pick and choose it's good to have the reinforcement and shared information."

3STU513120

Advantages – Motivation

Although the above are advantages of the inclusion of discussion boards in virtual learning, students also reported on the advantages of discussion boards in terms of motivation, by allowing them to communicate with one another and the group asynchronously. The following extracts raise the theme of discussion boards giving everyone an equal chance to view their opinions:

"Yes, it's a very difficult job, very skilled chairing a meeting but yea Blackboard allows everybody to say what they feel doesn't it without being interrupted."

2STU512507

"It allows people to say what they feel without being interrupted or without/nobody else is dominating, you are sat at your computer at home you can put your own thoughts into that for other people to read." 2STU512503

Although the Discussion Boards were not interactive in the sense they allowed real time synchronous communication, an advantage is that the ability to communicate with others is not restricted to normal working hours. This gave students the opportunity to access learning materials and do research at any time of the day or night, look at other people's

ideas at any time of day or night, ask for help at any time, contact other people at any time, give support at any time and go into greater depth by reading materials over again.

(See Appendix 26).

Discussion boards can also give students confidence. One student reports about her ability to function in a face-to-face group setting:

“I always feel that I get tongue-tied. Because I know people will be looking at me and so I am more conscious that people will be listening to me and looking at me than delivering what I have to say.” 1STU512189

The same student gives a different account of using Blackboard to learn and communicate.

“I quite like/now that I’m getting into it I quite like this isolated learning that I can choose when I learn by sitting at the computer downloading the information reading what others have to say this . . . there’s still a bit of anonymity there isn’t there because people can’t actually see you they can’t see you going red or blushing . . . so I do like this environment of learning in an isolated situation.”

1STU511988

Current trends in educational practice support the idea that learning should be an active process whereby collaboration is an essential ingredient as it provides the opportunity to

discuss, argue, negotiate and reflect upon existing beliefs and knowledge. (Johnson & Johnson, 1986) Without the inclusion of virtual learning technologies in a distance learning course it would make it very difficult to accomplish these learning activities deemed essential in the constructivist model of learning. Discussion Boards meet the criteria for collaborative learning in a setting that is preferable for some students to that of a traditional face-to-face group setting. In this way, students also can achieve learning through discussion and virtual interaction with learning peers and tutors. What has been ascertained thus so far corroborates this claim.

In this next section, the strongly supported theme of peer support as it appertains to discussion boards.

Peer Support – Team spirit versus competition

Peer support has already been discussed in the light of early motivation and also as it applies to Day Schools and thus the important part peer support played in the student learning experience has been identified. The way in which discussion boards contributed to the concept of peer support is now identified, as well as how and why students used discussion boards to be supportive of one another. However, the twin conflicting theme, that of competition, is prevalent.

Students sometimes demonstrated a lack of confidence and used other students to ask questions:

“I don’t want to bother [course tutor] with I can call her first and then if she thinks it is a reasonable question to put.” 2STU65274

“I have waited until [student] has asked the question on Blackboard and I am just waiting to see what the response would be [Laughs]. 2STU111078

Difficulties

Although the previous codes generated data that was mainly positive, showing where discussion boards contributed to student motivation and learning, there were inevitably difficulties and although it would appear some students were quite confident accessing the discussion board and are forthcoming, one student states:

“It’s quite hard to put your opinions across on Blackboard” and because you think everybody is going to read this whereas if you are there on a day school you are only going to pick the people you have most contact with and you are not going to feel as though everyone is scrutinising every comment that you make. I do feel quite scrutinized.” 3STU916733

Further problems students encountered were the difficulty of time and overload, and for some students the time element was difficult to find. Time is the fifth theme raised in this section on discussion boards and examples to support this theme are given below:

Time

"Problems of time to read discussions boards." 2STU2393

"It's the time of sitting down/when you turn on and you to the discussion board and it says 40 new messages and you can't (emphasis's can't) be bothered to read them." 3STU34194

"Two hours to read all the messages and then by the time you have done that it's too late to actually write any". 2STU65157

Interaction

Lack of interaction or contact and the impact this had on communication, was noted by the following students:

*"I think there is nobody on at the same . . . you might not get anything back . . . have got to keep looking at it to see if you get any response".
3STU77488*

"I think it can be a little bit impersonal you know again you are sat at home in your environment and I think you put this in and you don't know who is reading it. That the thing I think." 3STU916749

Understanding

Understanding is also an issue:

"Discussion boards! As I say I don't think the discussion board or Blackboard/yes the notes in there are fabulous but if I have a problem I am

thinking does that mean this, does that mean this, where do I go?"

3STU42792

One or two students reflected the use of the word 'discussion' to be wrongly used to describe the discussion boards.

"At the moment to me it hasn't been a discussion board it, has been a notice board where you can imagine writing something on a piece of paper and put it on a notice board that's what it has been up until now."

3STU34491

"I don't know perhaps/because it's not really a discussion perhaps it should be message board or something because discussion, if it is a discussion, then you expect someone else to be there." 3STU77530

The meaning of the word discussion suggests a two-way communication process or a conversation; a dialogue between two or more people but these two students did not feel that they were part of a two-way process. They felt they were uploading to the discussion board and reading other students contributions but not engaging or being engaged in a response. 'Lurkers' are notoriously familiar on discussion boards or chat rooms, where they simply view the contributions but do not themselves take an active role. Strategies to engage all learners in discussions are needed, otherwise the discussion board, as suggested by these students, becomes nothing more than a notice board. This point has

implications for tutors and course designers who need to create a learning environment that is inclusive, actively engaging students in the use and the benefits of discussion boards within their course.

Although one or two students agreed weekly face-to-face tutorials would be beneficial, overall the consensus from the research was that the use of discussion boards as part of formative assessment and the ability to access materials via the Internet for research and for information outweighed any disadvantages of the lack of more regular meetings and tutorials. Students adapted easily to using a virtual learning environment with little or no teaching, and technical difficulties, although not specifically reported on, seemed to be minor. Students with different learning styles all seemed to benefit from using Blackboard.

4 PERSONAL AND HOME LIFE ISSUES

This fourth section explores issues raised by these mature students concerning their personal, family and home life as they experience learning within Higher Education with a mixture of traditional teaching and e-learning. The identified themes and findings arising from data analysis are presented as follows. The first is coping, the second support and the third on the issues of time.

4.1 Coping

4.2 Support - Family

4.3 Time

4.1 Coping - *“I felt as though it was all collapsing around me.”* 3STU110882

Coping was classified as a theme from the identification and coding of the following three associated themes:

Struggling

Juggling

Prioritising

Most students were married with children. In order to cope with the complexities of their multiple roles of family, work and the Foundation Degree students struggled and as a result had to juggle tasks. This resulted in the need to prioritise tasks and, therefore, in deciding which was more important. Often this decision was based upon the importance

of family commitments over doing the work for the Foundation Degree as the following examples highlights:

“Well I have a family so it has got to be able to fit in with my priority over anything. Obviously if something conflicted with my family then my family would be first choice and anything else second.” 1STU64619

Students struggled to cope on two levels. The first was coping with the actual work for the degree and the second, coping to balance multiple roles of home, family, work and the Foundation Degree and students talked about juggling these commitments. Coping with the work for the Foundation Degree has already been discussed under Adapting to Higher Education on page 83. The second theme of balancing multiple roles of home, family, work and the Foundation Degree is now presented:

Balancing Roles

The following extract illustrates where students were struggling to juggle and to cope to balance their multiple roles:

“My son had just come home from Australia um so that there lots of different pressures on my time, and I was having to balance all those things and so you are constantly juggling, getting the house ready, keeping everybody happy at work, trying to get that moving along um and having/not having, wanting to spend time with my son who had just come.” 2STU33333

This male student raises the following several issues:

- Pressure
- Juggling
- Family Commitments
- Time*
- Maintaining impetus at work

As the above extract also demonstrates, students faced having to make many decisions over their home life and the work for the Foundation Degree. In some cases the need to prioritise home life prevailed and in other cases it was work for the Foundation Degree. Some decisions were made for students eg taken out of their hands by the importance of the issue and some they made themselves. Table 18 (Appendix 27) illustrates a sample of the decisions students were faced with and how they overcame difficulties.

Table 18

Student decisions over home life and the need to do work for the Foundation Degree

HOME LIFE PREVAILS		FOUNDATION DEGREE PREVAILS	
DECISION MADE	MAKES DECISION	DECISION MADE	MAKES DECISION
<i>“I am moving house and probably the computer at home is going to be off for well hopefully not more than a week.”</i> 2STU813612	<i>“I had to have an extension . . . I went to Australia for four weeks before Christmas”</i> 2STU65210	<i>“Like over the Christmas period I was just able to get on with it because my family was away.”</i> 3STU814052	<i>“I try to work it round my family really. It’s not taken over my life and I just fit it in if my husband wants to go for a walk for the day because he likes walking then I will do my course work for the day.”</i> 3STU42726

* *In this extract the student mentions time twice. Time will be further discussed below.*

As the above implies, overall students made most of their own decisions but in some cases, more important things override their need to do the work for the Foundation Degree. For example in dealing with family matters which either were major occurrences such as moving house or illness, or sometimes the day to day difficulties of managing multiple family roles and commitments. There is evidence to support the view that mature students are able to keep things in perspective and make balanced judgements about coping with multiple roles and the importance of doing their degree in relation to other aspects of their lives.

Complexity of Managing Multiple Roles

Next we observe coping strategies and examples of the complexity of managing multiple roles. The following show some of the decisions students made in order to cope with balancing their home life and work for the Foundation Degree. The first of these is ‘forfeiting’ and this is followed by ‘Juggling’ and ‘Impact on Work’:

Forfeiting

Managing to run a house, look after children, work and do a degree do not happen without consequences or cost. Parents had to forfeit in order to manage their roles. Some of these forfeits are described by one student who has a young family:

“The children have had to accept that mummy isn’t just there for them.”

3STU916516

Juggling

Students faced regular dilemmas about scheduling their time around home life, work and the Foundation Degree. The following example in Table 19 (See Appendix 28) shows where dilemmas are solved and what coping strategies were adopted.

Table 19

Juggling: Dilemmas and coping strategies

JUGGLE DILEMMA	ACTION TO RESOLVE DILEMMA (Coping strategies)
<i>“Time – keeping fit, the kids, the wife, coming here . . .”</i> 3STU2954	<i>“With horrible nights you don’t feel like going out anyway.”</i> 3STU2954

What can be identified is that in most cases, students managed to solve the dilemma. One common factor emerging from data analysis, however, is the recurring theme of ‘time’ and this is discussed further below.

Impact on Work for the Foundation Degree

It is reasonable to suppose having such busy and complex lives must have a negative effect on students’ ability to do the work for the Foundation Degree. Having such demands on their time will as a consequence, result in less time to spend as revealed by this extract:

“Sometimes I will go three or four weeks and not even look at the degree.”

2STU33500

In the following the student was adopting coping strategies in order to maintain contact with the degree whilst s/he is not in a position to be able to do as much work for the degree as s/he would like to:

“I am not spending as much time as I think I ought to and I don’t know whether that shows in my work or not . . . when I go to bed at night I may take a seminar paper to bed with me read it and then chuck it on the floor all that does is allow me to keep thinking about it in odd times but I may not pick up the pen or sit at the computer for three or four weeks.” 2STU33500

The complexity of managing multiple roles required students take steps to free up time in order to fit in the work for the Foundation Degree and possibly forfeit family commitments. However, this was often a dilemma for students when they were required to make decisions that affected their family and work. Due to the fact there were only two male students in the whole student cohort of 50, it is not possible to identify any differences based on gender.

One of the important factors that helped students cope is support from home:

4.2 Support – Family

Support has already been in terms of tutor support and peer support. In the following extracts, support is related to support from family and in particular, partners. In the following table, support is defined and examples given:

Table 20

Family support

SUPPORT	EXAMPLE OF SUPPORT
<p><i>“[Laughs]. There was last Christmas. I was working upstairs on the computer. . .”</i> 3STU109197</p>	<p><i>“My husband was feeding me wine.”</i> 3STU109197</p>
<p><i>“You know my husband’s really supportive and he is a teacher anyway.”</i> 3STU512792</p>	<p><i>“So he spends most of his evenings marking books or planning . . .so the two of us sit there he is at his lap top and I am at the computer um and so really he is very, very supportive.”</i> 3STU512792</p>

Although students talked about balancing different roles their attitudes were mainly positive, which is an important factor in staying motivated and coping with multiple roles.

4.3 Time

Time emerged as a theme during data analysis and report writing and is closely linked to the above themes of coping, struggling, juggling, prioritising and role conflict as the amount of time is finite. What difficulties do students encounter and how do they handle time to manage their multiple roles and responsibilities?

This student sums up the difficulty of finding time for her family:

“I suppose it’s working fulltime and looking after a family and everything else and doing the degree on top of that and it’s the time finding that time and doing/that were the biggest thing.” 3STU77200

A query was generated from the database to collect all the data regarding time and includes where responses were coded “time” and also where students use the word “time”. This data was analysed the produced the following issues throwing further light on the need for students to juggle and prioritise.

Issues of Time

Allocating time	Balance
Requires decision making	My time ²
What is more important?	Consuming time
Prioritising – which first	Snatching time
Organising self	Afford time
Organising others	Achievement
Importance	Amount of time

This list shows the complications and the number of dilemmas and decisions students were required to make in order to cope with their lives and the Foundation Degree and this required skills in organising or time management. Several of the issues above concern decision making (eg deciding on the importance) and others concern organisation (eg snatching time). These decisions have to be viewed in the light of reward or what the student will gain for instance, achievement. The following diagram describes this relationship:

² My time (“I might get a bit of a problem there but that hasn’t really occurred so because with working part time I have got time when he is at work that I don’t need to be thinking I have got to be available for him I can do it in my time.”)
3STU65515

Amount of time v reward

(Eg Question: Can I afford the time?)

↓
Decisions

(Eg what is more important and what is the reward?)

↓
Organisation
(Eg snatching time)

One of the factors in making decisions is based on how the student will benefit and what they will get out of it, eg reward. An example of this is given by the following student:

“Well because of limited time because when I go home to a small baby so I have to wait until she has gone to bed so I have to really structure my time so the priority I give is to the work that gets marked.” 2STU2393

Reward for this male student is clearly focused on achievement of assessment.

Time Cash

Time for students can be compared to money and managing a household budget. Certain factors are fixed much like certain household bills, some are needed but could be done without and others are clearly ‘wants’. It is in the latter two areas where internal renegotiation can be made to free up time. Unexpected occurrences, however, require much more ‘juggling’ of ‘time cash’ to be able to meet demands.

The following student explains how s/he understands that some decisions that are made at the time for important reasons can be re-evaluated once time has passed.

“It’s all on relevancy at the time isn’t it really some things are important at the time but on reflection perhaps they weren’t as important as the amount of importance you gave them, if that makes sense.” 2STU64907

We now turn to the question of what is the impact of a finite amount of time on the student ability to do the Foundation Degree. There is no doubt time is a problem for all students. Table 21 (See Appendix 29) is an example of the comments students made about time, how they dealt with the problems and, where appropriate, the impact on their work.

Table 21

Issues of time

ISSUES	ACTION	IMPACT ON WORK
<p><i>“Only get five5 or ten minutes at a time.”</i> 1STU2281</p> <p><i>“Limited time.”</i> 2STU2393</p>	<p><i>“I always give myself as much time as possible.”</i> 2STU2622</p>	<p><i>“Structuring my time to get the marked work done.” 2STU2393</i></p> <p><i>“If I had a lot more time I would do more research.”</i> 3STU2966</p>

Lack of ‘time cash’ also meant students were not able to do as much wider reading or research as they would like or access and read contributions on the Discussion Board.

They had to concentrate and use their ‘time cash’ on meeting deadlines and producing work that is assessed.

“I suppose that’s what it is about really when all said and done you are going to be judged on what is being marked.” 3STU2962

Students encountered many difficulties concerning time. Some difficulties concerned managing multiple life roles and the impact this had on their lives and the lives of their families. Some difficulties of time concerned the amount needed according to their capabilities to do the work for the Foundation Degree.

5 ISSUES OF WORK AND THE FUTURE

The first part of this section is about student employment and the effect the Foundation Degree is having. The second section identifies future plans students hold once they complete the Foundation Degree are these are included to provide evidence that the aim of the Foundation Degree as a progression route to an Honours Degree, is being met.

These are presented as follows:

5.1 Work Issues

5.2 The Future

5.1 Work Issues

Many of the themes presented are about student perception of changes brought about by undertaking the Foundation Degree. These changes are reflected in their perceived ability to perform better at work as well as other perceived changes to themselves in terms of growing confidence and the consequent impact on their self-esteem. How employers choose to support their staff during the Foundation Degree are identified as well as attitudes of employers towards students and how these affect motivation and or behaviour. Employer support is the first theme to be addressed and this is then followed by Change and finally Growing Confidence and Self-Esteem. Work issues are presented under three headings: Employer Support, Change and growing Confidence and Self-Esteem:

5.1.1 Employer Support

5.1.2 Change

5.1.3 Growing Confidence and Self-Esteem

5.1.1 Employer Support

The theme of support emerged during early data analysis. Support for students from employers has been analysed and the following example in Table 22 shows examples employer support under three headings: Positive support, negative support and ambivalent support. Full quotations are contained within Appendix 30.

Table 22
Employer Support

POSITIVE SUPPORT	NEGATIVE SUPPORT	AMBIVALENT
<i>"I work flexi here."</i> 2STU108813	<i>"Apparently I am not allowed study leave."</i> 2STU108813	<i>"The IT module I did he read that and he asked me about it."</i> 3STU21208

This student voices her concerns about potential employer support:

"Well it was a confidence thing I suppose again being out of any formal study for a long time the confidence can I actually do this am I capable of doing this am I going to get support from say like work and from home life." 3STU916492

One of the pre-requisites of the Foundation Degree, however, is the importance of employer support.

"It is beneficial if employers are involved, where possible, in the delivery and assessment of the programme and the monitoring of students,

particularly within the workplace.” (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2004)

What has been identified in the research (Table 22, Appendix 30) is that employer support is mixed. There are instances of good employer support, coaching and mentoring and also where employers do not appear to be especially supportive and this creates barriers. However, the suggestion from the research is that employer support is very much dependent on the relationship that existed prior to taking up the Foundation Degree and is, therefore, a personal issue rather than an institutional one.

5.1.2 Change

The research did not set out to measure change but due to the phenomenological perspective of this research in trying to understand the lived student experience and with how participants themselves make sense of their experiences, change emerged from the student data has been identified on the students’ perceived confidence in their ability. As students were interviewed at six monthly intervals, over a period of 24 months, during the second and third interviews students reported perceived changes and the impact this had on the student’s ability at work. This is commented on as follows, followed by reported perceived changes to themselves, growing self esteem as well as self confidence in the work place.

The first theme under change is 'Impact on Work'. Several sub themes were identified through data analysis and these are:

Able to do work better,

Progression at work,

Comparison with other professionals.

Earlier in this chapter the perceived benefits of doing the degree were identified. It was established that in terms of ability to do work better, students felt they would benefit. This would be achieved by making them more informed and aware of what they do but would also give them a better understanding of the 'how and why' of what their work is; in other words acquiring the underpinning knowledge and theory. Students also had hopes that by doing the Foundation Degree they would be able to progress at work by furthering their career or by opening up opportunities for new jobs. In this section of the thesis it is identified whether the benefits have actually occurred and if so how.

Able to do Work Better – *“It opens your eyes to certain things.”* (3STU916655)

Table 23 summarises the data into what students have learned, how they think it has changed them and the consequential outcome or benefit at work and an example is given (full extracts are contained within Appendix 31). Students reported changes to their ability at work. This summary generated data that is primarily concerned with improved job skills rather than promotion at work, with the exception of one case where the student

might have lost her job if she had not proved herself invaluable to the organisation through her work for the Foundation Degree.

There is confirmation that students felt they have changed their outlook and become more professional in their approach to their work. They see the importance of their job in relation to the organisation and this raises their self-esteem and confidence.

Table 23

Able to do work better – What, How, Outcome

WHAT	HOW	OUTCOME
<i>“I think I have to be organised to get all the modules done.”</i> 2STU110257	<i>“I can do five jobs/I can multitask .”</i> 2STU110257	<i>“If someone comes in and says where’s this and I will know the answer.”</i> 2STU110257
<i>“When we spent time in the afternoon talking about seminar papers.”</i> 2STU41751	<i>“I can learn from what they are telling me.”</i> 2STU41751	<i>“Bring back ideas to the school.”</i> 2STU41751

Progression at Work *“With a degree behind me who knows what the future holds.”*
3STU513056

Progression at work was identified as one of the motivators to do the Foundation Degree. Students perceived that by doing the Foundation Degree it would either increase their chances of promotion or being able to get another job by moving to a new employer. Progression at work is not only about promotion but also about how the students are perceived by their employing organisation as they progress and how they perceive themselves and their ability. The extracts contained in Table 24 (full extracts are contained in Appendix 32) demonstrate how students perceived they had changed over time, for example how they now perceived themselves and also where this is enabling

them to gain more responsibility, to be taken seriously, become empowered and confident and be of more worth to their employing organisation. The following table contains extracts from the female students. With one exception, these students work in schools.

Table 24
Progression at Work

HOW THEY PERCEIVE THEMSELVES	HOW THEY PERCEIVE THE ORGANISATION THINKS OF THEM	GAINING RESPONSIBILITY	TAKEN SERIOUSLY
<i>“I see myself more important.”</i> 3STU42655	<i>“More important I really do and I think strangely enough I think the Head does.”</i> 3STU42655	<i>“I am more involved in the decision making process at school now.”</i> 3STU111127	<i>“I have proved I am serious about. It’s not just a little job.”</i> 3STU111227
<i>“The confidence to do something else.”</i> 2STU110432	<i>“I think he is quite proud of me.” (The Head)</i> 2STU110735	<i>“Think that the management team definitely rely on me more.”</i> 3STU111219	<i>“They can see that I am serious about it . . . it and in doing a degree course they can see it is going to lead somewhere.”</i> 2STU915867

Comparison With Other Professionals – Raising Status – *“Not as blind as I used to be.”* – 2STU42194

Students on the Foundation Degree were working in organisations that employed professional graduates but they themselves were not as yet educated to Higher Education standards. The following extract indicates the actual benefits to students’ working lives and how they felt about their worth and capabilities:

“I feel I am becoming more equal with fellow professionals . . . I am going to attain something at a level that they have already . . . I am developing in a way that puts me on a level footing with fellow professionals.” 2STU512345

This extract is indicative of increased confidence when dealing with fellow professionals, in this case teachers and managers within their employing organisations and this in turn led to increased student self-esteem and confidence, increased job performance and potential value to the organisation. In the following two extracts the student recognises that this ability has always been there but what the opportunity of studying has allowed her to do is to work towards achieving her potential, increase her worth and value to the organisation by increasing knowledge and abilities.

“I am bringing my own status and my own abilities and applying the knowledge that/and the ability that’s always been there but never been put to its full use and now I am developing in a way that puts me on a level footing with fellow professionals.” 2STU512345

and

“I think it makes you feel very good if somebody respects you and values what you do.” 3STU512856

5.1.3 Growing Confidence and Self-Esteem – *“I see myself more important definitely”*. 3STU42655

Confidence emerged as a theme from the iterative process of data analysis and report writing. Students reported growing self-confidence and the database was then interrogated for occurrences of confidence both in the data field and in the code field. In addition, when the data were being analysed for other themes, wherever confidence appeared, the transcript was added to the report. The following analysis includes both sets of data.

Growing confidence has been reported in other sections of this thesis, for instance under Perceived Benefits as well as Adaptation to the Foundation Degree. Students, however, also reported growing confidence and change in terms of their work and how they viewed themselves. One student summarised the change in herself as becoming more “*confident, important, valuable, capable*” (2STU108965) in terms of her work. This theme is repeated by several students, where they reported increasing ability and an increased profile at work (“*In a way as well it has lifted my profile,*” 2STU512345) and this in turn increased feelings of worth and self-esteem within the organisation and in their ability and skills to do their work. (“*Setting up systems which is something I never used to do prior to the Foundation Degree and I think it’s given me that confidence and that ability to actually think look I am doing a degree I must be capable of doing something like this so I do*”. STU42644).

In table 25 following, further examples of growing confidence are presented. (Further extracts are given in Appendix 33).

Table 25

Student confidence and work

WHAT	HOW (CHANGE)
<i>“It has lifted my profile.”</i>	<i>“And that chip falling off my shoulder that I feel I am becoming more equal with fellow professionals.”</i> 2STU512345
<i>“I have understood much more what is going on.”</i>	<i>“I attend a fair number of senior management meetings as I do the minutes – I do feel I am one of them.”</i> 3STU109231

Self Esteem

One of the issues concerning support staff in schools raised earlier this chapter is that they felt they were not treated as equals with the professional teaching staff or management. What the research points to is a growing belief from both the students and the employer in the importance of support staff and the role they play in schools, colleges and universities. *“Especially with support staff that they are actually recognized as a very valuable resource in the schools because I think they are and I am part of it anyway”* (3STU42681). There is evidence of growing confidence at work but students also reported growing self-esteem in how they perceive themselves or think others now perceive them. Supporting extracts are given in Table 26:

Table 26
Student self-perception and self-esteem

HOW THEY PERCEIVE THEMSELVES	HOW OTHERS PERCEIVE THEM
<i>“I am more confident.”</i> 3ERNA2640	<i>“I think people are impressed that I am doing the course, friends, family colleagues.”</i> 1ALEX10707
<i>“I know what they are talking about.”</i> 3MLETH9247	<i>“I think he is quite proud of me (Headmaster) .”</i> 2ALEX10735
<i>“I just wanted to do it for my own self-esteem and I made the right decision to do it.”</i> 1ALEX9908	<i>“The Deputy Head asked for copies of some of the assignments . . . so I think her perception of me has changed as well.”</i> 3KA12860
<i>“Yes, definitely more important.”</i> 3ALEX11215	<i>“The Head actually saw the work I was doing and how it was benefiting the school that when it came to this year she said she felt terrible that the school hadn’t been able to find funding to help me out so they would pay my fees in full this year and next year they would pay half.”</i> 3KA12780
<i>“Definitely more confident.”</i> 3KA12852	
<i>“I think it makes you feel very good if somebody respects you and values what you do.”</i> 3KA12856	

<p><i>“I think I have probably grown in confidence, raising my profile in the environment that I work in, just making me feel better about myself and helping me fulfill an ambition.”</i> 3KA12996</p>	
<p><i>“I think I have probably grown in confidence.”</i> 1MDEL13323</p>	
<p><i>“I feel more confident about doing my job.”</i> 3MDEL14200</p>	
<p><i>“So I have actually started pumping up these other people, well saying you are doing a fantastic job and do you realize these are your strengths here and these skills.”</i> 3MIN16853</p>	

Students’ felt their self esteem and confidence in their academic ability grew as a result of increased explicit knowledge and the development of better reading, writing and communication skills. Students’ self perception of their value to their employing organisations also grew and students felt respected for their knowledge. Not being treated equally with teaching staff within their employing organisation was an issue that previously undermined confidence for some students but the change brought about by doing a degree specifically tailored to their work has raised their profile within the organisation and given them confidence, increased identity and the opportunity to redefine themselves. *‘Transformation, economic success, social mobility’*. These words are contained in the ‘Foreword ‘to the ‘Learning and Skills: the agenda for change’ document (Rammell, 2005). Students are transformed at work, by learning new skills and academic theory and are liberated; economic success is achieved by gaining new jobs, increased jobs prospects as well as increased value to the organisation; and social mobility is achieved by a new cohort of students entering into Higher Education. This

then translates to the concepts of human and social capital (Balatti and Falk, 2002) and the wider benefits of learning.

Summary

Undertaking a Foundation Degree gave students the opportunity to learn more about their own organisation and also other organisations. One of the benefits is a greater understanding of their own jobs by learning to know, “*what you are doing and why.*” (2STU2469). The following student perceived this understanding will have an impact on her job. “*If I understand more then I know if there are things I am doing I will know why I am doing them and maybe things I am doing I don't really need to . . . rather than just looking from where as I sit as a secretary in my job I will look as a university-wide.*” (1STU76166)

In this sub-section, issues concerning work and employment have been explored and this has included increasing skills at work as well as increased academic knowledge underpinning their work. More importantly are the changes students reported in terms of their increased confidence and self-esteem which in turn impacted on the way they perceive themselves and perceived increased value to their employing organisation. In particular, one of the issues that have arisen is about feeling equal to other professionals and the Foundation Degree has given the students the opportunity to change the way they are perceived within the organisation by their employers and other professionals. This is particularly pertinent to students employed in small schools where they are not part of a large team. For a number of the female students they felt their perception of themselves

could be summed up as: “*As a job title we have always been looked upon these little women*” (2STU110900). It has given them the opportunity to increase their influence and authority.

5.2 The Future

As data were analysed, responses around student perception of the future were coded accordingly and in addition students were asked to comment directly on their plans for future studying once the Foundation Degree was completed.

At the end of the three years and at the time of thesis writing, six out of the ten students in the research said they were planning to continue to do the full degree. Reasons for not continuing were lack of funding, peer group not continuing, work pressure not allowing time, promotion at work and changes to personal circumstances (eg divorce). One student already had a BA (Hons). However, the possibility of continuing at some point in the future was not ruled out by one of these four remaining students. Of the six students planning to continue one said although she was persuaded by her work colleagues to do the Foundation Degree initially, she had now gained confidence and would be continuing, another said she had ‘*got the bug*’ and other students said if they stopped now they might not go back to it.

Students were asked if they would have enrolled on the Degree if from the outset it was a BA (Hons) and not a Foundation Degree. Two students who said they would not have done the course at the outset if it were the BA Honours are now planning to continue on

to the Honours Degree pathway. The Foundation Degree has given them confidence and the necessary skills to feel able to undertake the full Honours Degree.

The Foundation Degree also provides career advancement with one student saying she had been promoted to Bursar in the school and another student has changed jobs to one at *“a higher grade with more responsibility and more scope for progression”*.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter the research findings presented in Chapter 4 are discussed in the light of the literature review and theoretical perspectives. There are many findings emerging from this student led research. Some of these are corroborated by other research and are discussed in the literature review and some are new. Both are discussed and for ease of reference, these will be presented thematically.

The first section deals with student aspiration and motivation; the second section the Learning Experience; the third is about E-learning, the fourth is regarding Personal and Home life issues, the fifth Work Issues, the sixth Gender issues, the seventh is about Student Pragmatism and the final sub-section is about the Foundation Degree. These are presented under the following headings;

- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Aspiration and Motivation | 2 | The Learning Experience |
| 3 | E-learning | 4 | Personal and Home Life Issues |
| 5 | Issues of work | 6 | Gender Issues |
| 7 | Student Pragmatism –a way of thinking | 8 | The Foundation Degree |

1 ASPIRATION AND MOTIVATION

This research, which was carried out from the perspective of the students, began by looking at their past and (a) uncovered the events that have created a need within the student to enter Higher Education as a mature adult; (b) identified what has enabled and motivated them to enrol on the Foundation Degree, and (c) identified the barriers and how these have finally been overcome.

Students talked firstly about their previous educational experiences which reflected their current attitudes and predispositions towards learning which led them to wanting to achieve a Higher Education qualification. The following sub-section discusses past experience and this is followed by discussion of what enabled students to enroll. These are presented under the following headings:

1.1 Past Experience

1.2 What enabled students to enroll?

1.1 Past Experience

In considering the impact of previous educational experiences, during interview students mainly referred to negative experiences at school as indicated by the following examples:

“I think what hurt me was I failed the eleven plus at that time and all my friends went to technical schools and grammar schools and I was the only one - I didn’t

and I think it was my downfall that I actually had to sit a test and what's why I failed it." 1STU813297

"Probably, I think I was talking about spelling. When she slapped me I was not spelling something correctly and I always found spelling a hindrance when I was younger and it is something that you develop with your vocabulary [student with dyslexia]." 2STU813529

If ever there were a system geared to brand individuals as failures, schools could hardly be bettered (Cullingford, 2002). The above two brief student extracts could hardly do better than to corroborate the sense of failure endured through schooling for these students. (Full extracts are given in Appendix 3).

During the research students reported the lack of parental support, (money, parental expectations or beliefs) or educational support and guidance as the main reasons for not having achieved a Higher Education Degree earlier, rather than internal reasons such as lack of motivation/aspirations. These are mainly cultural or situational barriers rather than individual student internal barriers (beliefs, expectations, aspirations or motivation). This externalisation of causes helps to explain the fact that students have retained aspirations and ambitions and they demonstrate a desire to achieve more than they did during their schooling. Despite these poor educational experiences, students continued to have self-belief in their abilities or high perceived self-efficacy which Bandura (1997, p3) describes as, *"Beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action*

required to produce given attainments”. High self-efficacy also influences the amount of persistence one has in the face of adversity, obstacles and failings. This may also explain the externalisation of causes of earlier failures or that the reasons they did not do a degree earlier was ‘not their fault’ but the fault of lack of support. High levels of self-efficacy in students, however, means students will ‘*work harder and persist longer when they encounter difficulties*’, (Zimmerman, 1995b, p204) which in turn will impact on students’ ability to ‘stay the course’ and persist, overcoming the many difficulties that occurred during the three years of the Foundation Degree.

Many of these difficulties encountered by students were over the conflicting demands of multiple roles and the importance of juggling these roles is discussed on pages 141. What Kember (1999) finds of interest, however, is why some students persist in the face of complicated family, work and university roles and some other students without such difficulties, seem to fail. His research finds that successful students employ what he terms ‘*mechanisms*’. As identified in this thesis, these are mainly support (employers, family and friends) but also the need for the student to make sacrifices. Some students are prepared or able to meet these requirements and others are not. The research that is the focus of this thesis corroborates these findings but to this should also be added, self-efficacy and belief in their talents and abilities, despite earlier educational failures.

Evidence arising out of the research for this thesis suggests, therefore, that students are equipped with positive self-belief about their abilities. Although students recalled a variety of reasons for not pursuing Higher Education earlier they still believed they are

capable. Self-belief was also maintained in their academic abilities although students also displayed tendencies to be insecure. This mainly manifested itself in seeking a great deal of support from tutors, (described by the course tutor as counselling), other students and work colleagues who were also on the same Foundation Degree.

Insecurity posed problems in some instances as students were also competitive with one another but healthy competition also benefits students as it raises the level of achievement as students vie with each other and seek out which is the best student or whose work is sound and with which to compare. Discussion Boards in particular allowed this sharing and identification of standards and thus students could benefit from and learn from other students by sharing ideas, thoughts, presentation and levels.

1.2 What enabled students to enrol?

“I think being part of a course where everybody is in the same position and most of us are middle aged working but we are all 30’s and 40’s in age and are grasping this opportunity we have got to better ourselves.” (2STU512267

This thesis presents a motivated student, one who has been looking for an opportunity to achieve a degree for some time and also that, as already presented, self-belief or self-efficacy and confidence in their abilities are the prime motivators for students to embark on the Foundation Degree. These are not the only motivators as the thesis highlights other factors. As stated in the literature review, the DfES report in their document, “Widening

Participation in Higher Education' (2003a), "*The evidence suggests that the principal barriers to access are attainment, aspiration and application.*" This thesis corroborates these but also evidences two further factors. The first is opportunity and the second is funding.

The research for this thesis illustrates these adults were intrinsically motivated to learn but also that they were actively seeking the opportunity. The findings from this research indicate opportunity to the student means the availability of a degree of relevance to work and of interest, opportunity created by release from family commitments and the opportunity afforded by the use of Internet for distance learning.

This group of mature adults have also had to wait, however, until two events occurred. The first is the technological advance, primarily the Internet. Technology is enabling adults to realise long held aspirations by giving access and opportunity by the flexibility of 'anywhere, anytime' learning opportunities. The second event is the introduction of the Foundation Degree, which is primarily a work-based Higher Education qualification. These twin themes have enticed this group of learners to achieve their potential and take the step on the ladder of Higher Education.

There have, of course, been excellent opportunities for non-traditional learners to re-enter Higher Education over the years. For instance the Open University (whose quality of distance learning provision is renowned) and Access courses. However, an important factor emerging in this research is that of funding. Students on the Foundation Degree

were supported at a macro level by Government funding with LEA's, the employing organisation or school paying part or all of the costs.

Opportunity is a strong enabler for students enrolling on the Foundation Degree but without support, and especially financial support, the evidence suggests that at the very least it would have made the decision to do the Foundation Degree difficult and for some impossible, especially for single mothers or low income families. *“Learning is a matter of time, but it is also a matter of opportunity.”* Based on Hippocrates b460BC (Honey, July 2007).

In summary, these students were driven by an intrinsic need to gain a Degree in order to prove to themselves they were capable, fill a gap in their working lives or through regret at past missed opportunities. The expected benefits of doing the Foundation Degree of raising self-esteem or confidence and achievement were exceeded. The inducements or incentives in relation to employment were either to do their work better or for progression. Difficulties or antecedents were employer or friend expectations, previous educational experience (in particular past failure), opportunity, support and changing family circumstances eg 'empty nest' syndrome. Sustenance and persistence are fuelled by personal predispositions of self-efficacy and support which Wheeler (2006) advocates may be the most important issue.

Therefore, what can be concluded is that mature learners who are prevented from achieving a degree earlier in their lives by external barriers can, when presented with the opportunity, given support and in particular financial support, realise their aspirations of

entering Higher Education and attaining a degree, particularly one that is relevant to their work. It is also important, however, that students are confident of their abilities and have a high level of self-efficacy.

2 THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

In this section of the thesis, issues are explored around how students adapted to Higher Education as well as the type of support learners required in order to overcome the difficulties they face. Changing skills and abilities are investigated and the importance of peer support to motivation and achievement is raised. Course design and assessment issues are considered from the viewpoint of learner motivation.

In this sub-section the main themes and findings are presented under the following section headings:

- 2.1 Adapting
- 2.2 Course Organisation
- 2.3 Support
- 2.4 Changing role of the tutor

2.1 Adapting

When adapting to Higher Education or "*beginning their studies*" (Open University, 2004/5), students needed to know what was required of them and this turned their attention to 'gauging' - a pragmatic need identified in this research. Their perception of their performance as well as an internal adjustment is fundamental to this measuring of performance against the implied and explicit aims of Higher Education and the Foundation Degree. Therefore, students recognised they needed to know what was required of them as they adapted to Higher Education, particularly in terms of levels and

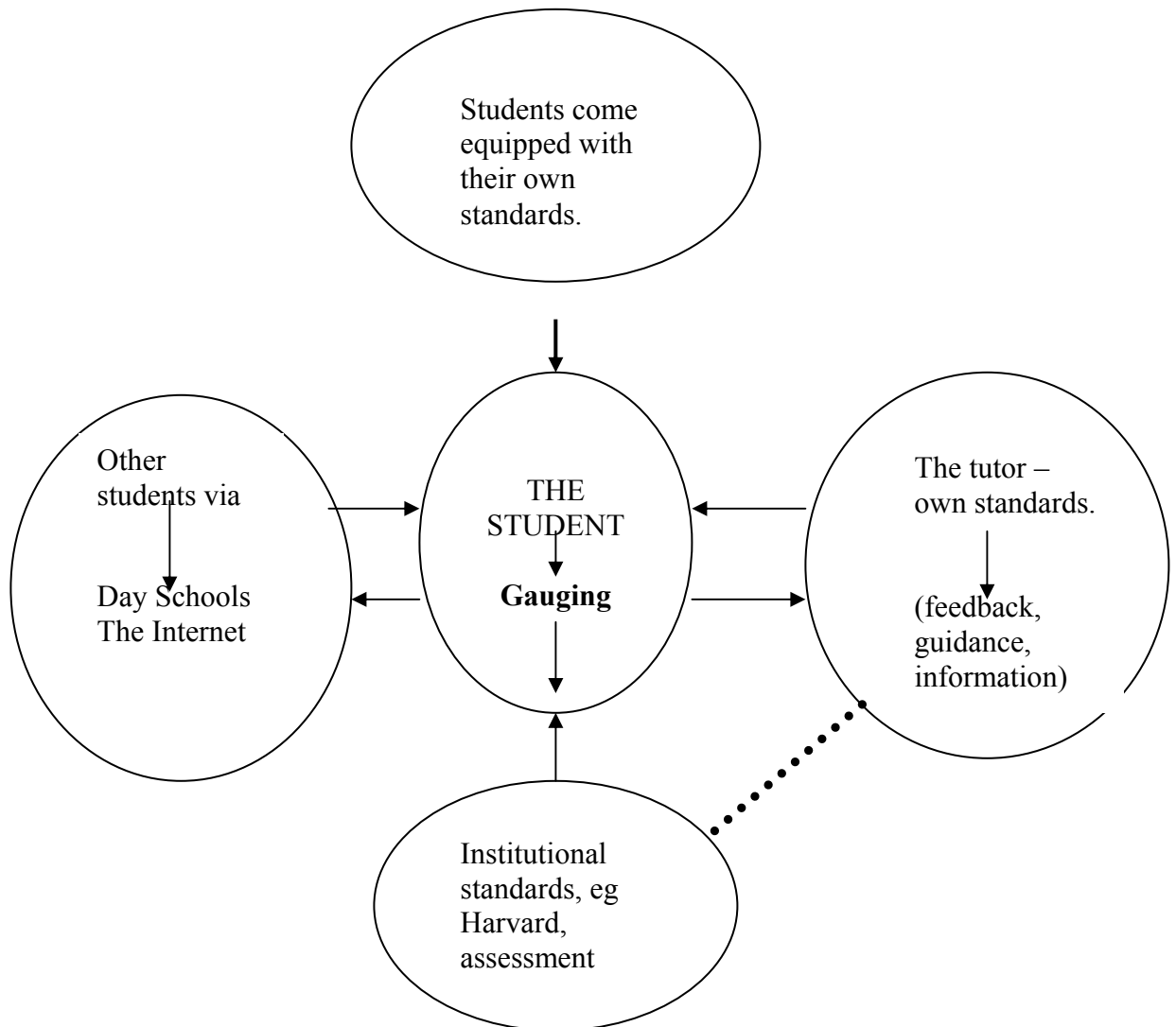
students adopted strategies to deal with this. This exhibits characteristics of self-directed learning (coined by Knowles in 1975), as students attempted to diagnose their learning needs. This they did by turning to the tutor for reassurance, by seeking feedback and by sending in drafts of their work for pre-marking but also by assessing themselves against other students which was often done at day schools when the students met together or by the use of the discussion boards. Discussion boards gave students the opportunity to view other students' work which, in a more traditional learning setting, does not often occur. From this they gained information as to whether they were performing at a level above or below other students as well as identifying high achievers and using these students as a measure in order to gauge their own work. Seeing other students' work also generated ideas they alone would not have achieved and allows for critical reflection.

In adapting to meet Higher Education standards, students struggled in particular on a practical level with Harvard referencing, both from the point of view of knowing what to reference and what not to reference but also with the actual specific format of the Harvard referencing system. *"I find it very difficult to know what I can use and how I reference it you know"* (3STU916644). Other concerns were; how to perform a literature search, adapting writing style and the growing requirement to manage their time. As time passed, changes to reading skills were reported – *"Reading style has developed and improved"* (2STU512533) along with the knowledge and ability to be able to 'skim' read: *"I can skim a book now. At the start of the course I looked at the reading list and I thought how on earth are you expected to read all these"* (2STU512251).

Figure 5 shows four principal elements involved as students adapted to learning within an academic institution. Previous experience means students already had standards but as they attempted to gauge what was required of them students needed to pick up clues that would enable them to adjust their performance. This research provides evidence that they did this by gauging their own performance against other students, by the guidance received from tutors, asking for feedback on their work and consequently adjusting their performance to the perceived institutional requirements eg for assessment.

Fig 5

Student adaptation to academic standards



Adapting to Higher Education requires students to begin to transcend the complexities of being a newcomer, engaging in and absorbing the cultural practices of being part of Higher Education, working their way towards being a full member of a learning community (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p73). This required not just a cultural adjustment but also adopting norms (Marks, 2002 and Leathwood, 1999) and values, altering behaviour and perceptions, learning new skills and ideas and being able to put all of these into practice. This the students did in the ways described, by reflection and practice but also by engaging with other students and tutors for feedback on their own performance whilst also acquiring knowledge and understanding of the performance of others. According to Norton (2006), however, many students who enter university education adopt a 'surface learning' approach and accordingly students need to be 'nudged' into understanding and realising the importance of adopting a deep approach to their study. This thesis has identified that knowing what they need to do is part of the process of beginning their adaptation to a university education and is not something that can be avoided. Tutor support helps students adapt as it gives students a better opportunity to develop skills to be able to change their approach to learning which is not fixed and is an intention rather than a fixed personal approach. If students perceive the learning context to demand a deep approach then they will take it (Marton and Säljö, 1976; 1997). Tutor feedback at this stage of adapting is, therefore, crucial if students are to adopt a deep approach and thus become more successful learners.

Although some students at the commencement of the Foundation Degree talked about a preference for traditional teaching methods, eg "*a teacher standing at the front telling me*

what to do”, this quickly dissipated as the realisation of the benefits of self-directed learning using the VLE Blackboard became apparent: the ability to be able to do the work when you want; dipping into it; peer comparison; learning from others and in groups both synchronously at day schools and asynchronously via discussion boards and the use of email. In addition, students had the ability to contact tutors regularly with an immediate email response when problems occurred or when advice was needed. Where there was a lack of personal contact with the tutor and their peers, students were drawn to developing strategies to combat this lack of interaction which would normally provide them with greater opportunities to evaluate their own performance. Day schools and classroom contact is of great significance in providing students with opportunities to gauge their level compared with other students. Day Schools, therefore, become very important and what students gained from this group contact was knowledge about the institutional assessment requirements but possibly more important still is the ability to be able to have discussions with other students in a supportive environment which is reassuring, inspirational and informational.

2.2 Course Organisation

Day schools were organised so students could meet face-to-face and were used for pre-instruction, explanation, assessment details and workshops. Students attended day schools six full days each academic year. The importance of day schools to the student learning experience is marked. Students were able to form relationships from the first day school which were often lasting and supportive.

Day Schools also reduced feelings of isolation - "*Circumstances force you to do an e-learning degree . . . day schools bring you together*". The day schools offered opportunities for many of the affective areas of learning (Bloom, 1964), for instance motivation to learn but in addition, social learning, learning from one another or peer learning emerged as a strong theme overall. This was not just restricted to day schools although day schools did offer huge opportunities for learning which set students up for the interim period.

The National Inquiry into Higher Education conducted research in 1997 into Higher Education. One of the findings was that students "*wanted more opportunities to learn in small groups*" (Dearing, 1997). As such, students were split into three tutor groups for part of the day school and this provided even closer contact with other students and gave students the ability to share ideas and worries. This in turn increased confidence as students realised they were "*all in the same boat*" 2STU2481, impacted on the ability to form closer relationships and develop "*friendship circles*" 3STU42898, and help and support one another. One student talked about "*throwing ideas at each other*" 2STU41771 and added "*they can remember things or I can remember things*" which is an indication that students prompted each other and used other students to retrieve and store information, "*drag*" 2STU915851 each other on and use others as a "*sounding board*" 1STU41671. Good peer support also meant students gained confidence from knowing that they have equal worries and concerns. Thus the importance of classroom contact for students on a distance or e-learning course is emerging.

Dillon and Granger (1998) discuss the development of technology as it moved from the availability of Powerpoint (Microsoft Inc) for presenting information to students and adding a visual element to lectures, through to the early days of the World Wide Web and finally to the current paradigm where students can learn from multi-media materials presented on the Internet. In their discourse of the development of digital learning methods and tools, the need for the 'classroom', where students meet on a regular basis, is questioned. However, as indicated earlier, it is demonstrated the purpose of classroom meetings is apparent and resulting from the research, evidence has emerged to support the claim that day schools are critical for engagement on a social level but this also in turn helps students form supportive learning groups. These groups progress to becoming online support groups and students used email to communicate with other members of the group as well as using discussion boards to communicate with other members of the group when completing summative assessment by reading and critiquing those members' articles.

Time is of particular importance to students. The concept of 'time cash' arose through data analysis. It means time for students is finite and the result is that students can become focused on completing formative assessments or develop a surface learning approach (Atherton, 2005). This also impacts on the ability of the student to conduct wider reading or reading around a subject. This is summed up by one student: *"I suppose that's what it is about really when all's said and done. You are going to be judged on what is being marked"*. Lack of time also manifested itself in limiting the time to read the

discussion boards or conduct more research: *“In an ideal world and if I had more time, I would do more research.”*

The importance of day schools, allowing students to meet face-to-face is evident. Students gain confidence and reassurance from meeting their peers and they can also gauge their own progress by assessing the progress of their peers. Day schools also gave students the opportunity to monitor their learning and develop learning strategies.

2.3 Support

“ I think it is just seeing other people in the same position has given me the confidence to think if they can do that I can do that and actually yes I have got something to contribute and I do know as much as they do. It’s been a real confidence thing”. 2STU512271

With minimal opportunity for classroom contact students looked to each other but also to their tutor to provide them with necessary feedback and reassurance as well as information, providing pointers or prompts and answering questions. Email was a preferred communication with tutors due to the fact that drafts of work could be attached and feedback given on formative assessment work. This was considered by one student to be better than a traditional tutorial. Emailing a tutor was mainly restricted to asking for help with assignments and one of the strategies that students adopted was to send in drafts of their work in time for any amendments to be made before the deadline. One student stated, *‘It’s actually being marked before you hand it into the assessor’*,

(2STU813849) which demonstrates the pragmatic and outcome focused approach mentioned earlier. Students, however, gained a great deal from positive tutor support and in particular during the first year where there was a “*huge learning curve*” (1STU41498).

Peer support is of special significance and students reported the importance of this to their motivation and/or to remain on the course. “*If it wasn't for the others doing it I would feel completely alone and probably would not have the confidence to complete it. If that was the case I might give up*”. (1STU813521). Due to the nature of the subject for the Foundation Degree, some students had work colleagues with them on the course. This had the potential for both positive and negative support but analysis has shown that most support was positive including support for each other in their working environment by the sharing of information, resources and by being supportive generally. Indeed, for one or two students (eg Stu4 and Stu10) colleague support was instrumental in maintaining motivation in the early days.

Learning from one another is an important benefit to students and students recognized this but it also demonstrates their pragmatic approach and as reported previously, this is achieved universally from all facets of the course: Day schools, Emails, Discussion Boards, Tutor groups and “*Friendship circles*”. One student described networking with other students as “*our little group*” (2STU110544). How students support one another further by networking and using these support mechanisms, however, is discussed later under E-learning.

Support is important for maintaining student motivation and, therefore, retention rates. One student described her previous experience of a part-time degree in relation to support and said, “*It was so disorganised . . . the support was non-existent for us* (3STU512928). Good support, in particular tutor support that includes counselling skills helps maintain motivation and students also learn from tutor feedback, both verbally in answers to queries and from drafts of written work, whether they are working to their perceived and desired level.

2.4 Changing role of the Tutor

Selwyn in 2002 argued that despite fears that the role of the teacher might be marginalised by the use of online learning; in fact what has occurred is the increasing importance of the teacher in a newly changed role. This is not new. According to research carried out jointly by the National Extension College and the Learning and Skills Development Agency (Hawksley and Owen, 2002, p7), tutor contact is a critical factor for distance learning but that this support in itself does not ensure success as it needs to encompass certain factors. These they say are: speed of initial contact and close monitoring of student’s progress. This point was verified by Canning in his research into Scottish Vocational Qualifications, new technology and flexible learning (Canning and Loots, 2000). Hawksley and Owen (2002, p 29) articulate that the tutor often takes on the role of surrogate parent. The course tutor for the Foundation Degree expressed that he felt that his support was necessary in order to deal with students who were often very anxious and also who sought a great deal of support. This has an impact on the changing role of the Higher Education tutor who is now not only required to be a facilitator or enabler but

also, just as importantly a counsellor. Wheeler (2001), however, suggests that the tutor now needs to change from primarily imparting knowledge to a becoming a guide, moderator, organiser and enabler. In the modern paradigm of e-learning, according to Dillon and Granger (1998) the tutor also becomes a co-learner, sharing in the process of learning with students whilst Aspden and Helm (2004) also found that educational technology draws both student and tutor closer together.

There is evidence to support the claim that the inclusion of technology in distance learning courses actually increases student expectations of tutor support, mainly brought about by the ease of email which many of the students said they preferred. Added to the need for a quick response time, this places pressure on tutors and takes up a great deal of time, now twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. With a growing student to staff ratio (Tysome, 6 October 2006), discussion boards and email are a mixed blessing. Whilst they allow for easy communication between tutors and peers, the expectations of students that emails will be answered quickly means that tutor workloads will most certainly see an increase. Although the use of technology does not increase the efficiency of the organisation, there is empirical evidence from the research that it does allow a greater number of students to be supported and although reduced lecture time to some extent frees tutors, it also place additional burdens on the tutor workload if the crucial one-to-one support is made available by email. Technology both shapes student expectations and the education process is itself influenced by the character of student expectations (James, 2001). Good tutor support, however, gave students confidence and the research identified three main categories of support. These are what students needed

which were help, guidance and feedback; when they needed it, which was immediate; and how they preferred the contact (through which medium) and this was by often by email but the telephone or one-to-one tutorials were also sought. The diminishing barriers of time and distance, however, mean that part time students who will work in their spare time, often evenings and weekends, also need support outside what is considered normal teaching hours.

Salzberger-Wittenberg, Henry and Osborne, (1983) make a valid point: “*Most teachers see their job as extending well beyond teaching*”. With the growing number and changing nature of undergraduates in Higher Education, due to the Government’s widening participation drive and as already identified, tutors are seeing their role change. The tutor’s role, once traditionally also encompassing a research role, now has to include becoming innovators (Hannan, 2001) and advocates of e-learning which is still subsidiary for many academics (Conole, 2004). Increasingly, large numbers of part time undergraduates are thus having a profound impact on tutors.

Summary

In summary, the way in which students use support and the benefits of this to students in aiding with insecurity and in helping to reduce anxieties has been identified. Although students have high levels of self-belief, the new environment in which they find themselves leads to some insecurity and although the students are confident of their abilities, support from peers is important. As a group knowing that they are all experiencing the same uncertainties helps reduce these anxieties. It has been found that

students seek support and support each other by helping with the generation of ideas in group discussions, for storing and retrieving information and using the other person as additional brain power, calling upon them for retention or memory difficulties. This also increases confidence as students are willing to share with others their ideas, experiences and resources. It has also been identified that students are keen to develop relationships in small groups, as well as with individuals whom they call upon for help and this gives them reassurance, confidence and that they are not alone and working in isolation.

The problems students faced as they tried to adapt to academic standards and juggle various facets of their lives in order to fit in have been identified. Students were keen to know whether they were performing at the correct level. Students displayed a tendency towards surface learning eg doing only what is required in order to meet formative assessment requirements. Ultimately, however, it is only the decisions which learners make about what they will or will not do which actually influence the outcome of their learning (Boud, D. 1981, p17). Work based problems eg identifying suitable ideas or data to base assignments on can be a problem and this potential is noted by at least one student.

As students progressed through the course they became much more aware of changes to their abilities and knowledge and this is described by one student: *“Coming out of the darkness into the light.”* (3STU512740). In addition, some students also reported an increase in confidence: *“This course has just boosted/just lifted me 100%”* (2STU512207).

In this section of The Learning Experience, the needs of students as they entered Higher Education and how the needs were met have been identified. Some of these are anxieties about ability and whether the student is up to the challenges of a Higher Education Degree; another is gauging their level within the group which is particularly important and troublesome. Some of the issues surrounding their level in the group are met by tutor support and feedback but support from other students is also important and this is achieved by face-to-face group meetings where students are cooperative and initially lacking competition but also by communicating via the discussion Boards. Discussion Boards are discussed in greater depth under the next chapter on E-Learning.

3 E-LEARNING

This research has sought to produce evidence from the student perspective (which Littig, 2006, says is needed), of how students feel, interpret and learn using technology as a medium for gaining access, communication, learning materials. Boud and Prosser (2003) argue that much early research was concerned with technology and was teacher focused instead of student focused and this thesis aims to redress this imbalance.

The first section below is about e-learning and the social community, the second is about communicating via the Internet, the third is about how students fall back on a familiar way of working, the fourth discusses educational theory and Internet learning, the fifth is about new Patterns of Learning, the sixth about the Discussion Boards and the seventh is about Blackboard and Student Adaptability. These are presented under the following headings:

- 3.1 E-Community
- 3.2 Virtual communication issues
- 3.3 Familiar way of working
- 3.4 E-learning and educational theory
- 3.5 New Patterns of learning
- 3.6 Discussion Boards
- 3.7 Blackboard and student adaptability – working in e-mode.

3.1 E-Community

Blackboard and the Internet were primarily used in the Foundation Degree in Educational Administration for the delivery of materials and this released Day Schools for affective areas of learning (Bloom, 1964) and for social cohesion. This gave students the opportunity to use these face-to-face meetings (as discussed previously) to bond and then to set up support groups which could then be transferred online. Isolation is one of the reported negative aspects of virtual learning but some students avoid this by creating e-learning communities which are self-selected supporting groups. As pointed out by Brown (2006), forming a community of learners is an important issue because it can affect student satisfaction, retention and learning and Brown raises the issue of how students actually define such a community. Often students in this research said they looked for other students they had met in day schools or in some cases looked for students who did a similar job and felt communication to be useful. Students were, however, sometimes uncertain whom they were 'talking to' because they could not link up the name with a face remembered from day school.

"It's often a faceless nobody because I can't put a face to the name."

2STU33879

"Sometimes I have read something and thought I think I know who that is but then gone to the next day school and deliberately tried to work out who I thought it was and it was not that person." 2STU33891

“I have sort of got to know the people who are in our groups in the day schools but as for the others I don’t think I have really got to know any of them/couldn’t even put a name to a face.” 2STU81386

Overall, students had different needs with some students participating in informal networking groups, others communicating directly by email with one other person or in some cases, neither. This was often down to time or predisposition to bond with groups of like-minded people although in the main it was the female students who were more active in communicating by the Internet.

3.2 Virtual Communication Issues

This research finds evidence that e-learning helped students as previously discussed by aiding them with idea generation, by helping to generate peer support (and especially support for less confident learners discussed earlier) and mentoring but also by increasing motivation as well as the importance to students of flexibility, availability of aiding memory and retention. This then fits with the theoretical perspective that ultimately learning arises from what students experience not what teachers do or technology does (Boud and Prosser, 2003). There are, however, differences between classroom based teaching and e-learning and communication is one aspect that differs considerably. For some students, virtual communication was successful and for others it posed problems, for instance, not understanding what was written and the difficulties of putting opinions across in a text based environment. Not knowing who people are affects communication. Students reported having to *“keep the language stale because I don’t know who it is . . . I*

don't know who they are really so you have got to be careful you don't offend somebody" and that a lack of body language is also a perceived barrier to communication. As one student comments, *"Because they can't see you they can't see your body language, what you look like, they may interpret something as being different to what it is."* What has emerged from the research throughout, however, is the adaptability and pragmatism of students as they met new challenges and that for most, it was not just a positive experience but actually critical to achievement and retention rates. Critics of distance learning often cite poor achievement and retention rates (Hawksley and Owen, 2002) although these range from 70-80% (Flood 2002) to 20-50% (Diaz 2002) for which Tyler-Smith (2006) finds no reliable or consistent reasons for drop-out rates.

3.3 Familiar way of working

The use of a VLE also contributes to the learning processes by making learning materials accessible and flexible; learning materials can be printed off and it allows a 'dipping in' process as well as the ability to see whole course in one go. This important aspect helped students stay motivated, become self-managers and self-regulated learners (Zimmerman 1990). This changed the students' beliefs in their ability to learn for themselves and created the opportunity to construct knowledge by independent research. This can then be carried through to their work by way of transferable skills, one of the aims of the Foundation Degree (QAA, 2004).

Some students reported that they printed all the materials from Blackboard, filed them and carried them around or took them home. Filing of such materials may also be a

familiar way of working for older students. A further benefit is that in a traditional course the tutor has control of printed materials and these often will be précis of a lecture. If students print learning materials from the VLE they are getting the entire resource and this also adds to reassurance and security. An important point, and one that is also raised by Carr-Chellman and Duchastel (2000), is the preference for reading from print rather than online materials because it is easier and a familiar medium. Research into the preferences for reading online materials versus papers materials (Shaikh, 2004) shows a preference for reading digitally if the reading matter is short but that longer documents, and in particular academic/journal articles, are preferred to be printed and read in hard copy. In some instances, Blackboard learning materials were comprehensive and could not be classed as short documents. Printing is also done to be able to annotate and also because the printed materials can be transported elsewhere. Locating academic and important documents a second time is a concern and complicated documents are also preferred to be in hard copy. The research by Shaikh points out that Acrobat files do, in fact, offer the opportunity to annotate or make comments directly on to a digital document but this was not available with the free downloadable reader. Carr-Chellman et al (2000) suggest in their research that this is an area that should be investigated further as this would reduce the need for paper printing, although it would not alleviate the preference for having hard copy and the flexibility of being able to “*take it to bed*” to read.

“Well sometimes I can take that home and read in bed. I go home I leave my husband downstairs and I go upstairs and I have got them and I just flick through

the pages and then I bring it back and I look at the thing and I go through it on the computer.” 3STU42393

Although there is evidence from this research that students do prefer to print off materials so that they can read them offline, a big advantage of the use of Blackboard is the fact that ‘hot links’ can be made to other external learning sites on the Internet, so improving the opportunity for wider reading and also research. Independent research is a large part of the Foundation Degree and students were required to identify areas for their project, find suitable literature and complete assignments. One student preferred reading materials on line. *“Even though you are only scrolling up and down it is changing, it is animated. I don’t absorb a piece of paper. I read it but it doesn’t go anywhere, it doesn’t go in”* (2STU111019).

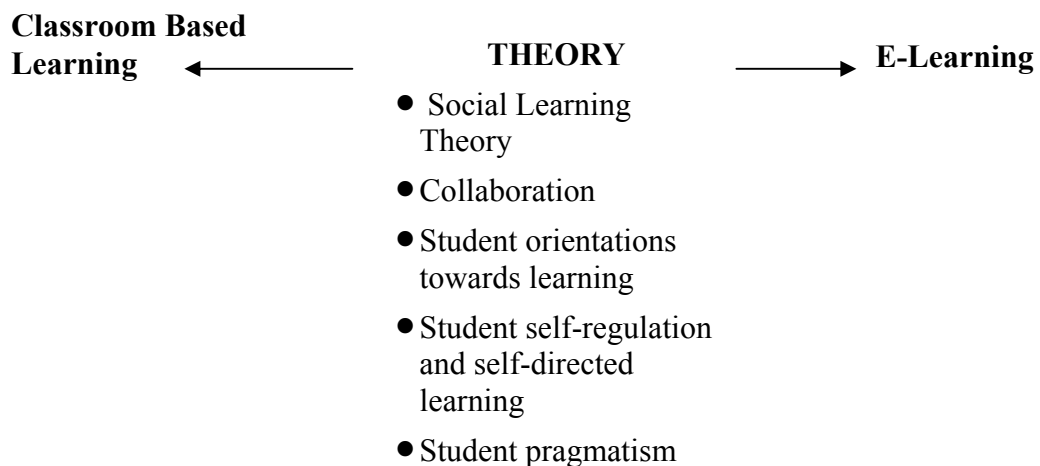
3.4 E-learning and Educational Theory

This research has recorded e-learning issues from the student perspective (Littig, 2006) and highlights multiple theories that underpin the student learning experience. These are shown in fig 6. These theories are: student self-regulation (Zimmerman, 1990), self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975 and Tough, 1967), student orientations towards learning (Beatty, L., Gibbs, G. and Morgan, A. 1984), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), and derived from this research, student pragmatism. What this research also demonstrates is that many of these theories, mostly developed before the advent of ICT and before the wide-spread use of and the concept of e-learning, can equally be applied to e-learning (See Fig 6), as students struggle to adapt with the complexities that this new

way of learning brings (people are producers as well as products of their environment (Bandura, 1986). As pointed out by Richardson and Newby (2006) and Durrington, Berryhill, Wafford (2006) there is a growing realisation that there is little difference in the way students learn when comparing traditional teaching and learning to online learning except that online learning places more responsibility on the learner (Eom and Wen, 2006).

Fig 6

Underpinning theories



3.5 New Patterns of Learning

E-learning was a new way of learning for most students as they were accustomed to a “*traditional way*” of teaching (3STU513216) and believed their preferences for being taught to be “*face-to-face . . . someone there handing me a leaflet out, telling me what I needed to do*” (2STU65440). It was, therefore, a surprise to some that their preference for being told what to do by a teacher, which equates to a more teacher centred

pedagogical model (Friedman, Watts, Croston and Durkin, 2002), was superseded by the convenience and flexibility of Blackboard and being able to '*do it when you want*' (2STU65440). Dutton et al (2004) use the term 'computer-centric work patterns' to describe this increased time that students spend at the computer.

This research also shows that students, however, were motivated to use the VLE in this way and also more importantly that students used Blackboard for communication between monthly day schools in order to allay fears, make sure that they were not alone and identify that the course was 'still there'. Students reported building a community, a support mechanism based on known 'others', often relationships formed at Day Schools. This then became a tool for redressing virtual isolation and in that way, substituted for the tutor. It had added value. Learning via the Internet freed students from these constraints and the research has shown that they developed as self directing learners and developed both research skills and confidence in their ability.

The VLE Blackboard provided students with additional benefits over the traditional lecture (Laurillard, 2007) but there are also negative aspects reported earlier regarding communication issues and lack of interaction (Weatherly et al (2003), for instance, lack of body language. Despite the drawbacks one student thought '*it would be impossible to do it without Blackboard*'. (2STU110814). Use of a VLE such as Blackboard, therefore, has many advantages for students and the research suggests that these are:

1. Being able to see the whole course in one go,
2. The convenience of being able to access materials at any time and at their own convenience, and
3. That the materials by being there all the time act as a reminder that the course still exists when students do not meet for several weeks at a time,
4. It gives students access to other students for sharing, amending, accumulating,
5. It acts as a prompt for assessment deadlines,
6. It is always there, and
7. Is reassuring (reducing the feelings of isolation).

3.6 Discussion Boards

On the whole, the part played by the inclusion of discussion boards contributed to the student learning experience by increasing communication between students, opening up opportunities for peer learning and support, and giving opportunity to view other students' work, all of which play an important part in increasing opportunities for student-centered learning. Being able to see other students' work is a particularly unique opportunity afforded by the provision of the Internet and the VLE. As cited by Carr-Chellman et al (2000) this has two benefits: it provides evidence of the level of work required but also the standards and quality of good work that the tutor expects.

As well as being able to communicate informally with other students, the discussion boards were used for formative assessment. Students were required to read other students' work and then produce written evidence to act as feedback to other students, raise discussion points, aid reflection and critical thinking. Doing this via an asynchronous medium has a further benefit because students could communicate on a much more equal footing as there is no one to interrupt. This might benefit quieter or reticent members who feel less able to contribute successfully in a face-to-face discussion. The characteristic of being able to reflect on messages and on the topic under discussion before replying has been the topic of research (Salmon, 2002). Discussion boards give time for reflection before engaging in digital conversation and students can retain control over what they contribute and when, as well as critically analyse other contributions. Discussion Boards helped students stay motivated and added to the student learning experience by helping students to assess their level in comparison to others in the group. This they did by identifying 'high achievers' and those that, "*made a good contribution*" (3STU513120). Students learned from one another by sharing ideas which reinforced their own ideas and consequently increased confidence. Feelings of isolation were also minimised. One criticism of e-learning as previously outlined, however, is the lack of interaction but what this research shows is that despite a lack of contact with other students and tutors, students participated in discussion boards on a much more equal footing. Face-to-face group discussions can be subjected to hijacking or domination by some individuals and less assertive members may not be able to contribute as easily or successfully. Discussion Boards give time for reflection, data gathering and thought and

in a learning context, give students greater opportunity to successfully join in and learn from others (Salmon, 2002).

What this meant is that students retained greater personal control over when, how and what to contribute and this added to success and motivation. The importance of talk in learning is highlighted by Hayes et al (2000) who assert that women and male students use different ways of talking; women's talk is geared towards building and maintaining relationships whilst men, they say, use a different form of talk geared towards power and domination. What the research shows is because talk cannot be interrupted, discussion boards, may give women a better opportunity (Hayes et al, p 90).

What is also potentially very useful for the student in the use of the VLE is the ability to see the course as a whole as it is possible to upload the entire course and materials for students to see in advance. This has benefits to the student as, according to Tannenbaum (1998, p409), it helps the learner to learn better if s/he sees in advance the objectives; in other words to identify what they will be required to know (knowing their way). This is also one of the basic tenets of constructivism (Kruse, 2007) and gives students the motivation and opportunity to read more widely by clicking on links to other external web sites as well as being able to share their ideas and thoughts with others. Students were required to use the discussion boards as part of summative assessment but they were also encouraged to share ideas and thoughts on the discussion board as part of the learning process which was not formally assessed, engage in collaborative activities, discuss, argue, negotiate and reflect. This allowed students to see the whole picture, gave

them the ability to recap at their own pace and time. They were also important features that helped students with achievement and motivation.

Students reflected on their progress by interacting with other students at day schools and via the discussion boards. This reflection allowed students to gain ideas they themselves would not have thought of which in turn gave them a broader view, increased knowledge and reinforcement that they are on the 'right track' or working below/above the correct level. This helps produce an independent learner. Feedback as identified earlier in this chapter is also important as this allows students to regulate their learning and achieve success (Zimmerman, 1990, p4).

As classroom contact was minimal and time for social engagement and communication very limited, students created e-learning communities. These were supportive groups between students with communication conducted mainly by email (Choy et al, 2002). This further reduced feelings of isolation and suggests that students tried to recreate the benefits of a weekly tutorial in the sense that instead of meeting and talking to other students face-to-face weekly, this was replaced with emailing each other or responding to each others' discussion pieces on Blackboard. This point is also made by Suler (2004) who makes mention that, "*students carry over the desire to communicate from face-to-face meetings to the on-line group*". Social interaction, whether face to face or online, is important to learning (Daggagh and Bannan-Ritland, 2004).

In conclusion, the data has provided evidence of mainly positive but also a few negative effects of the use of a VLE such as lack of body language in communicating. In particular, the inclusion of discussion boards as a substitute for traditional modes of learning has benefits to students both in a practical and pragmatic sense as students become much more self-directing and confident learners, able to conduct research and appraise and critically analyse other students' contributions. The ability to gauge other students by their contributions on discussion boards, although slightly competitive, gives students an opportunity otherwise not normally available in a more traditionally taught course. This helps students with the generation of ideas, plus giving students valuable feedback on their own learning. The availability of the Internet for any time viewing adds considerably to motivation and consequently to retention rates, not as a way of learning but as a means of contact.

3.7 Blackboard and student adaptability – Working in e-mode

Students adapted to new patterns of learning reported earlier and used the VLE Blackboard as part of their support mechanism and as a substitute or replacement for face-to-face teaching. This group of students liked, appreciated and valued the contribution of the VLE Blackboard to their learning experience. Of course, students looked forward to Day Schools held monthly, were very eager to repeat the experience of peer to peer contact and contact with tutors but the research also identifies that students adapted to using the VLE with ease, even though nine of the ten research population had no previous experience of on-line learning or technology driven learning. E-learning aspects were taken in the students' stride in their drive to educate and improve

themselves and students were confident with technology. Confidence with technology was researched by Garland and Noyes (2005) and showed that confidence with technology is also a precursor to successful learning by the computer.

Lack of more regular tutor time drove students to rely on the VLE for communication and peer to peer contact, learn from each other and support each other in the interim and students reported the benefits of learning in this way without reliance on a tutor. This also helps produce an independent learner yet one also reliant on other students. As Hibbert (2000) quotes in her research into distance learning and registered nurses, the self-learner obtains “*a great deal of advice and encouragement from a wide variety of people and not just one or two individuals or objects*” (Tough, 1979, p98). Support is a vital component within e-learning for non-traditional learners who are required to self-learn; it is a prominent factor and important for a successful outcome.

Although Alexander and Boud (2001, p4) claim that technology does not improve learning, this thesis provides evidence that learning is improved due to the fact that this group of students were able to learn from one another in a conducive environment. As has been discussed, less confident students have the opportunity to reflect and digest information before contributing to discussion boards. This also gives the opportunity to re-read others students’ contributions (recapping), gain ideas, thoughts, insights and thinking modes and develop critical thinking (Entwistle, 1984) as students dissect, interpret, engage in the discussions, as discussions are posted in text as opposed to classroom verbal dialogue and discussion.

In adapting to e-learning students had to overcome multiple challenges and steep learning curves. Difficulties included technical access (although this was minimal for most), asynchronicity, text based discussions, multiple conversations, information overload and isolation (Tyler-Smith, 2006) which impacted on the ability to interpret conversations. As interaction was asynchronous, it meant that immediate response and feedback were lacking but overwhelmingly students adapted and liked the convenience, flexibility and accessibility of the VLE and appreciated and valued its contribution to the process of their learning.

Much of the published research into e-learning discusses the pedagogical issues and technical issues or is a comparative study between traditionally taught courses and on-line courses (McCray, 2000, Schoenfield-Tacher et al, 2001). In the main these hold the view that virtual learning or online learning does not impact on or increase learning outcomes. By approaching the evidence from the student angle this thesis shows that the e-learning aspects are taken in the students' stride in their drive to educate and improve themselves. This has its practical aspects, for instance improved skills for better jobs and pay but it also is much bigger in its impact by opening up the student horizons to broader educational awareness and improvement, and as a stepping stone to further Higher Education.

The VLE maintained a link, reassuring students that the course and other students were still in existence. This is important for distance learning students who are isolated by distance and this helps with motivation and consequently retention rates. Students learned

substantially from the use of discussion boards as they gained ideas from other students and this also gives the opportunity for discussion, argument and reflection. This then reinforces students' own knowledge and gives them confidence. The time element is an important one as students were able to access materials and discussion boards at any time of the day or night which, for a working parent, is very important. Support comes and is given by way of discussion boards thus allowing students to ask questions and compare their thoughts. There is also a competitive element as students were anxious not to appear in any way less informed and capable than their peers, especially in the first months. This would appear to be in conflict with support but both conditions co-existed; students were both supportive of one another and also competitive with one another. Discussion boards were used to identify strengths as well as weaknesses in other students and this gave students confidence in their own work and allowed them to identify their own learning needs. Sometimes the discussion boards acted as a spur or prompt to students as they gave information on the progress and achievements by other students. Finding the time in a busy, full life to read discussion boards can for some students be an impediment. However, this differed quite widely between students. Some students would read the discussion boards every day and others once a month. This would also depend upon need, available time and the amount of reassurance required by the student. Communicating by discussion boards, because they are asynchronous, does have problems. As body language accounts for approximately seventy percent of communication between people the lack of the visual element in communication can mean *"it's quite hard to put your opinions across"* 3STU916733, *"nothing to give you that enthusiasm 3STU42792"* and *"people don't open up as much"* 3STU42470.

Information overload was not reported on by students during this research but it is a factor that course designers need to be aware of. The point is made by Smith (2000) who describes the use of the Internet to support learning as creating new boundaries for course designers who must take on board new technologies to support and create learning and to survive the information overload that new technologies can easily create.

4 PERSONAL AND HOME LIFE ISSUES

“Although it’s a stumbling block, it is not actually a brick wall.” 3STU65695

This chapter explores issues raised by students concerning their personal, family and home life. The first section regarding the personal lives of the students is about how students think and cope with the Foundation Degree itself and the second section is about the affiliated theme of ‘Time’. The third is about support from home. These are presented under the following headings:

4.1 Coping

4.2 Time

4.3 Support

4.1 Coping - *“In an ideal world”* 3STU2966

As students learned to adapt to the Foundation Degree they had to cope with not only the work for the Foundation Degree but also their other life roles of managing a home, family and a job. Two students talked about having to be “*very disciplined*”, having to “*compartmentalize*” and “*prioritise*” (1STU33140/1STU915960). One student described this coping as, “*juggling everything around*” (2STU813717) .This involves organisation as well as freeing up time.

This research points to the fact that as adult learners, students were able to keep things in perspective and make balanced judgements about coping with multiple roles and prioritising tasks. Coping strategies were employed to ensure success by good

organisation as well as implementing changes to their lives. As an example, one student reported cutting down the amount of paid work to release time, another changed working hours or used the Internet for shopping. Attitudes towards home commitments remained a high priority. “*My family is more important,*” 2STU64915, “*I think weekends are sort of family orientated.*” 2STU109075. This is in line with research carried out by Reay (2003, p309) who reports that the role of, ‘being Mom’ was a first priority.

Such a complex and busy lifestyle has a further impact on their ability to do the work for a degree. Some of the impact is lack of time to be able to do wider reading or contribute fully to discussion boards. One student said, “*I may not pick up the pen or sit at the computer for 3 or 4 weeks.*” (2STU33500).

4.2 Time

Time is an important issue that emerged from the themes of coping, juggling and balancing various roles. Students were required to make judgements based on the importance of the task and this required good organisation. Time management was identified by Bennett and Marsh (2003) in their research with adult non-traditional learners on a Foundation Degree as being the most important strategy to coping with multiple roles and conflicts over their time. Bennett and Marsh also articulate that when combining study, family life and full time work, time is a precious commodity which supports this research finding.

'Time cash' emerged as a theme from the research to elucidate the importance and significance of time. Time is, however, like money. There is a finite amount and students had commitments that time had to be allocated to as a priority. They made choices about some commitments and demands on their time and what was left was 'my time'. Students were required to assign importance or values to which duty took precedence, what corners were cut, how they were going to balance the need to perform certain tasks and commitments. Time was also seen as being flexible, however, inasmuch as it could be joined together to form larger chunks of time by reorganising other commitments, planning, prioritising, getting things done quicker, forfeiting and eventually reward. All these depended on the value that the student assigned. This had an impact on the student in the way s/he chose what to focus efforts upon and this impacted on the quality, breadth and depth of their work.

"It is up to individuals to get their own time scale to work through things but at least you can do it when you want to do it and not at a set time." 3STU109457

Lack of time means that students may often have to concentrate on what is being assessed and marked and as a consequence become outcome focused. This means that students have to be pragmatic and make choices about how much time and effort they are able to put into their work which means that they have to be very efficient at maximising their time. Learning via the Internet helps with issues of time management or 'balancing the books', freeing up or saving enough time to enable them to do the work for the Foundation Degree as it extends the amount of possible time by allowing unusual

patterns of working. For instance, by giving little bits of time for dipping into the online materials, re-reading materials or reading the discussion board, connecting to the VLE for reassurance and printing off selected materials.

The above findings can also be corroborated directly by Whitham (2005) whose research on retention rates with 500 Foundation Degree students found that it was mainly female students who quoted difficulties of coping with work, family commitments, adapting to Higher Education and time (issues raised in this thesis) as reasons for leaving the course early.

Unlike traditional students, therefore, these learners have to be pragmatic in making decisions about how to use their time effectively and obviously good time management is a priority but the research does show that the flexibility of the VLE in allowing learners to dip into materials is important. Technology is helping these students to succeed.

4.3 Support

Students generally appeared to have good support from their spouses. The importance of such support is raised by Darab (2004) who says that women continue to do the bulk of the unpaid work in families. However, partner support generally was reported to be good especially for one or two students whose husbands were teachers. For other partners, support meant the partner taking on some of the roles that these mothers normally assumed, for instance looking after the children, or taking over one or two of the household jobs. There was no reported lack of support by partners which was good news

for retention rates for this particular Foundation Degree. Although this research confirms many of above principles in terms of support it has found employer support particularly indistinct, even sometimes deficient. Why this should be so is unclear, however, and it is suggested in Chapter 6 that this is an area for future research.

5 ISSUES OF WORK

“It’s like it opens your eyes to certain things” (3STU916655)

This chapter explores issues raised by students concerning their work and the impact that the Foundation Degree has on the student’s ability, confidence and self-esteem.

“Our ability to compete in an increasingly global marketplace depends on our ability to equip people with the skills employers need now and in the future.” (Hope, 2006). This reference is taken from the Department for Education and Skills Strategy website and sets the scene for the planned future economic success of the country. It is not only Government who recognize the shortfalls in employee knowledge and skills but the students themselves recognize their need to up-skill and learn ‘how to learn’ as well as gaining knowledge and greater understanding.

“It is and it was a part of my role that I didn’t feel entirely/it’s the one thing that brought me down in confidence wise because I didn’t feel that I knew enough about it. I was going through the motions on a day to day basis but I didn’t necessarily understand why.” 3STU512876

In their responses, students use the word ‘skill’ to mean developed writing skills, better at organising, improved working methods but also to describe better working relationships, changing attitudes, empowerment and assertiveness, greater involvement, improved employer relationships and increased ability to do their job. Communication and team working skills were increased, so too were enterprise skills making work easier.

However, these skills are not just practical ones that impact on the ability to do a job better but also gave students greater insight and awareness, increased knowledge, knowledge of 'why': *"I didn't feel that I knew enough about it. I was going through the motions on a day to day basis but I didn't necessarily understand why"* 3STU512876. These impact on work but they are more to do with mental qualities, eg *knowledge, understanding, judgments and imagination* (Pring, 2004, p 112). So it would appear that on the surface, or in the minds of the students themselves, newly learned skills on the Foundation Degree are not solely 'able to do' skills but also cognitive and higher order thinking skills and fit in with the espoused aims of Higher Education as well as the aims of the Foundation Degree contained in the QAA Foundation Degree Benchmark 2004.

What the research has identified in relation to their work, therefore, is that students reported changes to their ability to do their jobs better which has an impact on employment (Webb, Brine, Jackson, 2006). They also reported improved confidence, increased knowledge and the ability to handle situations at work better as well as a revision of their assumed knowledge: *"I can go into meetings now and be a little bit more intelligent about it rather than assuming certain things"* 3STU916655. One student reflected on how she might have lost her job if she had not proven herself invaluable to the organisation. Students reported a changed outlook and as a result became more professional; saw the importance of their job to their employing organisation and this raised self-esteem and confidence. Students talked about, *'Becoming more equal with fellow professionals'* 2STU512345, *'It makes you feel more confident, important,*

valuable, capable', 2STU108965 as well as, *'I am respected for the knowledge'* 3STU512844.

Students learned what they were doing and why they were doing it, in other words evolving from tacit knowledge to developing explicit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966).

"It's like coming out of the darkness into the light you think oh yea that's why they do that it's just not realizing the theory underpinning the actions that we carry out on a day to day basis." 3STU512740

This increased knowledge was not restricted to their own organisation but students learned from other students how other similar organisations in the same field were working and accomplishing tasks. This helped students improve their own performance at work and bring back to their organisation new knowledge and different ways of doing things.

As students became more confident in their growing abilities, expertise and knowledge, aspirations were increased. *'I think it's given me the confidence to do something else'* (2STU110432), and *'I am hoping to go on and get a better job'*, (3STU21070), *'With a degree behind me who knows what the future holds'* 3STU513056.

Students talked about increased respect from their colleagues who are professional teachers or Managers and that they (students) were now respected for their knowledge. Not being treated equally with the teaching staff is an issue that undermines confidence for the administrative support staff and the chance to be able to do a degree has raised their profile and value.

The two main perceived benefits the research identified in relation to their work were 'progress at work' and 'able to do work better'. There is evidence to suggest from this research, however, that actual benefits are wider ranging and that these actual benefits exceeded perceived benefits by raising status, raising self-confidence and self-esteem, raising aspirations, removing barriers, changing employer perceptions, increased commitment to their work and increased responsibility.

The following extract from the aims contained within the DfES (2005) White Paper '*Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work*', describes outcomes or benefits of the skills strategy and to individuals and society:

“They should be able to fit training conveniently within the competing demands of busy lives. They should see a pay-back in the form of satisfying, sustainable jobs and a higher standard of living, because they can put their skills to good use in more productive, higher value, more knowledge intensive work. As a result, we should become a nation in which everyone has the chance to progress as far as their talents, ambitions and motivation can take them.” (DfES, 2005)

These are emotive and inspiring words but this research does, in fact, highlight the importance and relevance of the Foundation Degree in meeting the highlighted aspirations.

For some students who were employed in Higher Education, it was expected that they should have or be working towards a degree but overall students' perceptions were that

that they are more effective for their employing organisations. This is, of course, different to actually being more effective and, to corroborate this, research would need to be carried out with the employers and is a subject for further research. The Foundation Degree also provides career advancement with one student saying she had been promoted to Bursar in the school and another student has changed jobs to one at “*a higher grade with more responsibility and more scope for progression*”.

What is less certain, however, as previously highlighted in this thesis, is support from employers at the micro level as students reported that coaching support from line managers was mixed, spasmodic and even hostile. This in some cases included the withholding of important information the student needed in order to complete assignments (due in one case to perceived confidentiality issues) and there is evidence for concern that employers may only act on their own interests and not those of the employee Gibbs (2002). This lack of support has an impact on student motivation and achievement but most students appeared to have overcome such barriers and the evidence would tend to suggest that poor employer support can be negated if there is good support from the learning provider.

Summary

In the above, issues concerning work and employment have been explored and this has included students reporting increasing skills at work as well as increased academic knowledge underpinning their work. More importantly, however, are the reported changes within the student in terms of increased confidence and self-esteem which in turn

impacts on the way they perceive themselves and their increased value to their employing organisation. In particular, one of the issues that have arisen is about feeling equal to other professionals and the Foundation Degree has given the students the opportunity to change the way they are perceived within the organisation by their employers and other professionals. This is particularly pertinent to students employed in small schools where they are not part of a large team and for a number of the female students where they felt they may have been undervalued. It has given them the opportunity to increase their influence and authority.

6 GENDER ISSUES

The majority of students enrolled on this Foundation Degree were female (there were two male students) and, therefore, the research findings will to a large part, reflect the needs of female students.

One of the two male students already held a BA (Hons) Degree in History and saw the Foundation Degree as helping him to increase his promotional chances at work and to learn more about the area he was working in. This latter point was also made by the other male student who has an HND and an HNC. The most noteworthy factor for these two male students was to benefit them in their work: *“I am looking for something that is more work-related and will benefit me in the job I am in now and will allow me to progress at the moment. That’s why I chose this particular course”*. The highest other qualification within the original cohort of 48 by females were BTEC and NVQ 3’s as well as ‘A’ levels. Female students said that their aspirations were mainly for self-fulfilment, *“I always knew that I should have got more qualifications when I was at school and it is a way of proving to myself, not to anybody else that I can do it”*. One student said that in terms of her work; *“Not that I am expecting to get any more pay for doing this at school because I don’t think I will”*. The female students did not overtly cite work issues as their main aim (although paradoxically they had been seeking a qualification that was work-based) but were thrilled when the benefits at work showed themselves. As reported in the previous section, these were self-esteem, confidence, worth and also value to the organisation. Higher Education for non-traditional female students has a different perspective or need from the usual. Reay (2003) and Reay et al (2001) claim that women

frequently refer to the process of Higher Education programmes as being more important to them than the final outcome, a claim supported by this research. This they say may have its origin in previous educational experience, as well as in the desire to improve jobs or have more rewarding careers (Green and Webb, 1997).

The report, Higher Education in the Learning Society (Dearing, 1997), provided evidence that students had two major reasons for attending Higher Education. The first was “*to get a better job (29%)*”, second, “*to pursue a particular career*” (19%)” and that there was little variation in the overall pattern whether studying full-time or part-time (part time students were mainly over 25, working and with families). This report also stated, “*Nor were there any consistent differences by students’ age, sex, social class or type of institute they attended.*” Students enrolled on the Foundation Degree, the subject of this study, produced evidence of some difference as indicated above in terms of gender as female students quoted self-fulfilment. However, the research by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education statistics (1997) cites the age of part-time students as twenty five and over and does not, therefore, indicate the precise nature of the ages. In the student cohort for this research, the average age is forty two. The students’ greater ages may account for the difference in the responses for female students. A few students in the National Committee of Enquiry research (thirteen percent) said that they “*wanted to continue studying and learning*” but no indication of the age of these students was made therefore it is not possible to see whether these students were in the higher age brackets and to verify whether the findings correlate to the findings of the research that is the focus of this thesis, particularly in terms of gender issues.

Hayes et al (2000, p40) refer to the dilemma married women face in meeting the needs of their families and meeting their own needs and that both the home and Higher Education institutions are '*greedy institutions*' demanding total commitment of time and energy from women (Edwards, 1993 in Hayes, p 47, Darab (2004). In addition, according to Darab, women continue to do most of the unpaid work for families and in the community. Managing time whilst doing a degree and maintaining primary responsibility for the home has been raised as an issue in this research and this has been identified as problematic for many mature women students and that their success or otherwise is due to their ability to 'manage' their time (Edwards, 1993 and Morrison, 1996 in Hayes et al, p 48). However, these writers concur that time management is not the problem but rather the fact of control laid on women's time by the demands of others. As students become liberated from parenting responsibilities this has allowed them to achieve their potential and combined with the flexibility afforded by on-line learning creates the possibility to learn when they want or when they can.

Women's learning is often linked with collaborative learning (Hayes et al, 2000 p3). Certainly this research has identified where students use opportunities to collaborate with each other in order to gain and give much needed support. What this research has also identified is that students transfer relationships formed in the classroom to supportive groups using email or discussion boards, reported earlier. Von Plummer (2000) says geography and isolation have traditionally limited opportunities for women both of which can be addressed through e-learning. Many of the students lived a distance from the university and were chosen to take part on the research on this basis in order to identify

differential factors that distance from the learning provider may provide. However, no evidence of any difference has been identified due to distance.

In summary, the research has found evidence to support claims made by Hayes et al (2000) on self-esteem issues, women's learning in groups/classroom settings, communicating and transformation. '*Our little group*' was defined by one student as a supportive group of learners who would communicate outside the formal teaching environment to discuss issues and support each other. The fact that most students were female, may also have contributed to the fact that in small group work students felt able to contribute by talking and sharing ideas in a supportive environment. It is shown how the women portray redefining themselves, "*I did it for me*", recreating their identity, being something that women (and men) do throughout their lives (Hayes et al, 2000, p54). Changing identity is a choice made by the individual but it is also closely allied to self-esteem as self-esteem is to do with how people feel about their identities (Hayes, et al, p56). Students in the research report changes in identity, becoming more '*equal, confident, important, valuable, capable and respected*' and these have been commented on in earlier sections.

Technology is enabling barriers towards participation to be removed in education for all members of society, but in particular for 'second chance education' a category which this mostly female student cohort would fall into. Von Plümmer (2000) states that it is important that a second chance is not to be seen as '*second best*'. Evidence from this research would appear to negate this possibility. Although students' perceptions of the

level of the Foundation Degree is that it is lower than an Honours Degree they remain faithful to the ideology that it is providing them with opportunity to acquire a Higher Education qualification and the opportunity to build on that by progressing to a full degree at a later date.

7 STUDENT PRAGMATISM – A NEW WAY OF THINKING

Student pragmatism is identified from the research as a key component to student success in the light of multiple demands on their time demonstrating that this contributes to achievement of long held aspirations. Due to the fact that students are required to manage multiple roles, practical decisions are made about how to manage their time and also what to focus their efforts upon in order to meet the requirements of the Foundation Degree. This results in choices being made and this consequently impacts on their work for the Foundation Degree. For example, students were outcome focused although they know they should and would like to spend more time researching and doing wider reading. In the light of the fact that these mature non-traditional students are parents and also working, it is perhaps no surprise that time is an issue and this comes some way to explaining the pragmatic way students tackle the Foundation Degree. Pragmatism is also aligned with ‘gauging’, a concept arising from the research which reveals insights into how students think and adapt to Higher Education by assessing their performance, seeking guidance and in particular feedback.

Pragmatism is, therefore, a personal orientation, a behaviour derived from the need of the student to achieve. Beaty, Gibbs and Morgan (1984, pp. 81-82) identify two personal orientations, intrinsic and extrinsic. Students with intrinsic needs are those who are interested in “*being tested or improving themselves*” whilst students with extrinsic needs “*are concerned more with grades and feedback than the content*”. What has arisen from the research is that students on the Foundation Degree appear to have both orientations; are both pragmatic in their desire to achieve grades but also excited by the prospect of

learning new things and in change. These changes are reported on in the thesis and especially in Issues of Work, where, for instance, students describe how they have become more knowledgeable, confident and self-assured with greater self-esteem. Little literature including the expression 'student and pragmatism' has been identified and thus this would appear to be a new interpretation and meaning and perspective on the subject of adult students' orientation towards part time Higher Education and E-learning.

8 THE FOUNDATION DEGREE

HEFCE articulate that the purpose of Foundation Degrees is to:

1. Equip students with the combination of technical skills, academic knowledge and transferable skills demanded by employers;
2. Provide a valued qualification in their own right;
3. Provide a qualification which will enable students to progress to higher academic and professional qualifications on the ladder of lifelong learning;
4. Combat social exclusion by providing a route into Higher Education for groups currently under-represented;
5. Provide opportunities for students to study flexibly and to ‘earn and learn’;
6. Become the dominant Higher Education qualification below Honours level (HEFCE, 2000).

This thesis has outlined that for this particular group of adult learners on the Foundation Degree the opportunity of entering Higher Education has been successful and achieved the above aims of the Foundation Degree. In addition, the research reveals that whilst students knew and understood that the Foundation Degree is at a lower level than an Honours Degree they have striven to take on board those elements of studying in Higher Education that they perceived they should aspire to and know about. They have been pragmatic in this achievement and in thinking and in coping with the multiple roles they hold and have actively participated in and created a learning environment that is both practical and sensible, thus joining in collaborative learning as well as independent learning. Students demonstrated self-reliance yet were in collaboration and relied on

others for support which they actively thoughtfully and purposefully created. These students were eager to learn and demonstrated high levels of efficacy and self-belief and as well as uncovering a vast array of evidence of the benefits of the Foundation Degree to themselves as they changed, became more confident in themselves, more productive in their work as well as more accomplished. In addition the opportunity afforded to these learners was appreciated, was valuable to themselves as individuals and to their employing organisations. Students reported perceived additional benefits of being valued more by their employing organisation as well as reporting increased self esteem and confidence. In addition, they increased their skills by learning, understanding and knowing about the underpinning theory and Government legislation supporting their organisations, their work and the work of others.

Need for research into the 'value' of the Foundation Degree from the student's perspective is a point made by Stickland (2006). This research has identified that the value of the degree is that students see it as the opportunity and a valuable asset to achieve their needs for self-esteem and self-actualisation as well as improve their chances at work. Students clearly identify perceived benefits to themselves. Value to the student is also life enhancing. This increases feelings of self-worth and self-esteem leading to, "*Greater self understanding, a clearer sense of identity and independent thinking*" (Hammond, 2004). The availability of funding which makes the Foundation Degree affordable and the flexibility of online learning which gives students control to fit the work in with the rest of their busy lives, plus the significance of the degree in

relationship to their work, meant that these students could justify forfeiting other parts of their lives to reach and achieve their potential.

Students on the Foundation Degree in Educational Administration were late-comers to Higher Education which meant they are non-traditional Higher Education students and form part of the changing body of entrants entering Higher Education. They were initially attracted to the Foundation Degree for several reasons. The fact that it was a three year degree, that it was relevant to their work and that funding was available, were all of primary importance. What the research also identified is that the group were evenly split with half saying they would have enrolled on a full degree course whilst the other half said that they felt a lack of confidence to attempt a full degree or that a full degree was, “*a bridge too far*”. The option of being able to extend to a full degree satisfied these longer term aspirations for some. Other students reported that they had felt uncertain of their abilities but now believed that the Foundation Degree has given them the confidence and skills to be able to continue with the Honours Degree.

The Government recognizes the need for increased skills and the Foundation Degree was designed in order to bridge the academic-vocational divide (FdF, 2007) and more recently, the academic/skills debate (Leitch, 2006) and is thus placing work based adult learning high on the agenda. This has opened up the opportunity for these learners. The research has highlighted that widening participation to include sections of the community not previously encouraged to enter Higher Education, adds to human and social capital,

health, well being, confidence, self-esteem and greater prospects for economic prosperity but equally important to the realization of aspirations as well as self actualization.

Some students had been actively seeking a suitable qualification for some time that would meet their needs. It was clear from the start of the research that students had aspirations to achieve the Foundation Degree as they talked about the previous barriers, for instance lack of parental support, education and guidance and finance preventing them from continuing with their education earlier.

At the end of the three years and at the time of thesis writing, six out of the ten students in the research confirmed they were planning to continue to do the full degree. This is in line with an unpublished survey of students in the first and second cohort of Foundation Degree students that showed sixty percent had ambitions to transfer to Honours Degree study and that the Foundation Degree had been instrumental in encouraging forty percent of these respondents to take the additional step (Yorke, 2005). Reasons for not continuing were lack of funding, peer group not continuing, pressure at work not giving time, promotion at work and changes to personal circumstances (eg divorce). One of the students in this research had already achieved a BA (Hons). However, the possibility of continuing at some point in the future was not ruled out by one of these four remaining students.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the conclusions emanating from the research. This thesis has presented research and findings into real life experiences of a group of students on a part-time Foundation Degree in Educational Administration at Huddersfield University between 2003 and 2006. The thesis documents what students have to say about their experiences as they strived to educate and improve themselves, improve their chances, overcome obstacles and entry barriers, adapt to Higher Education and cope with the complexities of multiple roles and deal with a new way of learning, which includes e-learning. As the research was conducted from the student perspective, the findings in the previous Chapter have given an account of the many issues that are important to students.

This research has uncovered factors that promote successful student achievement in Higher Education within the current paradigm of the electronic age and has provided a detailed insight into the thinking behind student actions of a new cohort of adult students undertaking a new Higher Education qualification. Because the research adopted a grounded theory approach to data gathering and analysis, the factors that have emerged are those reported by the students and are as such important aspects of their experiences of studying and coping with a degree. Following is a summary of a few of the key points indicating the breadth of the research:

- Multiple adult and social learning theories operating in the student experience, the most valid ones in the modern age of blended learning.
- ‘Gauging’, a term used in this thesis to describe a way of thinking.
- The difficulties students face in adapting to Higher Education.
- The complexity of coping with multiple roles and the impact this has on students, eg they are very pragmatic and outcome focused.
- Personal changes to students eg perceived increased confidence and how students are viewed by colleagues and employers.
- The success of the Foundation Degree in meeting student aspirations – attractiveness to female students due to its work-based focus and flexibility.
- Education leads to increased self-esteem, confidence and well being. The Foundation Degree delivered by blended learning achieves these.
- E-learning contributes to social learning theory by allowing students to learn from and support one another.
- The significance of collaboration and support across a wide range of mechanisms including peers, tutors, discussion boards, and email.
- The importance of face-to-face contact to bonding and social learning online.
- The importance of funding to female students and the widening participation agenda.
- The importance of opportunity, timing, funding and subject relevance to student achievement.
- The impact that ‘time’ has on a student’s orientation to learn eg pragmatism.
- Use of discussion boards for modelling.

- Value of the Foundation Degree to the student (eg increased self-esteem/confidence and improvements at work).
- Aspiration and the removing barriers of distance and money.

Appendix 34 contains further research outcomes.

This chapter now proceeds by discussing the theory emerging from the research and this is followed by sections on Student Pragmatism, Blended and E-Learning, issues of Support, Widening Participation and Gender Issues, Higher Education and the Foundation Degree and finally suggestions for future research. These are presented under the following headings:

- 1 Theoretical Perspective
- 2 Student Pragmatism
- 3 Blended Learning and E-learning
- 4 Issues Concerning Support
- 5 Widening Participation and Gender Issues.
- 6 Policy and Employment
- 7 Higher Education Issues and the Foundation Degree
- 8 Future Research

1 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The research identified that students revealed individual characteristics of self-belief, high levels of self-efficacy, self-regulation, as well as pragmatism and persistence and excitement in achieving their aspirations. In Chapter 5, Fig 6 presented multiple adult learning theories identified during the research as working in the current e-learning paradigm. What this research has identified is that as students adapt to e-learning they exhibit similar characteristics and learning orientations. The learners are not different, it is the learning environment that is different but this does entail the learner taking on more of the responsibility (Eom and Wen, 2006).

This sub-section is continued under the headings of:

- 1.1 Self-Knowledge and Self-Belief
- 1.2 Achieving and Aspiration
- 1.3 Self-Efficacy

1.1 Self-Knowledge and Self-belief

Students were knowledgeable about their own personal and learning strengths and weaknesses but had strong self-belief and persistence/determination to achieve their long held aspirations. Students recalled a variety of reasons for not pursuing Higher Education earlier but still maintained a belief that they were capable. Their perceptions of earlier missed opportunities were due mainly to external barriers outside their own control. These, as reported in Chapter 5, were parental support (money, expectations, beliefs), or

educational support and guidance and the educational system at the time. These are cultural, economic or situational barriers rather than their own internal barriers eg beliefs, expectations and aspirations or motivation. Although self-belief was maintained in their academic abilities, students also displayed tendencies to be insecure. This mainly manifested itself in seeking counselling and support from tutors, other students and work colleagues who were also on the same Foundation Degree.

1.2 Achieving and Aspiration

Self-belief and confidence in their abilities was a prime motivator to embark on the Foundation Degree and continued to sustain them. The research illustrates that these adults were intrinsically motivated to learn and that when the appropriate opportunity arose they seized it. The research also shows that technology is enabling adults to realise long held aspirations by giving access and opportunity by the flexibility of anywhere, anytime learning opportunities.

These students have had to wait for two important events to occur: the first is the Internet and the second the introduction of the Foundation Degree in their work subject. These twin themes enticed this group of learners to achieve their potential and take the first step on the ladder of Higher Education. One or two students had made previous attempts to step on to the ladder of Higher Education and despite the fact that these attempts ended in apparent failure, student self-belief, determination and motivation have remained intact and the Foundation Degree has provided the inspiration to try again which is further

evidence of student self-belief and self-efficacy, persistence and personal intrinsic motivation.

1.3 Self-Efficacy

Adult students have multiple roles and this can include being a parent, being in employment as well as family life. Students revealed individual characteristics of self-belief, high levels of self-efficacy, awareness and self-knowledge, persistence, excitement, commitment and dedication in the face of the difficulties of managing their multiple roles. According to Zimmerman (1995b) students with high levels of self-efficacy work harder, are persistent in the face of difficulties and can overcome difficulties. This demonstrates positive thinking and attitude which is an important factor in staying motivated and coping with the demands of balancing different roles.

Students are required to make decisions regarding prioritising tasks required in multiple roles but the research finding is that students with families will often put family commitments ahead of work for their Degree. Sometimes they made decisions that meant work for the degree was put first. On occasions the decision was made for students when choice was restricted due to the higher importance of the home life or family commitment, as in the example of moving house or illness or the even the demands made on parents by offspring which results sometimes in the parent having to stop work on their degree, *“My son sometimes comes in and I have to have a break because I can’t sit and concentrate on what I am doing when he is about”*. 2STU76812

2 STUDENT PRAGMATISM

Several other factors have also been uncovered that are instrumental to student success and achievement. Firstly, the orientation of students and their attitude to study is essentially pragmatic and driven by the need to balance their multiple roles (parent, worker, and student) and to meet the conditions of learning within Higher Education. The thesis has uncovered that this new cohort of students had different ways of thinking and orientations toward learning to the typical degree student and that this was dependent on the need of the individual eg their aspirations but also their attitudes and orientation and perceived relevance to their lives.

Students are, however, also in competition with each other and many of the pragmatic strategies in the research include this element. One of these is in comparing their work to a perceived 'higher achiever'. As quoted by Bandura (1995), "*People seek proficient models that possess the competencies to which they aspire*". Although competition may be seen as rivalry or opposition, it is in this instance positive competition carried out in good spirit as it goes hand in hand with support. Discussion Boards in particular allowed this sharing and identification of standards and thus students could benefit from and learn from other students by sharing ideas, thoughts, presentation and levels.

Student pragmatism, therefore, emerged from the data in relation to achievement. Students made serious and frantic attempts to think and 'gauge' what is required of them. This manifested itself very early in the first year as students desperately sought to find the academic standards that they need to acquire and know about. This was done by

assessment of other students' work posted on the Discussion Board, seeking feedback from tutors but also by self-assessment. This aided students to self-monitor and self-regulate their learning (Zimmerman, 1990, p10). Students knew that they would be judged on assessed work and this, along with lack of time and many roles to fulfil (at work, at home, with family), caused students to adopt a very pragmatic and no-nonsense approach to their work for the Foundation Degree. However, students demonstrated they were also very keen to raise themselves and their work to perceived academic standards and they sought to know what these standards were. There is another element that contradicts this practical and sensible approach and this manifested itself as students became more confident, more knowledgeable about their area of work, completed and passed assignments. Students were proud of their achievements, pleased with their progress, and overall appreciated the opportunity to realise aspirations which for some have been held for a very long time.

This research has shed light on how students think and act, communicate and work together to achieve individual and common aims. Students were very supportive and formed supportive groups, which again is a pragmatic and sensible approach and ensured that they maximised communication between the six day schools, held approximately once a month. Students also looked for "*familiar faces*" on the discussion boards as they realised that some students were better than others, sometimes waiting for these 'others' to upload to the discussion board before they do. This gave students the opportunity to judge or assess their own work against another student and, therefore, increased confidence as well as gave greater knowledge. This sharing of work is helpful to students

in their own self-assessment and self-direction, goal setting etc and is a unique output from a Virtual Learning Environment.

Student pragmatism is identified from the research, therefore, as a key component to success and also demonstrates that this contributes to achievement of long held aspirations to achieve a Higher Education qualification. In the light of the fact that these mature non-traditional students are working parents, it is perhaps no surprise that time is an issue and this goes some way to explaining the pragmatic way students tackled the Foundation Degree.

3 BLENDED LEARNING AND E-LEARNING

Dabbah and Bannan-Ritland (2005) suggest that the *'classic model of the isolated independent study is now giving way to an emerging online learner – one who possesses skills in the use of online technology, learns through socially mediated and collaborative activities and becomes a self-directed learner.* These points have been raised by this research. There is evidence also to support May and Short (2003) who state that *"technology is not nearly as important as other factors"*. These factors are the learning tasks, learner characteristics, student motivation and the instructor; that the attitude and thinking of the faculty or instructor is a key instrument in the success or otherwise of online learning. Learner characteristics have already been identified: for example persistence and self belief and the role of the tutor.

Although Alexander and Boud (2001, p4) claim that technology does not improve learning, this thesis provides evidence that learning is enhanced as this group of students were able to communicate and learn from one another in a congenial environment via the Internet. This means that less confident students had the opportunity to reflect and digest information before contributing to discussion boards. It also gave students the opportunity to re-read others students' contributions (recapping), gain ideas, thoughts, insights and thinking modes and develop critical thinking (Entwistle, 1984) as students dissected, interpreted, engaged in the discussions. On the whole this experience also contributes and adds to the opportunities for peer mentoring, peer support, peer learning as well as collaborative learning and this fits with the theoretical perspective that ultimately learning arises from what students' experience (Boud and Prosser, 2003).

Although one or two students agreed that weekly face-to-face tutorials would be beneficial, overall the consensus from the research is that the use of discussion boards as part of formative assessment and the ability to access materials via the Internet for research and for information outweighs any disadvantages of the lack of more regular meetings and tutorials. Students adapted easily to using a virtual learning environment with little or no teaching and technical difficulties, although not specifically reported on, seemed to be minor.

The main findings from the research, therefore, highlight the importance and use of e-learning to student achievement, motivation, and as a tool and mechanism for learning. E-learning is now an important part of modern education and is hugely important for the expansion of Higher and Further Education especially in the light of widening participation, as it affords the learner access to learning that is affordable, flexible, convenient and adaptable to the needs of adult students. The research has also added to the field of e-learning by providing evidence that this combination of on-line learning and face-to-face contact not only helps with the widening participation agenda but also with reducing on line learning attrition rates.

According to Kember (1995) on-line learning on its own is not overly conducive to maintaining student motivation as online learners tend to drop out of online instruction much earlier or more frequently than they do in traditional classroom instruction. The blend of traditional classroom teaching and support online, however, known as blended learning is the way forward for organisations involved in the delivery of distance learning

and this is being increasingly recognised and in line with Bradford et al (2008) who claim that the use of educational technology such as Blackboard complements very well traditional instruction.

3.1 New Patterns of Learning

New patterns of learning have been identified for this thesis which shows how adaptable this body of students is in overcoming hurdles, as well the complexities of adapting to new modes of learning within the changing domain of Higher Education. The research shows that technology, this more accessible modern way of learning, is enabling adults to take advantage of learning opportunities. It also further identifies student strategies as they sought to overcome the absence of face-to-face tutor contact, few group meetings and limited peer to peer contact. This they did by fostering supportive groups formed at day schools but also online using the discussion boards or email.

Students knew that they needed to develop strategies to enlist the help of all those around them. Other students, tutors and work colleagues and to their surprise, 'Blackboard', the Virtual Learning Environment, also helped in a way that was unexpected, invaluable, exciting and even "*fantastic*", 1STU512101. The research has highlighted that the inclusion of e-learning into course delivery promotes effective autonomous and self-directed learning but also that peer and tutor support are essential to improving and maintaining student motivation. For most students this was a new mode of learning but most students adapted to e-learning favourably.

The advancement of computers, the development of affordable Internet and the extensive development of the world-wide-web have changed communication and learning and have also opened up opportunities for adult learning that would not have existed earlier in a way that is accessible, flexible, convenient, motivational and supportive. Distance learning education has been around for many years and opened up opportunities for part-time distance learning but the speed at which the Internet allows communication to take place between students and tutors and student to student has out maneuvered and out shone this older sibling. Technology has forever changed the way learning can be delivered. In the early days of the Foundation Degree, the adult students adapted quickly to learning technology and although initially they often felt that their preference was teacher led, they quickly realized the advantages and benefits of Internet learning delivery. We see during this research, *“I thought I needed to be told what to do”*. Students quickly adapted and became self-directed learners (Knowles, 1980, p267) and from the evidence presented in this thesis, technology benefits students by:

- 1 Giving access to information for research,
- 2 Giving greater control and freedom over learning materials,
- 3 Giving students power over when they learn, how they learn and what they learn,
- 4 Diminishing the need for regular ‘traditional’ lectures,
- 5 Increasing the need for contact time to be freed up for engaging in meaningful learning activities and group work,
- 6 Improving communication between peers and tutors,
- 7 Providing greater opportunities for co-operative peer learning,

- 8 Helping students make the transition from dependent learners to self-directed learners (Knowles, 1984, p9).

The VLE and online learning allows students to be flexible about not only when they learn but how they learn. Students developed strategies for handling multiple assignments, dealing with the isolation by networking and forming supportive groups both online and in the classroom. Without regular face-to-face contact with other students and tutors, they found Blackboard, “*reassuring – still there*”, meaning the course is still there and therefore they are still part of it. This in turns helps with motivation to work in isolation, knowing that others are doing the same. Discussion Boards reaffirm this.

As students did not meet physically except for the six day schools a year, they attempted to recreate the support online by looking for and reading messages and this is encouraged by the use of discussion boards for formative assessment. In this way, students received feedback and encouragement. This includes feedback on their own performance and the performance of other students and, therefore, students can better gauge what level they should be working towards. Seeing other students work is valued by students in order to evaluate their own progress and identify what is required. Students who move as a cohort increase group coherence, an important advantage particularly for e-learning where relationships are formed and continue on line (Kember, 1999).

Course organisation helped reduce attrition rates by providing a supportive environment. Small group work helped students learn from one another, evaluate their own progress

and needs, and establish relationships with other students. As well as this, the inclusion of discussion boards, where students can communicate voluntarily yet also are required to contribute for formative assessment, means that students are encouraged to discuss and share ideas. The less confident learner cannot totally abscond from involvement. Communicating by discussion boards also gives equal opportunity for all students to contribute to discussion as it avoids confrontation and because it is not real-time, allows time for reflection and thought prior to uploading contributions. The negative aspect of asynchronous communication, that of lack of body language, not knowing who you are talking to, and potential misinterpretation of text messages was not markedly problematic.

Online education gives much more freedom to the learner to find resources to define and meet their own learning goals within the framework of the broad goals required for formative assessments. This in turn can increase transferable independent learning skills which can be used at work. This point is raised by one student who feels she is now able to write reports better at work because of the skills learned for the Foundation Degree. *“Everything you do, you are growing and at some point, information you have learned, becomes useful to you.”*

4 ISSUES CONCERNING SUPPORT

Support is a strong theme emerging from the research and served to maintain motivation in the early days of the Foundation Degree. It is clear from the research that day schools provided the platform and mechanism for engagement on a social level. The fact that students did not meet regularly increased these group support mechanisms, especially as students could turn to the discussion boards or email to seek or give support, learn from each other and compare their progress by reading other people's work. This was important to students who, as previously reported, knowing where they are compared to others in the group increased motivation and gave students valuable feedback. However, one area where there was little evidence of support was from immediate employers and line managers and sometimes this was negative and included the withholding of information important to their work for the Foundation Degree.

Learning from one another or peer learning emerged as a strong theme overall. What we can, therefore, conclude is the importance of support in the form of peer and colleague support, tutor support, family support as well as students being given the opportunity to support and learn from one another in a group setting and the Internet. In the early days, peer support also helped maintain motivation.

5 WIDENING PARTICIPATION AND GENDER ISSUES

Baroness Kennedy stated in the introduction to her influential report, *Learning Works* (Further Education Funding Council, 1997):

“A nation’s well-being, as well as its ability to compete, is conditioned by a single pervasive social characteristic – the level of social capital inherent in the society. Education has always been a source of social vitality and the more people we can include in the community of learning, the greater the benefits to us all. The very process involves interaction between people; it is the means by which the values and wisdom of a society are shared and transmitted across the generations. Education strengthens the ties which bind people, takes the fear out of difference and encourages tolerance. It helps people to see what makes the world tick and the ways in which they, individually and together, can make a difference. It is the likeliest means of creating a modern, well-skilled workforce, reducing levels of crime, and creating participating citizens”.

This research has highlighted many of the themes contained in the speech and shown that the inclusion of a body of non-traditional students in Foundation Degrees has contributed to human and social capital - the ability, skill and knowledge of individuals (Balatti, 2002). Education for women, particularly mature adult women, however, also takes on a different perspective or meaning as for many women, their role as mother is deeply rooted and this role has paramount importance over doing the work for the Foundation Degree. Demands on their time are ‘greedy’. This being so, students often either put off returning to education until their offspring are off their hands or as the research has

identified, mothers with young children have difficulty balancing a job with managing the complexity that this causes them. Research into women returning to education by Green and Webb (1997, p143) produced evidence that they were often prompted by work-related factors and this would indicate that the Foundation Degree, with its work based focus, is particularly instrumental in meeting the needs of mature women and widening participation. These mainly female students were so supportive of one another yet were also in competition. For example, peer support, collaborative learning, communication and support groups are all part of the process as both the experience and learning process helping them to achieve their goals and outcomes. The inclusion of e-learning helps students create support groups in the absence of regular face-to-face meetings. Furthermore, Hayes et al (2000, p90) report that using discussion boards as a means of 'talk', helps women students by the fact that participants cannot interrupt one another. This point has also been identified from the research.

Although the vast majority of the student cohort was female, one male student talked about the issue of pressure of time and multiple roles he has to fulfil. Gender difference and the pressures on the student, their ability to cope with multiple roles and the barriers towards achieving their aspirations are a suitable topic for future research.

6 POLICY AND EMPLOYMENT

Mixed employer support or role conflict from the student's perspective as student/worker is highlighted in other research, for example (Edmond, Hillier and Price, 2007, p176) and Gibbs (2002) who question whether employer's motivation is to act in the interests of learners rather than themselves. Employer engagement is important for the success of the Foundation Degree. Although in the case of the Foundation Degree which is the focus of this research, employer involvement was minimal eg assessment and course organisation was not involved, the support for the student in terms of time to do the work for the degree, support in finding suitable topics for work-based modules was still vital and the withholding of this can impact on the student's motivation. However, despite some instances of poor support, what this research has shown is that student motivation, which was intrinsic, means that poor occurrences of employer support can be overcome particularly by the provision of good support from the learning provider.

Students also reported that they felt able to do their work better because they had more confidence, increased skills, more knowledge and ability. In addition, some students perceived their job now as being as more important or they were more valuable employees, taken more seriously or treated equally with fellow professionals. This in turn raised aspirations for some, gave better opportunities for promotion or change of job. *"The job was a higher grade with more responsibility and more scope for progression"*. This quotation is taken from a student who began the Foundation Degree in order to equip himself with the knowledge and skills to change jobs. Others report increasing opportunities at work or at least being able to remain in their job, *"I am totally funded by*

Beacon at my school 16 hours which ceases this year well they could have actually said goodbye [name] but because I have actually got so involved with ICT and made myself a little bit indispensable they are wanting to keep me on". Other reported changes are: "I have become more proficient at report writing", (Office Manager); "I have been able to bring theory in to augment my practical knowledge, and in Marketing, the theory actually made me realise we were mistaken in the direction we were taking" (Bursar at a large multi-cultural comprehensive school).

Students began the Foundation Degree with a certain perception of the benefits of doing a degree and there is evidence to suggest from this research that actual benefits are wider ranging and exceeded these perceived benefits. For example, 'Progression at work' was one of the perceived benefits contained in Chapter 4. The research has identified that this perceived benefit has been fulfilled by raising self esteem, 'I see myself as more important' (3STU42655), by increased value by their employing organisation, 'people are recognizing I am doing a course and already at work letting me have more access to documentation' (2STU915867), by gaining responsibility, 'I am more involved in the decision making process at school now' (3STU111127) and finally students report they are being taken seriously, "I have proved I am serious about it. It's not just a 'little job'". (3STU111227)

The espoused aims of Higher Education may be defined as "critical thinking" or "moving from the uncritical acceptance of orthodoxy to creative dissent . . . the critical faculty sharpened to the point at which it can change ideas" (Entwistle, 1984, p5) but to this should now be added 'personal transferable skills' which are increasingly valued by

employers (problem-solving, communication skills and working effectively with others). Although there may be a perception within Higher Education, with employers and students that Foundation Degrees are sub degrees, what this research has shown is that for students the experience is a valuable one, placing them on the ladder to achieving the Honours Degree and that students themselves, in their actions, aspire to meet the levels of Higher Education, are excited and challenged and it means much to them.

'Education improves quality of life' (Dearing, National Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997). The thesis has identified how this is achieved and highlighted the benefits to students both personally and to their work. Feinstein and Hammond (2004) claim that there is a lack of research into the benefits of adult education apart from the economic returns eg enhanced earnings or productivity. This thesis, which is aimed at giving students a voice, has also identified not only benefits to self esteem but also realisation of aspiration and this in turn leads to greater confidence both socially as well as in employment. The current agenda is to give opportunities to mature adult learners to achieve their aspirations for whom without the Internet and digital communications, this would not be possible, practical, feasible or affordable. This may be particularly true for lone parents and non-traditional adult female students.

Students are pleased with themselves, proud of their achievement late in life and although some perceived that the benefits would not necessarily lead to better paid employment, some were doing it for themselves to be like their offspring albeit, *'doing their life backwards'* (STU108498). Much is currently talked about the positive benefits of

learning and aging (LSC, 29 October 2006) and the importance of ‘*continuous learning at every stage of life to ensure the brain remains healthy and brain deterioration is kept at bay*’; thus the benefits of undertaking a degree later in life should also be seen within this context and provide a valuable benefit to the aging process.

7 THE FOUNDATION DEGREE

The following has been sub-divided into three sections; the first is about The Foundation Degree, the second is about Opportunity and the third is about the value of the Foundation Degree to students. These are presented as follows:

- 7.1 The Foundation Degree
- 7.2 Opportunity and the Foundation Degree
- 7.3 Value of the Foundation Degree to the student

7.1 The Foundation Degree

“But we’re all natural learners.” (Learning and Skills Council, 2007)

The White Paper, ‘*The Future of Higher Education*’ (2003b), denoted the development of Foundation Degrees as a major area for future growth in student numbers. An evaluation of these courses carried out by York Consulting (2004) has suggested that they are particularly attractive to people lacking more formal qualifications such as A-levels. Mature students and those in employment may also be drawn to Foundation Degrees, which can be carried out full time over two years or part time over a longer period. Evidence from the evaluation by York Consulting also reported that institutions involved felt that at both operational and strategic levels, Foundation Degrees were contributing to the widening participation agenda. This thesis corroborates these findings and has also identified that the group of non-traditional Higher Education students enrolled on the Foundation Degree in Educational Administration had been searching for a suitable qualification to support them to achieve their aspirations and that the Foundation Degree

fulfilled the required criteria. Gorard et al (2006), in research for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), highlights the fact that research is required to show whether Foundation Degrees are “*are attracting new learners who would have accessed other provision if the Foundation Degree programme had not been available*”. This thesis is not a comparative study of other similar educational programs and cannot, therefore, concur that the Foundation Degree has filled a gap in the market that other qualifications did not offer. The Foundation Degree in Education Administration, however, has a special attraction for learners. The benefits are that it was designed as a work-based qualification and this research has found evidence of the advantages of creating degrees to support students at work, particularly in areas that have traditionally not been catered for. For example, the perceived benefits that students hoped the Foundation Degree would deliver were exceeded by actual benefits. Actual benefits to the student emerged both in their working lives and also to their confidence and self-esteem (raising status, raising self-confidence and self-esteem, raising aspirations, removing barriers, changing employer’ perceptions, increased commitment to their work and increased responsibility).

Students on the Foundation Degree also recognised their need for both skills and the opportunity to raise their status within their employing organisation and grasped the opportunity to educate themselves, both achieving a degree they felt they were denied earlier and also by studying a subject that is relevant to their lives and work.

Funding is a major enabler allowing many students to embark upon the Foundation Degree as the majority of the students admitted that they would not be able to afford to pay the fees themselves. Other factors were release from family commitments as their children grew up and freed them to realise their potential. *“I think it is because I have got everything behind me now and I can concentrate on things I want to do, the family are independent and I reached a stage where you can be what you want to be”* 1STU108038. The part-time Foundation Degree, with its focus on work and the inclusion of the Internet in delivery provided the opportunity. This research shows, however, that funding is important, particularly for women students and especially, younger females.

7.2 Opportunity and the Foundation Degree

As already identified in this thesis, opportunity, removing barriers and progression are key factors in enabling student aims to be realised. These aims derive from previous educational failure that left the students with a residue of aspiration to achieve more than they had earlier. Opportunity is identified from the research, therefore, as a marked outcome. The dictionary definition of opportunity is *“chance”* or *“break”*. This research has shown that the Foundation Degree has provided this and given students this chance or break to fulfil aspirations of gaining a degree but as cited by Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998), adult learners learn best when it is relevant to lives eg when life situations create a need to learn. Some students had been actively searching for a work relevant degree; for some a leaflet dropped on their desk or was ‘intervened’ or received in the post. For others their employing organisation required them to be working towards a degree. Therefore, there were a variety of sources that informed students of the

availability of the Foundation Degree. However, all of the students had aspirations and were motivated, despite past failures, to gain a Higher Education qualification. The Foundation Degree, would appear, therefore, to meet student needs in three dimensions: Firstly it is a work-based degree and therefore relevant to their lives. Secondly it is part time and delivered by blended learning which affords them flexibility to fit the work in with their busy lives and thirdly it is at a lower level than an Honours Degree which the students feel comfortable with, having been out of learning for some time. Foundation Degrees are successful in attracting non-traditional learners.

It is claimed that Foundation Degrees are aimed at widening participation into Higher Education, particularly for non-traditional entrants and to “*help students to become familiar with work and help them reflect on such experience*” (DFEE, 1998), as well as up-dating skills at the “*higher technician and associate professional level*” (Foskett, 2003). This is also in line with the Government’s aim to ensure Britain’s ability to compete in the global market. This research has identified that opportunity, removing barriers and progression are key factors in enabling these aims to be realised and concludes this objective has been achieved but more importantly, that it has opened up horizons for those participating, has stimulated and enlightened as well as aided self-motivation and progression. In this sense, it can also be judged to have been a success

7.3 Value of the Foundation Degree to the student

As Stickland (2006) argues there needs to be a greater understanding of the value and success of the Foundation Degree from the student’s perspective. This thesis has

produced evidence of the value to the student in terms of perceived increased confidence and self-esteem both socially and at work. It has also enabled students to meet their often long held aspirations of gaining a degree, offered a future where progression to an Honours Degree is presented and taken up by the majority of students in a way that is both flexible, affordable and achievable. In addition students reported increased job prospects, promotion or in gaining new employment. Personal skills and abilities are reported to have been increased eg determination, increased communication skills, “*I can bring theory into an argument*”, increased persuasion, improved presentation and writing skills, greater awareness and understanding, in all personal growth. As stated earlier, value to the student is life enhancing, leading towards feelings of self-worth and greater self-esteem.

There is, therefore, evidence from this research of the wider benefits arising from learning apart from purely economic and monetary benefits and this is currently an area of interest to the Government. As a result, in 1999, The Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL) was created by the Department for Education and Skills (then the Department for Education and Employment) to investigate the benefits gained from ‘*learning across the life course*’ (WBL, 2006).

In summation, Baroness Helena Kennedy remarked on one of the key features of our education system: “*If at first you don’t succeed — you don’t succeed*” (LSC, 2002). This thesis provides some evidence that this is not factually correct. This group of students are not automatically self-confident and are in need of support both from other

people and in the use of technology – they are eclectic consumers, but this thesis also presents evidence that adults are intrinsically motivated to learn despite earlier failures but that other issues and concerns are more important. In order to attract these adult learners, the conditions that have to exist are: ease, flexibility, affordability and relevance to their work. The new paradigm of Foundation Degrees would appear to fit these conditions.

8 FUTURE RESEARCH

Several areas of the research have uncovered suitable projects for future research. These are suggested as follows:

- Pragmatism has been identified as students struggle to cope with multiple roles but what is unclear from this research is whether this is a personal predisposition or born out of the need, raised during experience of achieving the Foundation Degree, to be successful. However, this has implications for course organisation (blended learning and pedagogy).
- Self directed learning has emerged from the research in relation to successful student learning and achievement requiring the student to self-diagnose learning skills, set goals, and select learning strategies. Hayes et al (2000) point out that it is an individual orientation and is culturally context, being primarily western, middle class and masculine. Brockett et al (2000) suggests that self directed learning research should in the future focus on how people engage and manage their self-directed learning using blended learning.
- Although, this research has raised several issues suggesting that Foundation Degrees are attracting a new cohort of learners, as the sample is a small one and with specific educational goals tailored to educational administration, further research with a greater number of students across a wider spread of educational purpose is needed.

- More research is needed on whether the Foundation Degree or the top up to a full Honours Degree actually helps students in their careers or whether it simply gives student greater self-esteem and worth, the realization of ambitions etc as shown in this thesis. This is important if employers are to be encouraged to support learners more fully.
- This research also appears to point to the fact that students have personally derived much from the degree. What is less certain, however, is whether employers have benefited. What are employer perceptions of the reported student changes for example are students performing better at their jobs?
- The research identified that some students used discussion boards to assess their performance and that of others and also to organise themselves into supporting groups. Whether these are purely a female associated activities cannot directly be substantiated by this thesis and would need further research.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Interview consent form and ethics document

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: _____

**INTERVIEW
TIME** _____

DAY/MONTH _____

Location of interview	
Name of Interviewer	Mrs H W Thelwell
Purpose of Interview	You have kindly agreed to take part in this interview as part of my EdD research into the student experience of the Foundation Degree.
Length of interview	No longer than 60 minutes.
Research data	The interview will be recorded on a tape recorder and notes may be made by the Interviewer. These will be destroyed after the end of the research period and following analysis. You may ask for the tape recorder to be stopped at any time.
Confidentiality	All information will be strictly confidential and your name will not be included. The only information that is needed from you of a personal nature is gender, age, and job title.
Special instructions 1	The interviewer is instructed not to comment on any answers or indicate approval or disapproval of any information that you give.
Special instructions 2	You may withdraw from the interview at any time.

To the respondent:

Please read the above form. At the end of the interview, please sign and date one copy of this document and hand to the Interviewer. You should sign and retain the second copy.

SIGNED _____

DATE _____

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – 2nd INTERVIEWS

AIMS

2ND MEETING AIMS

To clarify meanings to ensure that interpretation is correct

To develop and build on themes identified from the data ie e-learning/learning styles ie aural/visual,

To follow up leads provided in first interviews (ie things not anticipated that may or may, not be relevant)

To identify further (unknown) issues/themes around learning

To identify further E-learning issues

GENERAL THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

1. **How many didn't like learning facts like history**
2. How many feel have unsatisfied ambitions that were not catered for at school.
3. Did their school experiences leave them with unfulfilled ambitions or desires to succeed
4. What is it they want to succeed at
5. To identify further (unknown) issues/themes.

TYPE OF QUESTIONS TO ASK

NOTE: **who, when, what how** and **why** questions allow you to uncover the properties, dimensions, conditions and consequences of action of course of events.

How do you (construct) _____

How to you handle _____

Why do you _____

When did you decide to (get them to explain how they proceeded from one step to another)

Why did you (get them to explain how they proceeded from one step to another)

How did you (get them to explain how they proceeded from one step to another)

Where did you (get them to explain how they proceeded from one step to another)

1 METAPHORS

Say, at our last interview you used the metaphor ??? to explain ????

When you said ????? what did you **intend** it to mean – can you expand? or

What **meaning does it have to you** – can you tell describe ????? to me in other words

2 CLARIFICATION (to ensure I have interpreted it correctly or that it is what they meant to say.

Put in anything that you couldn't hear/understand or you want them to explain further.

3 BUILDING ON PERSONAL IDENTIFIED THEMES

EXAMPLE FROM STUDENT

I did this particular LD course it was literally sitting there it would give you some information and a little test afterwards the information is very basic you couldn't ask further questions and there was no way you could say "that's interesting" or "how can I do this" "how do you go back on with that" you couldn't do that. I didn't have the tutor support I was I supposed to have. Every time I emailed, I didn't get anything back and basically it was appalling and I didn't finish the course. It was awful.

Q What steps have you taken with the FOUNDATION DEGREE to get round the above problems?

Q If you had to sum up the way you like to learn what would you say: (think of history/learning dates/exam technique).

Take things they have said and ask 'do you still feel the same now'

Q Do you still feel the same now about discussion boards Blackboard

Q Do you still feel the same about using the discussion boards (reading everything)

Q Do you still feel the same about the day schools

Q Do you still feel the same about reading (likes to skim read)

Q Do you still retain a belief in your abilities

Q Do you still feel the same about time/role management

Q Do you still feel the same about your goals to get the Foundation Degree

- Q Do you still feel the same about course work being best for you
- Q Do you feel the same about the goal of getting the degree in that you said it would help you in your career

**4 DEVELOPING GENERAL THEMES
(rediscovery/unfulfilled potential/need to prove self/adapting learning style/empty nest/something not finished – earlier experience)**

Include general themes identified through the 1st research that you think interesting or relevant ie

- Q Why do you feel you need to the Foundation Degree now?
- Q Is there anything from your past learning experiences that the Foundation Degree gives you?
- Q Is there anything you need to prove to yourself?
- Q Is there anything in your current life that the Foundation Degree benefits you in? (prompt) Anything you do/think/feel differently.
- Q Is there another time in your life when you were tempted to do a degree? What stopped you? Answered already.
- Q Is there anything in your past that the Foundation Degree fills? (prompt) Things you wished you had done earlier.
- Q How are you handling conflicts over time management
- Q How are you dealing with role conflict
- Q How do you feel you have changed your learning style?

5 DILEMMAS

Ask them to tell if how they resolved, whether it is still outstanding and if so, what are they doing about it/what decisions are they making/what are they trying to do to resolve it.

6 CODING/CATEOGIRES

Ask for further comment on personal codes

7 ABOUT BLACKBOARD

ABOUT BLACKBOARD

Q Could you tell me what you think are the positive things about using Blackboard.

Q Could you tell me what the negative things are about Blackboard?

Q Could you tell me what problems you are encountering?

Q Could you tell me if there are any particular circumstances or incidents that have happened (could be good or bad or indifferent)

Q Could you tell me what you think about the way Blackboard is laid out on screen.

Q What are the things on Blackboard that are difficult or easy

Q What improvements could be made?

Q How many times a week do you use Blackboard and for how long.

Q How has Blackboard helped you learn

Q Does it suit your learning style? If No please say why, If Yes, please say why

Q How do you select what to do – what are the steps.

Q What do you think you know now you didn't know, before the course started.

--- OoOoO---

Q Ask what skills or knowledge do you think you need to use Blackboard and access course materials (look for tacit knowledge or other knowledge)

Q What do you like about using Blackboard

Q What don't you like

Q What is missing from Blackboard

Q How could it be improved

Q How has using Blackboard helped you learn

a) How long is a typical Blackboard session for you – how many times a week

b) Does it vary depending on the closeness to day schools/assignments/other

c) Do you read all the materials and discussions

d) How do you select what to read

e) Are the reading materials useful

f) How important did you find Blackboard materials to help you understand the topics

g) How important did you find Blackboard materials to help you learn about the topics

h) What do you mainly use Blackboard for

Q Are there any particular incidents (difficulties or things you observed or think) (ie language, volume

Q Before you upload anything onto Blackboard, what decisions do you make

a) What are your thoughts or feelings after you have contributed to a discussion board

Q Are there any aspects of the interface (way it looks and works) that you like/don't like

Q When you meet at day school, whom do you seek out to talk to

Q How do you feel about people when you read their discussions

a) When you read the discussions, how do you decide which ones to respond to

Q What do you think are the difficulties about learning online

a) IT skills

- b) Knowing how Blackboard is structured
- c) Do you think there are things that are not being utilized on Blackboard
- d) Is there anything we could do to improve
- e) Is it good or better than face to face tutorials and lectures

How does Blackboard substitute for traditional face to face tutorials and lectures?

Correlation with style of course delivery (ie the Internet/Blackboard/taught elements)

8 THE FOUNDATION DEGREE

What are your positive experiences so far on the Foundation Degree?

What are your negative experiences so far on the Foundation Degree?

What difficulties have you encountered so far (if different from above)

What have you found easy so far on the Foundation Degree?

What have you found particularly difficult on the Foundation Degree?

What are your major problems/obstacles on the course and in using the on-line learning materials and the Blackboard interface.

When do you decide to contact your tutor?

APPENDIX 3

Previous Educational Experience

STUDENT	POSITIVE EXPERIENCES	NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES	AMBIVALENT EXPERIENCES
1STU511922			I would imagine that I would be remembered as a pupil who never did anything wrong but perhaps never did anything remarkable that I would be that well remembered for. Perhaps one of these pupils that slip into the background a little bit because I never did anything bad but never do anything really good.
3STU21026		At school I think they were interested in pushing those who had been accepted by Oxford and Cambridge if they got the grade and I felt neglected.	
2STU65081			Oh it does that's why I am doing it really. It's because I am disappointed with myself for not achieving previously either completing the Access course/on a similar/I know it is slightly higher the Foundation degree but I look at it on a similar level to the access course it's the next thing up from school leaving qualifications and so it's important to me that I do this because I feel that haven't achieved previously for me not for anybody else.
1STU64724		I felt disappointed actually. I did feel disappointed I felt	

		again that I hadn't achieved – I felt dissatisfied – it was something else I had started that I couldn't finish – I should have finished the Access course	
1ALEX9779		I don't – no I don't feel anything is beyond me. It is whether I want to do it and that is my biggest stumbling block and it always has been.	
1STU41486	I think I was a very good pupil I listened I reacted to teachers, I behaved myself, I enjoyed school to a certain extent. I like challenge I achieved a lot of things when I was at school.		
1STU32991	I went to a Grammar School and I just went through Grammar School not finding it very hard.		
1STU64595		I can't honestly think I did particularly enjoy school for the last couple of years – I mean sort of I still did reasonably OK but I could have done a lot, lot better had I put my mind to it.	
1STU75880	Yes, I was quite easy going and laid back, probably too laid back,		

	learning yes, [pause] sometimes I couldn't be bothered. I just didn't think it was that important really.		
1STU813297		Yes, I thought my . . . I loved geography and I must. Yes, I quite enjoyed those. I must admit I was always one of the top ones. I was always in the top stream right through secondary. I failed. I think what hurt me was I failed the 11+ at that time and all my friends went to technical schools and grammar schools and I was the only one I didn't and I think it was my downfall that I actually had to sit a test and what's why I failed it.	
1STU915745			I think I always do well when I am taught and it could be in any situation but with somebody with enthusiasm so I mean basically sitting at school we all remember the maths lessons when, well say I had a geography teacher he was appalling was very boring and it was just statistics and I hated the lessons and I probably didn't do very well at that subject.
3STU814312		It's gone right back to when I was at school. Not being a very good reader probably my	

		reading age would be a lot lower than it should have been. I hated reading out loud	
2STU813529		Probably I think I was talking about spelling. When she slapped me I was not spelling something correctly and I always found spelling a hindrance when I was younger and it is something that you develop with your vocabulary	
1STU19675		I didn't try my best. I didn't do as well as I could have done. I was not disruptive but I could have/was leaning towards that certainly didn't do as well as I could have done.	
2STU512467			I think it was probably the/when I was being educated in high school it was time when comprehensive education was just really in it's infancy and the switch from grammar schools to secondary modern had just taken place and I think it was the system I just fell into a 'bit of a hole' and probably people of my generation fell into a bit of a hole where we weren't quite good enough for grammar school.
			Yes, I never stopped in that desire to learn but I played it down a little bit I down more low key things I did a couple of counselling

			courses, so I did shorter courses. 2STU512571
2STU916166			Yes, I am not looking any further to be honest. People keep saying why are you doing this degree what do you want to do and I am doing this personally because I feel I should have done one when I was younger. I am doing it because if I am just still at school in another 3 years time I won't be any better off really I will still be in that kind of job so it's an investment in me
1STU813289		It is just my sheer hard work, over the years, going back to college, I mean I took CSE's at school, I got 6 CSE's, and I did really well but more on the academic side like geography, history, that type of thing, and it was always my English that I fell down on but I think it was lack of confidence really and probably the teachers. Um, I always do remember when I was about 6 or 7 I could not spell this particular word. It has always struck in my mind I always got in the wrong way round. I remember the teacher actually slapping me on the leg. It really knocked my confidence, it really	

		did, it's still there, I was only about 7. 1STU813289	
1STU64595			I can't honestly think I did particularly enjoy school for the last couple of years – I mean sort of I still did reasonably OK but I could have done a lot, lot better had I put my mind to it. I can't think of anything that I actually excelled at – I don't look at my 4 years as being an achievement really I think I sort of made more of myself since I left school and I have been to educate myself in an area that I was interested in. 1STU64595

APPENDIX 4

Self-Belief

When I went to work, I went to work as a junior the company saw that obviously I had more potential 2STU42013
I went to a grammar school and I just went through Grammar School not finding it very hard really 1STU32991
I can't remember things, I can't remember dates, I can't remember, I can't remember any dates of kings and queens when they reigned, I just cannot remember anything like dates, I have to take things back to what they used to call first principles where you work out why something is, from the basic. 1STU33087
with regards to I suppose [thinks] ability that maths was always my weak subject so I was lower down in the sets for maths than I were in any other group in any other subject I did, so I suppose that was a bit of a non-achievement. 1STU232
Well probably I were aware that I probably didn't have the ability to get an A or a top mark but I had the ability to get the 2 nd top mark . . . 2STU2292
I didn't finish the Access no. That's my problem I start things . . . 1STU63700
I don't look at my 4 years as being an achievement really I think I sort of made more of myself since I left school and I have been to educate myself in an area that I was interested in. 1STU64595
I didn't go on to do A levels which in hindsight I regretted. I left school with GCSE's and went to secretarial college actually which I enjoyed. 1STU107901
I am quite open to new ways of learning and I like to work by myself as well. 1STU19730
Yes, definitely and I got 4 O levels – I should have got 10 [laughs] 2STU110412
I don't know how to express my own opinions because I can see the argument that everybody is putting forward so I find it hard to be critical and sift through the information to find out what is really relevant and important and because all this information is just a mass of information in my head, I get myself worked up with this desire to get something out of it but not knowing how to extract the information. 1STU511948
It is just my sheer hard work over the years, going back to college, I mean I took CSE's at school, I got 6 CSE's, and I did really well but more on the academic side like geography history that type of thing. 1STU813289
I think I always do well when I am taught and it could be in any situation. 1STU915745

APPENDIX 5

Internalisation and Externalisation

INTERNALISING	EXTERNALISING
<p>No I think I let myself down I am not doing it for anybody else I am doing it because I think I want to achieve something for me to say that yes I could have done it then and yes it has taken me 20 odd years [laughs] to get round to it. 3STU65531</p>	<p>I came from a working class family and my parents come from working class backgrounds when I look back they had this feeling of inadequacy too but we were working class we weren't meant to be educated we weren't meant to get jobs that paid us good money we were meant to be the labour force for other people and I have two brothers who are a few years older than me and I just followed in their footsteps we just left school when we were 16 we left school and got a job that was never any question of going to college, going into FE, HE – nobody at my school did that and I never remember any encouragement from teachers at school that you could go to college, no guidance whatsoever. 1STU511980</p>
	<p>Oh really down to family things really, I didn't have a very supportive family to be quite honest they just wanted me to get out and get a job where I could support myself. 2STU916170</p>
	<p>I didn't/I would have liked to have gone to university but financially my parents weren't able to – there were 4 of us. . . . I would have loved to have gone to university definitely. 2STU42013 2STU42013</p>
	<p>I suppose that at that age people have got ambitions for you and like sort of you disappoint them because they are ambitious for you because they think that you could have done better than you have done 3STU65523</p>
	<p>I think it was probably the/when I was being educated in high school it was time when comprehensive education was just really in it's infancy and the switch from grammar schools to secondary modern had just taken place and I think it was the system I just fell into a 'bit of a hole' and probably people of</p>

	my generation fell into a bit of a hole where we weren't quite good enough for grammar school or . . . 2STU512467
<p>My own barriers really, I left school with just a bundle of GSE's at that time and I have only ever done IT qualifications since and that's within the last 10 to 15 years to push up to being an ordinary typist to knowing how to use a word processor and I haven't done any studying since I left school so that's 25 years ago and to prove to me that when my father was alive he said if you "don't learn to read or write you will end up in a fish house" and really it's to prove to him that I can do it and to prove to myself I can do it (3STU814088)</p>	
	<p>I did think about this a couple of years ago I was doing another course at college and I think it goes back to my child hood. I was brought up in a working class family . . .realise that I had been carrying a big chip on my shoulder and I still do and that is a deep rooted feeling that because I came from a working class family and my parents come from working class backgrounds when I look back they had this feeling of inadequacy too but we were working class we weren't meant to be educated we weren't meant to get jobs that paid us good money we were meant to be the labour force for other people and I have two brothers who are a few years older than me and I just followed in their footsteps we just left school when we were 16 we left school and got a job that was never any question of going to college, going into FE, HE – nobody at my school did that and I never remember any encouragement from teachers at school that you could go to college, no guidance whatsoever. I actually left school and started working in a Bank and I was considered to be – wow – you know that is fantastic that somebody like her to get a job in a bank and so I think that feeling these feelings that I have of inferiority and inadequacy go right back to my childhood and the deep routed feelings that my parents had that were passed on to me and I am sure they wouldn't have</p>

	<p>intended to do that it was just the way they were, their feelings were reflected in me and now when I look back I can see that's why I became like I did and I still feel inadequate and doing this course now I am still questioning are you up to this [own name], can you do this. This is too hard for you I have these little voices in my head I keep putting myself down all the time. 1STU511980</p>
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APPENDIX 6

Unfulfilled Ambition

2STU33408	I think it does because I left school at 16 and then went straight out to work but a lot of my friends went on to do A levels and a degree. Through work I did do an HNC and then I went to college to do an HND but because of various family commitments I couldn't/at that time it was not the normal thing to go on and make an HND a degree. If you did an HND if you had just done A levels you did a degree and that doesn't exist any more. What most people do is if they do an HND they go on and do another year and make it a degree I didn't have that option.
2STU916156	Yes, I am not looking any further to be honest. People keep saying why are you doing this degree what do you want to do and I am doing this personally because I feel I should have done one when I was younger. I am doing it because if I am just still at school in another 3 years time I won't be any better off really I will still be in that kind of job so it's an investment in me.
2STU42013	I left before GCSE's to I did GCSE's at college at the same time as doing a secretarial course but from there obviously, when I went to work, I went to work as a junior the company saw that obviously I had more potential because I then went back on day release and did a legal executive course which is about law and thing like that I would have loved that university to go to university so I saw this as my opportunity to maybe make up for the time lost. I would have loved to have gone to university definitely.
2STU33589	I think they probably left me capable/if I had had the opportunity I could have gone to far higher education than I have.
3STU65531	No I think I let myself down I am not doing it for anybody else I am doing it because I think I want to achieve something for me to say that yes I could have done it then and yes it has taken me 20 odd years [Laughs] to get round to it
1STU19900	I am doing the course because I always knew that I should have got more qualifications when I was at school and it is a way of proving to myself not to anybody else that I can do it and I should have done it before. [Laughs].
3STU814088	I left school with just a bundle of GSE's at that time and I have only ever done IT qualifications since and that's within the last 10 to 15 years to push up to being an ordinary typist to knowing how to use a word processor and I haven't done any studying since I left school so that's 25 years ago and to prove to me that when my father was alive he said if you "don't learn to read or write you will end up in a fish house" and really it's to prove to him that I can do it and to prove to myself I can do it

APPENDIX 7

Student response to the theme of Opportunity

I sort of intercepted it [laughs] opening the post you see I intercepted. So I copied it and read it at. [laughs]. 2STU108575
I was really looking forward to doing something like this and then I saw the flyers come through at college. I scanned through them and we had a few actually and each one seemed to land on my desk. 1STU107951
I would have loved that university to go to university so I saw this as my opportunity to maybe make up for the time lost. 2STU42013
I think it's just that it is an opportunity really for somebody pays for me to do it. 3STU65472
It's not a compelling factor it was just that the opportunity arose and the school was prepared to pay for it. It was/unachieved ambition and an opportunity and so. 2STU65254
We are all 30's, 40's in age and are grasping this opportunity we have got to better ourselves and to learn more about the environment that we work in. 2STU512267
It's the opportunity. I probably would have done it if it was – it's not the time of my life it's the time of the environment I am working in working in educational admin at this time with the changes that are afoot and it's so fast moving at the moment and it's the desire to be up there with and be well qualified as education changes. 2STU512617
I have looked around for the last 2 years at all the prospectuses and not managed to pin anything down and I got the leaflet from this and read through it and thought Oh yeah that's for me that's just for me. 1STU915779
I have got a friend who works all hours, she works more hours than her husband and I would never swap with her I have got lovely kids, a nice house, a nice life and I am very happy with it and we might be short of money every now and then but I would not change it not now, you know, this is just something that has popped out of the blue and it's just perfect timing 2STU916174

APPENDIX 8

Examples of the importance of Funding

<p>“I wouldn’t have been able to. Single parent so in no way I . . . [LEA] are paying for 12 places and I was really pleased I got on.” 1STU11077I /1STU110069</p>
<p>“I have got LEA funding.” 2STU916415</p>
<p>“Financial no because we are lucky that the college will pay for it, I probably would not do it if I was doing it on my own [says slower, thoughtful] I don’t think I would have.” 3STU814128</p>
<p>Q “Would you have done it if you had to pay for it yourself?”</p>
<p>A “I wouldn’t have been able to afford it to be honest. So I would have liked to have done but realistically with 2 kids and that.” 3STU21172</p>
<p>“Again financially the university is funding it for me so at the moment. “ 1STU64887</p>
<p>“Well interestingly enough college said they would pay £500 towards it so I thought I will only do the 3 modules this year that means I have only got £88 to pay. “2STU108587</p>
<p>“I paid for the first year myself, now being paid by school, in turn paid by LEA” (Email 11/12/05) STU3</p>
<p>“My department is paying for me.” (Email 19.12.05) STU7</p>
<p>“The first year I funded myself and then I was able to find a source within the LEA who would pay the remainder.” (email 11/12/05) STU4</p>
<p>“Because that was also a plus factor why I wouldn’t complete or stick with it was because I didn’t have any financial costs.” 2STU65230</p>
<p>“Head actually saw the work I was doing and how it was benefiting the school, when it came to this year she said she felt terrible . . . they would pay my fees in full this year and next year they would pay half . . . they are paying half the cost of the fees for the whole course.” 3STU512780</p>

APPENDIX 9

Student perception of the level of Foundation Degree

To me personally. I think it is a euphemism for an HND. 2STU33983
I did an HNC in civil engineering and an HND in agriculture, and I think it is just a euphemism for both. 3STU33986
Q OK, So do you consider it is a degree
A No 3STU34008
Basic a lower level grounding 3STU65500
It means a lower level of a degree 3STU814080
Um maybe a basis a stepping stone 3STU814084
I think it's on par I would think it is on par with lecturers and tutors doing their cert ed. 3STU814188
Qualification. Um a way to further a career really. 3STU111099
Well funnily enough I don't think of myself as doing a Foundation Degree. Foundation I see is the beginning of something else something to build on so I am actually not aiming for a Foundation Degree I am aiming for a degree because I am intending to carry on and get the Honours Degree. 3STU512764
Um they mean to me in a way that it's for people who haven't just come out of say 6th form college or some kind of study it's giving you the opportunity to build up your skills rather than it just been thrown at you and having to do study at a higher level from the offset really but what it also means which is always at the back of my mind is that it's not a full degree and I don't know 3STU916480
Well obviously it is degree level so it is something I am familiar with.
Q In levels of what you are achieving are they on a par?
A No, No. [This student already has an Honours Degree in History] 3STU2830/ 3STU2842
Well I think some people think a Foundation Degree is very easy 3STU42514
To me foundation degree when I first heard it I thought that just contradicts itself

3STU77188
It means starting at the bottom and working up. 3STU109125
3STU42522 Yes, if I mentioned I was doing a degree that sounds much better than saying I am doing a foundation degree so I think sometimes it doesn't/it's a bit like in the older days when you used to have Polys and Universities here was definitely a difference between the 2 or people looked at them differently
3STU77196 Because I feel that a Foundation Degree isn't a full degree

APPENDIX 10

Barriers Table

BARRIERS		ENABLERS	
Internal	External	Internal	External
Mostly I think themselves		Self belief Peer Support - 3MLETH9157	
Gender			Self Belief
Background/roots		Regret, 3MLETH9189	Being paid for, I wouldn't have been able to. Single parent so in no way I, 1ALEX10077
2COL3640	I think when I completed my HND I would have liked to go on and do a degree but I couldn't afford, I had got a wife and a mortgage and a young family I couldn't afford to do that.		
Thinks, um, Practically, none at all, um, I think emotionally isn't the right word but we just making myself do it [speaks thoughtfully] 3COL4018	I couldn't get any financial support so that was a barrier. 3KA12776		
Suppose mental I had to/I was the barrier really that I had to decide that yes I was going to do it and when I decided I was going to do it actually			

<p>making myself do it. 3LIZ5508</p>			
			<p>My daughter started high school last year so I didn't have the constraints of her running around/I still have to run around but she is a bit more independent now so I don't have to think about well my evenings are spent on bathtime or bedtime/she does that all herself now so I am freed up in that respect so no that wasn't a barrier so that was probably her age probably contributed to my decision to try to do it. 3LIZ5515</p>
<p>Um something I never thought I would do at the time I thought/I am doing my life back to front um I didn't know whether I could have done it actually. 3MLETH9157</p>			
			<p>I didn't have any barriers at work because I have got such a supportive boss. She is very hot on professional development of all sorts so as</p>

			<p>soon as I said last year that I wanted to do it she was fully in support of it. The only thing was that the school didn't help me financially. I couldn't get any financial support so that was a barrier. 3KA12776</p>
<p>My own barriers really 3MDEL14088</p>	<p>um I left school with just a bundle of GSE's 3MDEL14088</p>		<p>when my father was alive he said if you "don't learn to read or write you will end up in a fish house" and really it's to prove to him that I can do it and to prove to myself I can do it. 3MDEL14088</p>
<p>None really. I would say the only thing that I was worried about was whether I would be able to cope with the work that was my biggest fear because I had only been here a year as well but you know I have managed to keep/I don't have a social life as well laughs. 3ALEX11155</p>			
<p>Thinks, Um, Practically, none at all um I think</p>			

<p>Emotionally, it's the fight word bar code. I suspect mental health to litigate barrier thoughtfully had to do with yes I was</p>			
<p>going to do it and when I decided I was going to do it actually making myself do it erm3LIZ5508</p>	<p>Only the fact that I obviously had to go back to academic writing and having to do/I sometimes</p>		
	<p>think it is very, very strange that you have to have a full stop and a comma in a certain way in the Harvard referencing. 3ERNA2538</p>		<p>Um thinks I suppose I don't know whether this is what you mean but the most thing was the time doing the degree I</p>
			<p>I thought have OK. Fine things when books I have got such a hard time for this degree I thought well I do this professionally and I'm not a professional that's easy so I'm not least I have got that I know that I should do it. BK 10 2576</p>
	<p>The only thing</p>		<p>3MAN7200</p>
	<p>was the client's working full time and working after a family and any anything support and doing the degree on top of that. It's the</p>		

	time finding that time and doing/that were the biggest thing. 3MAN7200		
My own barriers really um I left school with just a bundle of GSE's at that time and I have only ever done IT qualifications since and that's within the last 10 to 15 years to push up to being an ordinary typist to knowing how to use a word processor and I haven't done any studying since I left school so that's 25 years ago and to prove to me that when my father was alive he said if you "don't learn to read or write you will end up in a fish house" and really it's to prove to him that I can do it and to prove to myself I can do it. 3MDEL140880			
None really. I would say the only thing that I was worried about was whether I would be able to cope with the work that was my biggest fear because I had only been here a year as well but you know I			

<p>have managed to keep/I don't have a social life as well laughs. 3ALEX11155</p>			
<p>Again balance of home life really because I have young children I am the kind of mom who is hands on and the reason why I work part-time is because I go home after school with my kids and that's when we have time as a family to do things. I also find it very important to do things with/as a whole family at the weekend. I am finding it/the work isn't impossible it isn't it's manageable it's difficult when things come up time/you know at the last/there's just been too many things going on er so it's really just been balancing/I've balanced everything work my home life and my studying. 3MIN16488</p>			

BARRIERS		ENABLERS	
<u>Internal</u>	<u>External</u>	<u>Internal</u>	<u>External</u>
Motivation 3COL4018	Financial support 2COL3615 3KA12776	Self-belief 3MLETH9157	Peer support 3MLETH9157
Self-belief 3MLETH9157	Family commitments 2COL3640 3MAN7200 3MIN16488	Regret 3MLETH9189	Funding 1ALEX10077
Self motivation 3MDEL14088 3LIZ5508	Lack of Previous Academic Achievement 3MDEL14088	Set example/ offspring 2ALEX10460	Reducing family commitments 3LIZ5515, 2MLETH8969, 3LIZ5515 2MLETH8969
Coping (with work) 3ALEX11155	Academic Standards 3ERNA2538		Support (work) 3KA12776
Make self to it (motivation) 3COL4018	Time 3MAN7200 3KA12788		Parental pressure EMDEL14088
Personal standards (setting high standards) 3KA12788			Work based – familiar 3MAN7200
Confidence (3min16492)			Example Set By Offspring 1ERNA1574

APPENDIX 11

Peer Support

<p>“Yes [name] is on the course as well. She is only doing two modules and so she is on the course as well and we quite often talk about things.” 1STU41671</p>
<p>There is a lady who does work for [LEA] and she’s in my afternoon group and if she was not in my afternoon group I think I would feel very lost in the afternoon group but she works at a primary school which is similar size and in a similar are and we are doing very similar work so I feel that she is probably the closest contact” 1STU110053.</p>
<p>“I think that’s/if it wasn’t for the others doing it I would feel completely alone and probably would not have the confidence to complete it. If that was the case I might give up. 1STU813521.</p>
<p>“Well because we do look after each other in lots of ways”. 3STU42902</p>
<p>“Oh no, I think that/even though I am not on contact with her every day or month it’s nice to know she is there and perhaps if there is something I don’t want to bother [tutor] with I can call her first and then if she thinks it is a reasonable question to put to [tutor] then you know.” 2STU65274</p>
<p>“For moral support it’s very good yes I think now I am into it and now I know what is expected I could but whether I would have done it on my own. I think it’s nice/I have never done any studying at all since school apart from IT course I took. It was a CLAIT course when they first came out about ten years ago and but it’s nice having support and it’s very strange studying the way that we are.” 2STU813624</p>
<p>“Erm, depends what I get stuck on. I would probably email [Tutor] if I am stuck but depending upon what it is I would just say nothing. What about this what do you think because that’s what we normally do and we help each other out and there are 5 of us in the office and we sort of “oh I am stuck on this what shall I do” and we help each other out.” 1STU76462</p>

APPENDIX 12

Student perception of progress

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	AMBIVALENT
3STU21176	No I think I just - touch wood - the ones that I have had back I have not had many changes to make so I guessing that I am doing most of it right, so yes I think I have got most of them sorted out but this one may come back.		
1STU41566	I have/I have come/I haven't done any education over 25 years and I have realised that perhaps I am not using my potential any more and it is given me the opportunity to think about things more and I am certainly looking at things differently now, since I started the course I am questioning things much more than I ever used to		
2STU108874	The first few did yes and then I sort of got [can't hear] to myself because it meant/I was striking out being organized I was striking out the weekend in my diary saying the weekend is to sort out what I have got to do and start the way forward but I have got more used to working the working style now that you don't have to start looking things up straight away and I have got a timescale to do things in, so I am feeling more comfortable.		
2STU109059	Well, positive, I feel satisfied at what I have done as far as the work goes, this time last year I was not able to conduct case studies or researching so that is a positive experience. I enjoy going over to Huddersfield for a day and the environment and being a student for a day, despite working amongst students		
2STU110326	I think I have learned to read between the lines more and not just take things at face value.		

2STU111055	They are not easy I do have to think about them and I do always think I could have done a little bit better but I am always pleased with what I have done so I know I could do a bit better next time and I do I think I have improved each module even though they are completely different subjects I think I have got better		
2STU512283	It would have been at the start of the course subject knowledge because I think I have probably developed the right/I, have learned how to develop different writing styles by doing different types of essays which is a very different style of writing than a report that was something I had not even considered at the start of the course I and I would have even have been aware of so I mean I personally think and I probably would not have said this at the last meeting that the work I have produced this year I have been very pleased with and I think it is of a good standard and the fact that I have drafts returned to me saying 'no changes needed; tells me that I am working at the required level.		
2STU512207	I am more confident/I was definitely more confident. No this course has just boosted/just lifted me 100%.		
2STU512533	Reading style has developed and improved.		

APPENDIX 13

Understanding Strengths/Weaknesses.

"I was slower than I thought I was". 3STU34178.
"Just a general better understanding of some of the educational procedures and I mean I understand a bit more about how the Government produced green papers you know well I think I did last year I am not sure whether I still do now [laughs] I have learned that I am not very good at remembering things [laughs]". 3STU65845
"I know everything is all right but I just can't remember. It's a failing in myself." [forgetting] 2STU108785
The way I learn. I like to learn to be taught. 2STU108922
I do like to listen to people I would say that is my main strength. I like to get on with the job in hand – I have a tendency to rush it though and want to get on with it and get it completed. 1STU512053
I see myself as a methodical person, I like to be very organised, that's how I learn I am sure but obviously things change. 1STU41486
Q But you say you are a very confident person
A Yes, perhaps I am not so [laughs]. 2STU110181
Yes, yes, if I don't know what I am talking about I won't ramble [laughs] 2STU110185
I think I am good at writing whereas verbally/things come more naturally when I am typing away and writing. I think my strengths/my capabilities on the computer use of the thesaurus and things like that words are/that's what I think are one of my strengths, but not verbally as much as written. 2STU42166
I learn best by doing actually something I would rather get on and do it myself and learn from any mistakes that I have made than somebody else telling me what to do and watching them do it. 1STU19801

APPENDIX 14

Adapting to academic work

I have had to incorporate the methodology explaining and that side of things 2STU2618
I worry about the references. The referencing that is really hard and I think knowing what I am able to put into assignments and what I am not able to put in about referencing it I am little bit unsure about that. That really is worrying me. 1STU41598
I am still struggling with referencing don't get me wrong. I find it very difficult to know what I can use and how I reference it you know. 3STU916644
Well I honestly didn't know about referencing until I went to university and I have had to do it for every project/module I have had to do now and I am not saying that it is an easy task because it certainly isn't and it doesn't get any easier but I have learned that you put them down as you go along [laughs] 2STU41763
The way that the projects are done, literature research, new ideas, new ways of gaining information by means of graphs, fish bone, how to if you have got a problem and all the different areas you can get the positives and negatives, it's getting things down on paper and just looking at it as a whole picture. 2STU42118
I have had to be more thorough. I have got used to doing research but not just finding one thing and carrying on and finding out more or less, I am probably a bit bad at that but I also think that's also to do with the subject I picked. I picked fairly IT current subjects that you can't find a lot on and I probably could improve on that, whether I will do or not I don't know 2STU916261
I still have this problem because I can't waffle and I find that I just say it and then I look at the words and I think there's not enough words there but I have said what I want to say what do I do so I try to think around it and get a bit more in but I think I have said what I need to say why should I – they have to try to pad it out. 2STU76780
I think you are more conscious of what you are putting in your sentences and things and I looked at one and then I thought no I can reword that a bit differently, so it has made me more aware to do words slightly different/use a slightly different word. 2STU76851
I have learned how to develop different writing styles by doing different types of essays which is a very different style of writing, than a report that was something I had not even considered at the start of the course. 2STU512283
I think my English and my grammar has probably developed, writing styles has developed. 2STU512459
I think I am getting my brain into gear of how to phrase things and how I want it to be

worded, not using too much wording. 2STU813784

You are coming across new words all the time that you have never used before.
3STU814708

I know how to use Blackboard, I know how to use the use the Oxford referencing system.
I know how to evaluate my learning style [laughs] not that I can remember what it is
when I have done it but er I now how to manage my time a little bit better for assignment
work whether it is the right way or the wrong way, it's how I manage it so I suppose I
have got a little bit more self-discipline. 2STU65329

APPENDIX 15

Increased confidence

2STU2526	Slightly more confident because I have not done a work based qualification before and I know I am capable of doing it now and how to structure things.
2STU42107	I think it did definitely have an effect. Now because I am reflecting on it yes possibly I possibly would not have thought that at the beginning but definitely now – I have got more confidence, I have got much more confidence.
3STU42667	Um, the confidence aspect definitely also I think I can what is the word, I have more of an ability maybe it is something that over that year just writing something and knowing that it is in a better format, introduction, the body conclusion etc because you are getting into that way of writing things and even with those policies the structure is very, very similar you have to give this introduction of what the policy is about and then you have to set up the sets and say why you have done this etc so yes, I think I am getting there.
1STU76182	I suppose it will give me confidence to go to sort it out well it will give me the confidence and ability to know what I am doing is OK. I think that's and I think with the school, not just my school it's like some of the schools outside, it's knowing what their perception is of it and how they work. Obviously some of these children are going to then come to university and it is good to know how they work as well.
3STU109349	Yes, I didn't think I could do it.
2STU512207	I am more confident that I was, definitely more confident. No this course has just boosted/.just lifted me 100%. Be interested to know whether anybody else has seen that in me as well but I actually identified that in the first assignment the learning styles, and when I analysed my learning style I felt that I was a bit indecisive which is really was I was saying about taking on board other peoples ideas but I was quite indecisive in putting myself forward and what I had identified from that was it's not the fact that I am not/I am confident really but I was perceiving myself as being not confident and it's because if I don't have the knowledge to back up what I am saying or I am not confident about the knowledge I have in a topic then I can't speak confidently about it so I would rather just sit back and let others do the talking but this year, because I have gained such a lot of knowledge/somebody/you were asking me about marking but because I have been reading about it I have got so many ideas I can go straight in there with the ideas now so it's not that I am not a confident person it's having the confidence in my ability.
2STU512271	I think it is just seeing other people in the same position has given me the confidence to think if they can do that I can do that and actually yes I have got something to contribute and I do know as much as they do

	it's been a real confidence thing, I think.
2STU512455	No, No I am more confident.
2STU512629	It's just like being a more confident person.
2STU916199	You get more confident and eventually you think I know more than everybody else now.
3STU916632	It was 70% which I was absolutely gob smacked because it's not my strong subject and when she was handing them out I said please don't show anybody because I thought it was going to be so bad so it's given me a lot of confidence and I actually looked at it and thought/now I know what I have got to be doing and that actually has helped getting a mark because I think if I had been marked last year I think I could have/I am not saying I would have worked less but it would have given me the confidence.

2STU2526	Slightly more confident because I have not done a work based qualification before and I know I am capable of doing it now and how to structure things.
2STU110121	Oh I am really enjoying it. I feel more confident this time more confident than last September.
2STU41844	Oh yes, I have got the confidence to out and do the research but I still like the school days.
2STU41884	Yea, yea. I think also it's the confidence of the group I have been in – you get used to the same people. I am sure it would not bother me – at 50 we have been split up and when we are doing our seminar papers we are small groups but because I've know those people/we are all in the same boat at the end of the day and I have realised that that is probably one of the things I have learned most that everybody is equal in that sense because we are all doing a course/we are all like 'fish out of water'.
2STU41896	No, the very first one when I first read it I thought gosh I don't think it's going to be comparable with everybody else's but I think because again I have had chance to look over other peoples I think about the same now but that's confidence again, it's all about confidence and thinking oh yes, if I am not happy about it then I can always get some help from yourself or [tutor] whichever.
2STU41995	Hum, I have got the confidence to actually/if I have got something to say I just say it now it doesn't worry me. I think I have solved that one and it's all about confidence and I didn't want to look silly in front of everybody else. It's not all about that now.
2STU42107	I think it did definitely have an effect. Now because I am reflecting on it yes possibly I possibly would not have thought that at the beginning but definitely now – I have got more confidence, I have got much more confidence.

2STU42118	The way that the projects are done, literature research, new ideas, um new ways of gaining information by means of graphs, fish bone, how to if you have got a problem and all the different areas you can get the positives and negatives, it's getting things down on paper and just looking at it as a whole picture but I think I have learned/I feel that I could actually maybe go into an interview and say things about what I have done over that time and hopefully be quite impressive if I say that I have done this, I have done a literature search, I have been involved in a work-based project [pause] I think that has built confidence as well because I know that perhaps I have got those abilities – they were always there it's just that the course has brought them out.
2STU42166	I think what I said earlier I like to write. I think I am good at writing whereas verbally/things come more naturally when I am typing away and writing. I think my strengths/my capabilities on the computer, use of the thesaurus and things like that words are/that's what I think are one of my strengths um but not verbally as much as written. Again it's this image of being in front of the class isn't it – I know I do give discussion points but I don't like/when I did the seminar paper and I mean to talk about that. It's alright just giving a little/just chipping in and doing things like that because I have got confidence to do that but actually to talk about one thing all the time and everybody listening to you it would be more difficult
3STU42667	Um, the confidence aspect definitely also I think I can what is the word, I have more of an ability maybe it is something that over that year just writing something and knowing that it is in a better format, introduction, the body conclusion etc because you are getting into that way of writing things and even with those policies the structure is very, very similar you have to give this introduction of what the policy is about and then you have to set up the sets and say why you have done this etc so yes, I think I am getting there.
2STU65194	I don't want to make things difficult for myself by imaging all sorts of terrible things that could go wrong or it's not going to be good enough or I am not going to have find/search to be able to put forward a good argument sort of um I don't know, I am still frightened of failure yes.
3STU65557	Yes I think I think I am just very confident [laughs]
3STU65647	Probably more confident.
1STU76182	I suppose it will give me confidence to go to sort it out well um I will give me the confidence and ability to know what I am doing is OK. I think that's and I think with the school, not just my school it's like some of the schools outside, it's knowing what their perception is of it and how they work. Obviously some of these children are going to then come to university and it is good to know how they work as well.

2STU512207	I am more confident that I was, definitely more confident. No this course has just boosted/.just lifted me 100%. Be interested to know whether anybody else has seen that in me as well but I actually identified that in the first assignment the learning styles and when I analysed my learning style I felt that I was a bit indecisive which is really was I was saying about taking on board other peoples ideas but I was quite indecisive in putting myself forward and what I had identified from that was it's not the fact that I am not/I am confident really but I was perceiving myself as being not confident and it's because if I don't have the knowledge to back up what I am saying or I am not confident about the knowledge I have in a topic then I can't speak confidently about it so I would rather just sit back and let others do the talking but this year, because I have gained such a lot of knowledge/somebody/you were asking me about marking but because I have been reading about it I have got so many ideas I can go straight in there with the ideas now so it's not that I am not a confident person it's having the confidence in my ability.
2STU512245	A real boost because when I have submitted drafts of the work to be looked at what I tend to do is do a finished product. I don't send a part draft in – I would rather get the whole thing done maybe submit some ideas to [tutor] to say I thinking of this in and he will say that's fine and then I submit the final product and say this is a draft any suggestions and every piece I have submitted with 'no changes needed, this is fine'. So you can image I thought this was a draft and have allowed myself a couple of weeks to do any amendments and improve it and within/ the last assignment was a month before it was due and I had submitted the draft and [tutor] said no changes needed so then I knew I was a month ahead of myself and that was a real boost of confidence, definitely
2STU512259	Oh yes it was an inadequacy. Personally as I have gained knowledge no because I have become more confident.
2STU512271	Thinks. I think it is just seeing other people in the same position has given me the confidence to think if they can do that I can do that and actually yes I have got something to contribute and I do know as much as they do it's been a real confidence thing I think.
2STU512287	It's this confidence thing again. Humiliation. If you said something that was stupid in a group
2STU512380	I think it's gaining subject knowledge and forming my own opinions from what I have read because if I gain knowledge then I am more confident about what I believe in so I can form opinions better about what other people are saying – I can pick up and say that's a really good point but I can see what he or she means but I don't agree with that because I think such a thing. I have learned how to if I have an opinion why do I have that opinion I have learned how to develop the skills to back up my opinions

2STU512455	I am more confident
2STU512537	Because I don't/whereas before when I thought about the reading list for example I would think oh goodness I can't possibly read all that and now I can quite confidently pick up a book – just general confidence. I just keep going back to that don't I that I just feel so much more confidence.
2STU512563	This is fine because it is a subject I am working with day to day whereas the course I was doing previously was it was a new subject to me as well so the learning curve was steeper because I didn't have any background knowledge so I found it too intense. That probably knocked my confidence actually at that time I was/it was a time when I was trying to better myself, enrolling on this course thinking I could do it and I had to admit defeat 2 years down the line so actually this is getting too intense for me so either I can do it if I gave up work but I couldn't afford to do that financially or I carry on working and I have to let this go and I was really disappointed when I let it go.
2STU512625	I think I have already proven it that I can do it.
2STU512629	It's just like being a more confident person.
3STU512876	It is and it was a part of my role that I didn't feel entirely/it's the one thing that brought me down in confidence wise because I didn't feel that I knew enough about it. I was going through the motions on a day to day basis but I didn't necessarily understand why so I suppose the Finance module has been the one that has cemented things for me really but I have to say that they have all been useful.
2STU813784	Um, I think I am more confident now. I think I am getting my brain into gear of how to phrase things and um how I want it to be worded, not using too much wording type of information rather than precise information. I think I have learned how to develop that and in writing up my case study or whatever.
2STU916126	Not as much as I did at the beginning. I still find it difficult to interpret what I am supposed to be writing but I think that's a confidence thing and I will read/you give us these sheets which are a really good help but if you put something in then I am thinking I can't do that I don't know what you mean by that I do need/I suppose again I need to get it straight in my mind before I can start um so as long as I have got any my queries out of the way I am confident in what I am doing that's fine.
2STU916199	You get more confident and eventually you think I know more than everybody else now.

2STU916273	Well sorry yes well I did I suppose I worried about if I would be able to do the work and I think I have had a lot of pride of sort of finishing something and if you had said to me last year you could do that I would have said don't be so daft I can't, so especially getting the first module marked and the comments and they were very positive comments and I thought Oh yea, you know so I was extremely proud of that actually so I suppose it has diminished.
3STU916464	I am not worrying about having to write an essay or a case study or anything like that so I am going in there and I think has been so nice [stresses] having the confidence of thinking well I can do this I know how to/last year it was gosh I can't write an essay you know and it was so hard to get into that writing style whereas this year I don't have to worry about that it's just the content so um it's been nice. I think the time is the hardest thing it always has been and it always will be but that's been the nice thing about this year.
3STU916492	Well it was a confidence thing I suppose again being out of any formal study for a long time the confidence can I actually do this am I capable of doing this am I going to get support from say like work and from home life um I think it was just that really and having the guts to go for it.
3STU916632	It was 70% which I was absolutely gob smacked t because it's not my strong subject and when she was handing them out I said please don't show anybody because I thought it was going to be so bad so it's given me a lot of confidence and I actually looked at it and thought/now I know what I have got to be doing and that actually has helped getting a mark because I think if I had been marked last year I think I could have/I am not saying I would have worked less but it would have given me the confidence.
3STU21018	I think it gives you a sense of achievement when you have finished that you know you can do it. For me I suppose I like at the first time in higher education because when you are young it shapes you more - it gave me a lot more confidence as I were quite shy and retiring when I went to university a lot less so when I came out.
2STU41719	Oh, now that, yes it does, I think at that time when I first/I was not that familiar with the discussion boards – it doesn't worry me any more. I say what I want now but I think at that time I felt very vulnerable but I can see that everybody else is in the same position and I see myself as an equal now – perhaps I thought there were different levels of people with the class an therefore I thought they had better communication skills better knowledge, but I think we were all of a par really, we were all there for the same purpose, to learn and I think now I have much more confidence and the real me is coming out. I think that's the real me – I think I was very cautious at that time.

2STU41723	No I probably was I would only have interrupted if I was on firm ground whereas now I will put a suggestion in that group and see what people say think I was.
3STU109349	Yes I didn't think I could do it.
2STU110177	Yes. Yes and I am not writing only perhaps my reactions I am writing other peoples and that's what I find difficult. I obviously don't know that I have the confidence to know that I am reading people correctly
1STU512053	I always find this difficult to pick out my own strengths. I am a good listener. This is so difficult to answer. I have been reading a book about academic um . . . academic . . . oh what's the title of the book. It was on the reading list. Active critical thinking, R Critical thinking, yes, and there was just a questionnaire in there that I did about your own qualities and I was surprised at how many of them that I could tick that were qualities I think I had it with me now as it would have been useful but I actually/it was a good confidence booster because when I actually looked at it I thought yes you do have more qualities than you think you have. I do like to listen to people I would say that is my main strength. I like to get on with the job in hand – I have a tendency to rush it though and want to get on with it and get it completed.
1STU813331	I probably didn't for a long, long time. Um, I think it's just we seem to get broad shoulders although it's there in your mind you do grow in confidence and it has only come with age and maturity.

APPENDIX 16

Impact of Course Organisation on Student Motivation

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	AMBIVALENT
<p>“Yes I think going back to the [University] [a previous degree course that was abandoned] course it’s just so well structured to have everything there and accessible is great.” 3STU513261</p>	<p>“I did feel there was a long period from the first and 2nd day schools that I was not really doing much at all and I felt that maybe an induction programme that we would probably hold for our school leavers here perhaps we didn’t need it on the first day for such a long period. I thought that could have all been done in the morning say and in the afternoon could have been given to an assignment to start” 2STU813541</p>	<p>“Um probably because I was not used to it I have always done been at school with a class in front of a blackboard and that type of a thing and it seems something I am not used to – away from the university.” 2STU813632.</p>
<p>“I think the balance is good, with the school days once a month and the Blackboard backup.” 2STU109017</p>		<p>“I like the module system and it is better/it appears to be better this year because you can sort of hit a module and forget it but not as much and I like that I like to be able to hit it and forget it. I find having to concentrate on 2 or 3. 3 particularly is just a struggle I can’t cope with that very well so yes the structure is and I am well aware it is a new thing and it is having to be tweaked</p>

		so that's fine. People aren't saying oh now that's how it is and it is getting changed to how people feel it will be better". 3STU34222
<p>"It's good because you can dip into it when it is convenient to you to dip into it, and it is up to individuals to get their own time scale to work through things but at least you can do it when you want to do it and not at a set time at having to attend an evening class once a week or something like that. That has been good." 3STU109457</p>		<p>"Yes, yes, I am so really my first year I thought was quite but I think this year is going to be so much harder I just feel that the 3 all running together and even though the course tutor is insistent that they aren't running together yes OK you have got the actual dates, the deadlines dates slightly different but you are still having to work on them all the way through and I feel especially when the course tutor said at the last day school has anybody looked at mine and I hadn't at that time and I thought oh my gosh but I am glad I did look at it and I looked at it a couple of days ago and spent a good what 6 or 7 hours just on his and there is relevance and a crossover anyway and so to be fair I needed to look at that to help with the other." 3STU42269</p>
<p>"I think you can be inspired basically by somebody that is teaching well. It is just here you are all into this things there's a lot of enthusiasm</p>		<p>"Well I think this year is better because we are more focused in what we are doing. Last year I thought</p>

<p>there I think it shows I think you drag people on and I think you know you inspire people with you.” 2STU915849</p>		<p>was a bit/because we had more choice when you have more choice that you need to do I find that harder. If somebody says to you right I want you to read about this and I want you to do that to me that’s a lot easier rather than saying right we want you to do that but you can just do what you want. It is difficult because then you think well what am I doing whereas it you have got a few choices then you can pick what you are interested.” 3STU77329</p>
<p>“I think all the modules have been done fantastic right from the start. Again you are very supportive. Blackboard is very good because if you have got any queries you know you come back and everything. Erm I think again the Blackboard/it’s difficult because you have got to try and keep remember to do this task and this task but again it’s very supportive in the way that you get other students’ ideas and things.” 3STU916663</p>		<p>“Um, after Christmas when all the modules seemed to be/each day school seemed to be flitting from one to another and I would have liked to have done the seminar paper and then completed the case study but we seemed to overlap 3 of them and I found since Christmas, that we have tried to juggle each one around. I have just got one of them out of the way so that’s good – I haven’t even thought about my work project yet apart from the title but I</p>

		<p>think I am changing that because what I wanted to do was an electronic booking form for her – we are having a new computer system an upgrading the whole college system so they don't want me to start it until that's in place and that's not going to happen until September so I think my work based project I am going to have to change so er I am trying now to concentrate on this essay which is the 3rd module and get that out of the way before I can even begin to think about my work based project.” 2STU813559</p>
	<p>“The first day school for me was a waste of time because we didn't really do anything, but the 2nd day school in the afternoon we did actually break up into a group and that is what I found useful .” 1STU33051</p>	

APPENDIX 17

Day Schools

<p>The motivation comes from the day school, I mean I have found there that the next step forward has been so clearly explained and the handouts are so detailed if you have got a report to do you know your introduction has got to be 500 words and the next bit 1000 and so on. I find that tremendously helpful. I know what I have got to do it's organized I can go away and do it. 2STU108631</p>
<p>[Thinks]. I mean the day schools are good because you get an awful lot out of them which sets you up for the following week's work but if you are very good at taking notes all the time it's more or less done with a bit of research and padding you have got bones to 3STU109461</p>
<p>You had the school one before didn't you but it wasn't as good as that one though and ours/don't get me wrong I really found it interesting [student was talking about the content of a speaker not being relevant to her line of work] and under normal circumstances that would not have been a problem but I think 6 days/when you have only got 6 days to learn as much as possible and the interactions then I think that was a bit of a waste of time for me but don't get me wrong I would not complain about it because I did enjoy it 3STU42673</p>
<p>Q So the day schools are important?</p>
<p>Yes. Yes. I think the balance is just right – it's really, really organized and well structured course. I am just so pleased that I am part of it. 2STU512364</p>
<p>Well, throwing ideas at each other and I think I am lucky because I have got [name] in school and although I still enjoy going onto the discussion board and talking to others, I still find that one to one and I don't think that can be replaced because I think that's where the day schools are advantageous. I mean, I am sorry I have not been to go to the other two because I think you become a unit 2STU41771</p>
<p>That's a link with others and it's interesting that I commented about not being as motivated without the monthly day schools so although I am happy to come away and get on with the tasks that we have been given I somehow like to go back and have some central form of communication with people that is a little bit reassuring and to discuss with other fellow students that this where were are up, or I did this or I found this useful. I would not want to do a course that was just virtual learning in isolation. 2STU512360</p>
<p>Yes, but I think once a month is plenty but I know there's one this Friday but we are not going because we are not doing to be taught anything difference but we are still going to have time off work and work from home, so hopefully if we were learning new things I think it would help to come over. 2STU813741</p>

I would, I would. I would have preferred it. I mean obviously circumstances make/force you to do an e-learning degree but I would prefer there to be more school days but that's just the way it is but I do get an awful lot from the school days. 3STU42277

Yes, I was, yes. I was not sure whether or not that would suit me but I do have obviously internet facilities at home and at work I use the internet facilities at work an awful lot. For me it was an easy method, I can get on to the email every day and it's not a problem for me and I thought that could be the easy way. I am pleased that we still have the 6 days to bring us together. I don't feel isolated and that might be because [name] is in the office and we talk between us about the course. 1STU41663

Yes, yes and I met somebody on the first day and we got chatting but then last time we didn't see each other because she was in a different group in the morning and in the afternoon so it would have been nice to chat to her and see how she was getting on but I don't know how you get over it unless you say to people who would you like to be with which you know you/it's like being at school isn't it you have got so many permutations of who is friends with who and who needs to be who so and I think/the only thing I do find with working in primary school and then you have got people working in universities we are talking about 2 different jobs completely. Maybe people in the secondary schools can relate to both of us because they feed and they feed from us but people from universities that they talk about doesn't mean anything to me nothing to me what they are talking about and I am sure what I talk about/they don't have any interest in that so I don't know whether you could look at where people work rather than what they do. That's only another thought, because I know in my afternoon group most of the people seem to be university or secondary school people and a lot of the work that I am doing and we have talked about/this glazed look comes over their face and you think they don't know what I am talking about but then they are the same because they are talking about electronic registration and truancy and then they are talking about students at university but that means nothing to me and I don't need to look at that because it's not part of/it won't be part of my role here. 1STU110037

In the following extract, the student explains how it feels when day schools have finished for the year.

2STU916221 It's a bit difficult because it is so different so I mean on the day schools we have got very enthusiastic tutors so again they do inspire you to get on and everything and the students are very supportive so you do gain that but because it's different it's a different learning experience completely and I must admit at the last day school I did feel as though I could just jump off a [can't hear] here and how am I going to land, because as you know er you get/we have always known that there was another day school to come to and meet everybody and everything and we are going to have the tutors to speak to and I did think how is it going to feel now I did feel kind of like 'free falling'.

APPENDIX 18

Student responses on the theme of peer support and day schools

<p>“I can say to [student] what do you think about this or what do you think about this, and it’s one to one whereas the discussion board you do lose a little bit of personal touch but that’s why I like the school days, [emphasises] I do like the school days. I find them very advantageous. 2STU41779</p>	<p>PERSONAL</p>
<p>“That’s a link with others and it’s interesting that I commented about not being as motivated without the monthly day schools so although I am happy to come away and get on with the tasks that we have been given I somehow like to go back and have some central form of communication with people that is a little bit reassuring and to discuss with other fellow students that this is where were are up, or I did this or I found this useful. I would not want to do a course that was just virtual learning in isolation.” 2STU512360</p>	<p>LINK WITH OTHERS</p>
<p>“No I have enjoyed the day schools I think they have all been really pleasant people/nice people but I have stuck more to/there’s a few people at the university and I have bonded more/well not bonded more but been more involved in their group activities, than mixing with people/although I have mixed with people but I think from the first day school it depends who you sat with on that first day school I think kind of all stuck together really so when you come into the next day school you looked for a friendly face that you remember and you went and sat at that table again, so but yes, I have enjoyed the day schools they have been really nice but/could have used the discussion board but again that’s down to time and commitment at the time and when I found that going on the discussion board it can take me like 2 hours to read all the messages and then by the time you have done that it’s too late to actually write any [laughs] but that’s probably because I am not going on often enough. Um, so I haven’t been as active as I could have been on the discussion boards but if I needed to use it I would.” 2STU65157</p>	<p>FRIENDLY FACE</p>
<p>“I would be wondering how well I was going. Sharing ideas with the others, the other students and chatting with them at the day schools makes you realize that yes they have got the same worries, they produce similar sort/I am looking at other peoples work as well, sharing seminar papers.” 2STU512275</p>	<p>SHARING IDEAS SHARING WORRIES</p>
<p>“I think probably if we had more day schools. The only thing is that Huddersfield is a long way to come. If it was based in Grimsby maybe the ideal would be one class contact a week or</p>	<p>GIVES CONFIDENCE</p>

<p>once a fortnight just to give you confidence and to give you the confidence and see how you are going and to give you support really. I think that if it wasn't for the others doing it I would feel completely alone and probably would not have the confidence to complete it. If that was the case I might give up.” 1STU813521</p>	
<p>“No I don't think so. Accessing computer sites or that sort of thing or some of us jotted notes down at day schools and anybody taking minutes don't always pick up the precise things that other people pick up so I think that when you refresh each other, oh yes, I remember that.” 2STU813760</p>	<p>PROMPTING</p>
<p>“It's quite hard to put your opinions across on Blackboard whereas when we go on the day schools and you get nattering and by got oh yes I struggled with that and it's a little bit easier to bring discussion about. It's quite [can't hear] on Blackboard because you think everybody is going to read this whereas if you are there on a day you are only going to pick the people you have most contact with and you are not going to feel as though everyone is scrutinising every comment that you make. I do feel quite scrutinized.” STU916733</p>	<p>EASIER TO DISCUSS THINGS</p>

APPENDIX 19

Tutor Support

<p>“The thing I am not looking forward to getting the first draft in and seeing what comments come back.” 1STU2189</p>
<p>“It’s normally when I am doing assignments, if I am stuck on what I want to do firstly to check what I picked is OK, secondly if I get stuck to ask for a relevant text or if they can recommend and thirdly to have a look at my draft.” 2STU2785</p>
<p>“Yesterday I am thinking well if I am sending it as a draft then I am sure someone will tell me that that’s the wrong way of doing it so at this point in time I am still on a big learning curve.” 1STU41598</p>
<p>“I still send drafts in first I still need that confidence and when I send them I will say, ‘Look forward to hearing your amendments/comments’. I think if it came back and it said this sorry this is totally rubbish I would be really hurt.” 2STU42025</p>
<p>2STU42029 “Maybe you are looking for somebody to say yes that’s the way to do it and yes you are on the right track, and that’s why I do send in a draft.”</p>
<p>“So I thought I would do a pretty good draft for the assignment for [tutor] last weekend.” 1STU33140</p>
<p>“The emailing of drafts is possibly better than traditional tutorial because you do get the feedback of that.” 2STU33859</p>
<p>“And put the final draft sent to her about 10 days before the closure and said this is the final.” 3STU34534</p>
<p>“A real boost because when I have submitted drafts of the work to be looked at what I tend to do is do a finished product I don’t send a part draft in – I would rather get the whole thing done maybe submit some ideas to [tutor] to say I thinking of this in and he will say that’s fine and then I submit the final product and say this is a draft any suggestions and every piece I have submitted with ‘no changes needed, this is fine’. So you can imagine I thought this was a draft and have allowed myself a couple of weeks to do any amendments and improve it and within/ the last assignment was a month before it was due and I had submitted the draft and [tutor] said no changes needed so then I knew I was a month ahead of myself and that was a real boost of confidence, definitely.” 2STU512245</p>
<p>“The fact that I have drafts returned to me saying ‘no changes needed; tells me that I am working at the required level.” 2STU512283</p>
<p>“I emailed [my draft] for her to look over and it just came back and said excellent so I just thought no changes needed let’s get it printed off and in the file and it’s sitting there all ready to hand in.” 3STU512732</p>
<p>“Yes. I think there was only 2 comments on it that I had from [name of student], and that was all so yes she had the draft.” 3STU814068</p>
<p>“Sorry, I do like sending the drafts in because at least when we know you are handing it on the deadline date it is something like/you haven’t got any more alterations to make to it so it’s actually being marked before you hand it into the assessor.” 2STU813849</p>

APPENDIX 20

The three themes of: practical gains, student perceptions and communication

1	PRACTICAL GAINS
2STU41771	Well, throwing ideas at each other and I think I am lucky because I have got [name] in school and although I still enjoy going onto the discussion board and talking to others, I still find that one to one and I don't think that can be replaced . . .
2STU813568	Um, I have had the support of [NAME] and [NAME] who are colleagues here in the college although we are doing different projects but we support – they can remember things or I can remember things – oh yes, I forgot about that or oh yes, that needs to be done. We have this support mechanism to help each other. Had I been out on a limb on my own I don't think I could have concentrated like I have done in doing
2STU65270 Communication with other people on the course I mean I spoke to Paula who's works in registry who is on the course. I spoke to her yesterday because I wanted to see if she could help me some research for my essay and then so then she put me in touch with somebody else who could give me that information so communication that way is working well.
2STU65274	Oh no I think that/even though I am not on contact with her every day or month, it's nice to know she is there and perhaps if there is something I don't want to bother [tutor] with I can call her first and then if she thinks it is a reasonable question to put to [tutor] then you know . .
2STU108655	I am OK because we helped each other a lot in the initial stages, where do you find this where do you find that. How do I click on this. We helped each other a lot but now the teething troubles are over and it's plain sailing so, I felt quite happy continuing by myself.
2STU916154	We work in the case office so we do actually we just say how we are getting on even if it is just have you started your essay yet, - no – we do – it is a support really and she brings things in for me or if I see things for her we will say oh have you seen this yes we do support each other
2STU33261	I find it very useful to talk to the other people there and hearing specifically what they do in their schools and I sort of store that away and then often go back, discuss that at our school or look on the internet or look up in books to try and develop that theme as I find it's a very useful way of just getting an idea to entertain in the first place.
2STU76577	Probably where everybody is giving you their experiences or saying what they think where everybody is contributing to the conversation so you are picking things up and somebody might say something and you think Oh yes, that's a good idea and you

jot it down, it's something you've not thought about.
2STU111078 Unless I didn't get the answer/get the question at all. But I know there is a question on finance and funding that I don't get and Nicola doesn't get but I have waited until Nicola has asked the question on Blackboard and I am just waiting to see what the response would be. [Laughs]
2STU915851 Um what I meant was, we are a big group and we are all at different levels of learning and we have all got difference experiences and what I meant by drag people on is that if one person says I can't do this or do that, another one will say don't be daft, and it's only this, this and this and you kind of pull each other through it at the same time where somebody who is struggling in one particular subject, somebody else might not be so they can help them and it might help them the other way round so I think you are all helping each other.
2STU813760 No I don't think so. Accessing computer sites or that sort of thing or some of us jotted notes down at day schools and anybody taking minutes don't always pick up the precise things that other people pick up so I think that when you refresh each other, oh yes, I remember that
3STU21318 [laughs] I have I have been on a couple of times and picked up a couple of web sites and things like that from other people
2 STUDENT PERCEPTION OF THE GROUP
3STU21277 It means everybody is in the same position, everybody is having the same problems, everybody has got the same goals, basically you are trying to achieve the same thing/all pulling in the same direction. Basically everybody has got the same/trying to attain the same thing
2STU41884 Yes, yes. I think also it's the confidence of the group I have been in – you get used to the same people. I am sure it would not bother me – at 50 we have been split up and when we are doing our seminar papers we are small groups but because I've know those people/we are all in the same boat at the end of the day and I have realised that, that is probably one of the things I have learned most that everybody is equal in that sense because we are all doing a course/we are all like 'fish out of water'.
3STU42898 No I don't think it's as important as I first thought it would be because you do get to know these people but you do have your own friendship circles even within that group that you tend to always seem to help each other
2STU512271 [thinks]. I think it is just seeing other people in the same position has given me the confidence to think if they can do that I can do that and actually yes I have got something to contribute and I do know as much as they do it's been a real confidence thing, I think.

2STU512275 I would be wondering how well I was going. Sharing ideas with the others, the other students and chatting with them at the day schools makes you realize that yes they have got the same worries, they produce similar sort/I am looking at other peoples work as well, sharing seminar papers.
1STU110053 There is a lady who does work for [LEA] and she's in my afternoon group and if she was not in my afternoon group I think I would feel very lost in the afternoon group . . .
2STU33763 Because I know her and she tries to help me and I try to help her so. . .
Students recognise that others are sharing the same experiences and have the same goals and this leads to increased confidence. The whole group of students is perceived as sharing the experience but students also form their own groups or "friendship circles". What students gain from this support again is confidence from receiving and giving help and by sharing. The following extracts give further insight into the concept of sharing and how it benefits students.
3 SHARING
2STU2650 I think you have the ability to acquire information from fellow students when they put on that they have found something really relevant like reference wise, I think that's quite good . . . But when I have seen other people do it I think that's quite good.
1STU41671 Yes [name] is on the course as well. She is only doing 2 modules and so she is on the course as well and we quite often talk about . . . if I went to talk about the learning styles project which she is doing as well, then we have a little chat about it and it's nice to have that extra person to just act as a sounding board.
3STU42906 I printed off all those things from this one and I gave them to [name] to do and rather than printing them off copied . . .
2STU41998 It's about learning from each other and everybody can give something to everybody else.
3STU42313 When I say competition I/we try to share resources.
2STU512275 . . . Sharing ideas with the others, the other students and chatting with them at the day schools makes you realize that yes they have got the same worries, they produce similar sort/I am looking at other peoples work as well, sharing seminar papers. . . . Actually sharing work like the seminar papers and the discussion board is great for that as . . . you could see the standard of what other people were writing and that was a good guideline for your own work.
2STU512388 Then not the knowledge from books then. It's nice to share ideas with others.

3STU513120 I tend to pick and choose it's good to have the reinforcement and shared information.
3STU513140 Yes or shared experiences like somebody put on comments about how they access the free nursery education.
3STU814304 No, no it was given back to everyone and then everybody's quite rightly so if they have got good marks they want to share it with everyone but someone who got a lot lower marks feels gutted

APPENDIX 21

Examples of colleague support

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
<p>“Probably read [Name’s and name] because they are the university so I read theirs and responded to theirs.” 3STU77826</p>	<p>“I never thought like that. In fact it is an advantage being on my own because there is nobody to compare anything with. We are not fighting over/we are not competing or if you are producing the same piece of work you are not feeling it is being compared.” 3STU512700</p>
<p>“We helped each other a lot in the initial stages, where do you find this where do you find that. How do I click on this?” 2STU108655</p>	<p>“I don’t know how you feel about this [student] but I always send my things through to [student] to have a look at and she doesn’t her and they hadn’t been doing that to me so.” 3STU814628</p>
<p>“We are all doing it together so that we can help each other rather than try and do it on our own.” 1STU813339</p>	
<p>“I have got support of my other 2 colleagues so I think I would be very isolated if I was doing it by myself and not going to any day schools and doing it online. I don’t think you get the feedback if you are on your own.” 3STU814608</p>	
<p>“We do actually we just say how we are getting on even if it is just have you started your essay yet - no – we do – it is a support really and she brings things in for me or if I see things for her we will say oh have you seen this yes we do support each other.” 2STU916154</p>	
<p>“But we support – they can remember things or I can remember things – oh yes, I forgot about that or oh yes, that needs to be done. We have this support mechanism to help each other.” 2STU813568</p>	
<p>“I spoke to [name] who’s works in registry who is on the course. I spoke to her yesterday because I wanted to see if she could help me some research for my essay and then so then she put me in touch with somebody else who could give me that</p>	

information so communication that way is working well.” 2STU65270	
“It’s nice to know she is there and perhaps if there is something I don’t want to bother [tutor] with I can call her first and then if she thinks it is a reasonable question to put to [tutor] then you know.” 2STU65274	
“Spent the day together really and of course in the spare time talked about sort of things that we can relate to here at work.” 2STU108571	

APPENDIX 22

Student previous experience and/or expectations of e-learning

PRIOR EXPERIENCE	EXPECTATION
“No I had not really experienced it before.” 1STU2154	“All I expected were contact with a tutor via email with any problems we have got and small number of students.” 1STU2154
“I was aware of e-learning and it’s a big thing in schools these days.” 1STU41276	“I didn’t know whether or not it would suit me as a person, but I think it will.” 1STU41276
“I didn’t have half the worries that I would have done if I hadn’t done ECDL online. That has helped tremendously.” 2STU108389	“I didn’t think I would be able to do e-learning, being an/I keep going back to this organized, I am not creative and really e-learning, there is a touch of creativity about it.” 2STU108356
I only know that there would be some. I didn’t know how much. 1STU76367	“It didn’t bother me. The only thing is using Blackboard you are on your own”. 1STU76367
“Over the course that I did 2 years ago, the other degree course, we did some video conferencing that was not a great experience.” 1STU512085	“I actually discovered the course I certainly hadn’t thought about it and then reading about the course I would say as probably as much as I would have expected it to be.” 1STU19981
“I have done an e-learning course with Learn Direct. I didn’t have the tutor support I was I supposed to have. Every time I emailed, I didn’t get anything back and basically it was appalling and I didn’t finish the course. It was awful.” 1STU915747	“I think I would probably have been a little bit apprehensive if I had known in advance of how can that work I don’t understand how it is going to work it can’t be efficient.” 1STU512101
“Prior to this course I have not got any experience really in e-learning.” 2STU2269	“I was not apprehensive at all when the course came up when it said it was e-learning because I actually am very happy/I email my friends all the time.” 2STU915972
	“I really didn’t have any expectations. I thought there would be an awful lot of Internet based learning.” 1STU33200
	“I was aware of the word Blackboard but I didn’t understand what it was.” 1STU108225

APPENDIX 23
Advantages and disadvantages of Blackboard to support learning

POSITIVE	FEATURES
<p>“Well there are some things I am quite impressed with like I have been on today and I have been able to get documents off the IT module and I have also been able to go one to Onelog and actually download journals and print them off which is fantastic it saves me travelling through to Huddersfield.” 1STU2269</p>	<p>ACCESS TO MATERIALS SAVES TIME</p>
<p>“It has dissolved an awful lot of fears for me, I think it is brilliant, I think it really nice.” 1STU915803</p>	<p>DISSOLVED FEARS</p>
<p>“All the information is on there and you can put up what you want when you want so it’s flexible in that way.” 2STU2756</p>	<p>FLEXIBILITY</p>
<p>“See what you want, when you want.” 2STU2756</p>	<p>AVAILBLE ANY TIME</p>
<p>“Is straight forward to use and it’s easy to use.” 3STU2998</p>	<p>EASY</p>
<p>“The fact that you can email I mean somebody like [tutor] if you have got a query and you get a response the same day. That makes it really good.” 3STU2998</p>	<p>IMMEDIATE RESPONSE</p>
<p>“It’s accurate/anytime you want day or night it’s all there it’s not going to forget anything or miss anything.” 3STU21102</p>	<p>RELIABLE CONSISTENT</p>
<p>“Blackboard I think is suiting me really well for it’s purpose for me.” 2STU65436</p>	<p>FIT FOR PURPOSE</p>
<p>Q “Do you think, again we talked about it a little bit but how does Blackboard substitute for traditional face-to-face lectures. Do you think it is better?” A “I think it is better.”</p>	<p>BLACKBOARD BETTER THAN LECTURES</p>
<p>“We were introduced to it at the first day school, we were introduced to Blackboard then. My initial reaction was ‘wow’ this is fantastic. We can look at the work for weeks in advance if we want to, and you can recap and keep going back over the topics over the previous weeks.” 1STU512101</p>	<p>GET AHEAD RECAP</p>
<p>“Well I always thought that I would prefer face-to-face someone tell me what to do, but so far on this course I haven’t missed that.” 2STU6543</p>	<p>GOOD SUBSTITUTE FOR FACE-TO-FACE</p>
<p>“But there again the convenience of Blackboard you see</p>	<p>CONVENIENT</p>

<p>“you can do it when you want to do it rather than having to be somewhere at a certain time, for a certain length of time.” 2STU65440</p>	<p>WHEN YOU WANT TO</p>
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<p>“I think Blackboard is brilliant actually.” 3STU65635</p>	<p>BRILLIANT</p>
<p>“And I saw the way that Huddersfield has structured the whole course I was so impressed and I am still so impressed with it all but it’s – well perhaps it is still wow, this is brilliant.” 2STU512603</p>	<p>MOTIVATING</p>
<p>“It’s so easy to use, it’s so well set out and with all these conversations with other students I think it’s fantastic.” 2STU915972</p>	<p>EASY WELL SET OUT CONVERSE WITH OTHER STUDENTS</p>
<p>“Blackboard, Um I have found it easy to keep the motivation up as well which I didn’t expect. Normally I start things really enthusiastically.” STU111039</p>	<p>MOTIVATING</p>
<p>“Because it is there in writing and you can actually sit and read/if you sat and listened you don’t take half of it in you just doodle or laughing at the person next to you or reading the wrong notes and you just you don’t take it in whereas if it is down you have discussed it briefly so you know the main parts I like to just go away and read all the notes which I do.” 2STU110952</p>	<p>INFORMATION BACKUP</p>

APPENDIX 24

Negative aspects of Blackboard

NEGATIVE	FEATURES
<p>”Because you can interact with people better. If somebody says this you can actually ask them questions. Now I know on a discussion board you can do that but people don’t open up in the same way in a discussion board as they do in a group situation.” 3STU42470</p>	<p>PEOPLE DON’T OPEN UP</p>
<p>“I am fine with it now. I have had to force myself to use Blackboard. It’s quite difficult when there is a significant majority of women on the course and there are only two men and one of those men doesn’t seem to contribute much and I have had to really force myself to sort of take part in some of/I still don’t take part.” 1STU33221</p>	<p>GENDER</p>
<p>“I think I found Blackboard a disappointment and I suspect I could/if I put a lot of effort into I could use it to a much greater degree but I don’t/it comes back to this thing about/I also have to enjoy a bit what I am doing. I look at it every night so even if it is for 2 or 3 minutes.” 2 STU33534</p>	<p>NOT ENJOYABLE</p>
<p>“I think that’s easy and although I am not too keen on Blackboard I am keen on email and you did mention the almost impersonal side of that because I think once you have met somebody a couple of times, then that doesn’t matter with email it’s where you are using it with somebody you have never met and perhaps never even spoken to on the phone then you can easily get misunderstandings.” 2STU33674</p>	<p>MISUNDERSTANDING</p>
<p>“It didn’t bother me. The only thing is using Blackboard you are on your own, so it is this thing you are on your own when you are using it you’re not with other people.” 1STU76376</p>	<p>LONELY ISOLATION</p>
<p>“Because yes it does give you all the information but it doesn’t give you any chance to feedback or ask questions ... I actually don’t like sitting in lectures but it is an opportunity to ask questions to get it completely batted out before/ I prefer it to going to lectures . . . so there is plus and negatives to that really.” 3STU916729</p>	<p>LACK OF FEEDBACK</p>
<p>“I think it can be a little bit impersonal you know again you are sat at home in your environment.” 3STU916749</p>	<p>IMPERSONAL</p>
<p>“No problem with that the course materials on Blackboard are easier in the sense that yes you can read them [pause] but again they are just written, there is nobody there giving their ideal way of how they work even if it was on a video at least you have somebody saying do this do that.” 3STU42800</p>	<p>IMPERSONAL</p>

APPENDIX 25

Table of Print

<p>I print everything off. I don't read it on Blackboard. I can't sit and read – I just go bog eyed if you know what I mean just concentrate so I print everything off and I sit and read it and you can highlight bits which you can't do on the screen. 3STU77480</p>
<p>I don't know. It's just traditional way of working it's an age thing you just want to see how everything looks. I do have a separate file for each module and I do often carry them around with me if I am know I am going to be somewhere. If I am going to at the doctors for an appointment say or I am sat waiting I will sit and take a book with me so it's accessible wherever I am. When Blackboard was down one of the weekends so I hard copies so I could still work. 3STU513216</p>
<p>It is and it isn't. It is Because you have got everything I take it you mean like handouts, I can see the advantages of handouts and you got it there you can write on it and underline and highlight but on a screen, without printing it off, you can't actually highlight, but other than that I think as long as it is proper information I think they are both equally as good. 3STU21122</p>
<p>The work-based project I did hand write things but the last one I did I did a bit of both – I did all the research at home and I started writing it up here on the machine and printed some off, and then go home. 3STU21450</p>
<p>I actually print it off I mean I actually print everything off but obviously the tasks you have to go onto the discussion board to put them on. 3STU42357</p>
<p>I print them off and then I go back on line and I have the printed version. 3STU42385</p>
<p>When I am on the internet I copy the web site address straight on to the document I am printing off to make sure that I put when I accessed it so when I come to read it again or take anything out of it then at least I have got all the information at the bottom without having to relocate. Just getting myself sorted it's like the Harvard referencing I know it's now on the website on the Blackboard but I always print a couple of copies – I have 2 – so that you know I don't have to go through all my papers/because the paperwork I had from last year is this much and I wouldn't want to have to go through/I do have a separate file which includes, the flow charts, questionnaires all the useful resources and tools that I can have in 1 file so that if I need anything like an all round them. 3STU42878</p>
<p>It's probably much the same but it does/sometimes I do go back print them off, print that bit off again and just sit and read it and then often I will chuck it away because I don't like bits of paper and then another couple of weeks I will go back and do the same and</p>

then even chuck it away again. 2STU33707
Because it is there to print off again. 3STU34483
Yes, because what has happened once or twice is I have read something and printed it off and read again and though no I have got that wrong, I don't need that bit and chuck it away but as the thing has developed I think no I could have used that so you can then go back it isn't as though you have photocopied something in the library and brought it home and chucked it in the bin and then it is lost isn't it but it is on Blackboard. 3STU34487
Because you can read/go back and read them again and you read them when you want to read them. Sometimes you can sit there and read something and you are really not in the mood an it's just/you are just reading words and not taking anything in and you have got access to the notes and of course you, have got the option of printing it out anyway. 3STU65723
Well I was hoping to get quite a lot done this week but of course Blackboard is going to be down isn't it. It starts tonight at 4 and it doesn't come back on until Monday morning so I haven't been able to get those bits done but what I will do is I will do quite a bit of reading so I printed quite a lot of stuff off. 3STU77160
I have printed everything off as far as I know. 3STU77172
Yes I was going to have a look on this afternoon and just check what else was on because she might have put some things on there I haven't got so I will check this afternoon, print it all off this afternoon and then just take it home and make notes and sort it out and then hopefully when it is up next week/I have got a study day on Thursday I can get this 3STU77176
I don't agree with it because everything that's on Blackboard I print out anyway because I find it easier to read in hard copy than read it on Blackboard so I would rather have a hard copy. 3STU77476
I print everything off. I don't read it on Blackboard. I can't sit and read – I just go bog eyed if you know what I mean just concentrate so I print everything off and I sit and read it and you can highlight bits which you can't do on the screen. 3STU77480
If you are reading it you can think oh right I can highlight that bit and use that bit highlight that and come back to that but you can't if you are reading it on screen so I print everything off. 3STU77484
The time allocation I would think. Having to go home in the evenings or occasionally I do spend weekends at the computer. I have found particularly hard the beginning of term here September to November was particularly hard and it was under a lot of pressure then certainly on my social life, because everything was new for the foundation degree. Loads

<p>and loads of things printing off the computer off the internet and stuff which/because I like my own hard copies to look through at home I mean that's just my way of working, so there was all that for me to do as well as a new term. I did find that quite pressurised actually but it's easing off now. 3STU109277</p>
<p>Um well it's both really because an example is this morning, I have printed off the task sheets and read through them and where it says click here and all the rest of it when I click in there and I print that out so I can read it at leisure at home or flick through and find out the interesting bits and print it out depending on how long it is. 3STU109393</p>
<p>Yes pretty much yes and I print them off/at work I print them off so that when I am flicking through the notes at home I have got them as sort of back ups to what other people have said or what Stockport college thought about this and so I do sort of click through. 3STU109567</p>
<p>It would be but I would not be as inclined to be. Now whether that is because I use a computer in my work such a lot and I am quite happy with the use of computers, that could be the reason why I think that I am happy to look back on a computer screen and log on and just back track a little bit. I do have hard copies, I have printed out hard copies of everything and keep them in separate files as well so I do occasionally flip that through. I sometimes find it easier to look back at the computer screen and just check that I am up-to-date and where I am up to and it's nice to be able to log onto the discussion board and just check whether anybody else has put a comment about the particular subject. This constant reinforcement and reassurance that I need. 1STU512117</p>
<p>Um, each weekend I would do a reflection on the previous week on whether I had actually achieved the objectives I wanted to the previous week and then I would set out objectives for the next week. I need to read chapter such and such a thing I need to print off, write the introduction to such a thing, so I would have a numbered list of things to do this week and at the end of the week I would keep referring to that as the week went on and as I did them I would tick them off, so hopefully by the end of the week the idea would be that I had achieved everything on that list. At the end of the week I would then do a review – I would write a paragraph in the book “I have had a good week this week, I have achieved all my objectives and I actually achieved so much more and this was really productive. So I would actually write an account of the week, and I would also write in I couldn't complete item 3 because the fridge broken down or, so that would be number 1 on next week's and so I would have a tick list every week. It was really useful. 2STU512396</p>
<p>Never. The Finance Funding one that we are handing in January was finished before the last day school. I emailed that to [name of student], my draft for her to look over and it just came back and said excellent so I just thought no changes needed let's get it printed off and in the file and it's sitting there all ready to hand in. 3STU512732</p>
<p>I think it is nice to have the personal touch I think the mixture of the day school and/I think it reinforces what you are covering at the day school. For example Blackboard I</p>

<p>actually have a hard copy I print off all the notes on Blackboard and have them in a folder so I can read then whenever I want so it reinforces and I don't think it would ever/I couldn't see a time where I would think I couldn't do an OU degree I like the contact that we have at Huddersfield. I want to feel that I belong to a university if it just all done by computer and I never actually visited the place where/I would not feel the same about it. I feel that I belong that I am a student at Huddersfield. 3STU513068</p>
<p>Oh yes, yes. When I have been searching for something else I might have come across something – that's good, I will either save it or print it off or just highlight the bit I want and save it in my notes but you have got to be careful on plagiarism. 2STU813776</p>
<p>Um they are both about the same probably because it doesn't matter if you print them off, 3STU814460</p>
<p>I have printed them off for my file and put them in a file because I have been referring on the funding modules I have been referring back to those. 3STU814468</p>
<p>Well I do but I would still print them off. 3STU814476</p>
<p>Yes because I think you digest it more when it is front of you on a bit of paper. It's like when you type anything up you don't always see the mistakes until it is printed off in black and white. 3STU814484</p>
<p>I keep referring to Finance and Funding because that the one I have been doing, more information that was input in there for us to print off and use and it was quite clever how you would have to press into something and then you press something else to get an answer. 3STU814582</p>
<p>It's a bit difficult because it is so different so I mean on the day schools we have got very enthusiastic tutors so again they do inspire you to get on and everything and the students are very supportive so you do gain that but because it's different it's a different learning experience completely and I must admit at the last day school I did feel as though I could just jump off a cliff here and how am I going to land because as you know er you get/we have always known that there was another day school to come to and meet everybody and everything and we are going to have the tutors to speak to and I did think how is it going to feel now I did feel kind of like 'free falling' now, but it's been fine because I was not going to actually come in today but then I had arranged it with you and then as it happened I actually had a problem with and I thought than goodness I can come in and speak to him and so it hasn't worried me actually and because I had always bought into my work as well as I preferred to do that rather than email it, if I had to email it I thought am I doing to remember everything and I stuck it all in and it was 21 pages and I am thinking what if they don't get it, so that was the worry, there was the worry of not getting the work there and if you did notice I have enclosed this that and the other because I didn't want you/what do you do, do you print if off as soon as you get it. 2STU916221</p>

Oh yes. I don't print off peoples' discussions particularly and the thing was it was at a time when I hadn't had chance to print off my printer was not working and I think I had printed some stuff off/there was so much missing. I tried it when we hadn't got broadband and I couldn't get it at work so you know what I mean so I couldn't get into the tasks as well as I wanted to so it was just because I hadn't got round to doing it and I do rely on it to be honest because I don't print everything off. I always print off the modules stuff and the tasks but I don't print everything off and sometimes you know there's some discussions and you needed to know what the people have discussed and I couldn't do that. 3STU916675

It is and it isn't. It is Because you have got everything I take it you mean like handouts, I can see the advantages of handouts and you got it there you can write on it and underline and highlight but on a screen, without printing it off, you can't actually highlight, but other than that I think as long as it is proper information I think they are both equally as good. 3STU21120

Um, I wouldn't say it's better than lecturers but it is helpful to because after you have had your lecture you can go on Blackboard and pull more or less the powerpoint presentations off if you want them but they are given out anyway. 3STU814452

APPENDIX 26

Discussion Boards

<p>Because it is there in writing and you can actually sit and read/if you sat and listened you don't take half of it in you just doodle or laughing at the person next to you or reading the wrong notes and you just you don't take it in whereas if it is down you have discussed it briefly so you know the main parts I like to just go away and read all the notes which I do. 2STU110952</p>
<p>[laughs]. Um, yes they do because it's nice to see what other people write. 3STU109563</p>
<p>For me. Positive things are is that it is there when you need it, the information is there, it isn't as though you have to make an appointment to talk to somebody to discuss something or clarify something, the information is there, the discussion board is a useful tool . 2STU65281</p>
<p>If I am at home I think would I would have to do is to get on the Blackboard and the discussions boards and say I am stuck with this, can anybody help? 1STU76480</p>
<p>I have confidence in the discussion boards if I want to say something I will. 2STU41928.</p>
<p>Um, that is a conflict. Um, but that is to make sure that I am doing the right thing – I am using that as a tool more than a reading although books are a tool to a certain extent. 2STU41953</p>
<p>The discussion boards so that you can contact other people. 1STU64797</p>
<p>The following students make the point that if someone responds on the discussion board, then do not feel they are working alone and this is motivating to students.</p>
<p>I suppose if you have got the Blackboard then even if you are working on your own you can be talking to somebody else if there is somebody else on you can say, "is there anybody else on", "what you're doing" and have a chat so I suppose that way you can/you are not quite as alone if you know other people are working on it as well. 1STU76385</p>
<p>3STU65643 People have on the discussion boards they have been doing something at 3 o'clock but it is just available 24/7 isn't it so it fits in – you can learn when you want to.</p>
<p>Sometimes find it easier to look back at the computer screen and just check that I am up-to-date and where I am up to and it's nice to be able to log onto the discussion board and just check whether anybody else has put a comment about the particular subject. This constant reinforcement and reassurance that I need. 1STU512117</p>
<p>I have to say I don't use the/I do go on the discussion boards to have a look if there are</p>

any new comments. 2STU512295

I mean I suppose really that's how day schools operate isn't it I mean you are given the information verbally, ask questions there and then and then we follow it up with Blackboard and look into it in greater depth really. 3STU109551

I probably look at the people I know more than anything. 3STU814590

APPENDIX 27

Student decisions over home life and the need to do work for the Foundation Degree

HOME LIFE PREVAILS		FOUNDATION DEGREE PREVAILS	
DECISION MADE	MAKES DECISION	DECISION MADE	MAKES DECISION
<p>“I am moving house and probably the computer at home is going to be off for well hopefully not more than a week.” 2STU813612</p>	<p>“I had to have an extension . . . I went to Australia for four weeks before Christmas.” 2STU65210</p>	<p>“Like over the Christmas period I was just able to get on with it because my family was away.” STU814052</p>	<p>“My wife were getting a bit fed up when I were doing the work based project as every night I was coming in and writing out so she got a bit annoyed.” 3STU21038</p>
<p>“I am not spending as much time as I think I ought to and I don’t know whether that shows in my work.” 2STU33349</p>	<p>“I have been trying to organize a family holiday and we are all going to Florida.” 3STU65460</p>		<p>“I usually do it by saying Wednesday night I am doing college work and I will disappear upstairs.” 2STU33305</p>
<p>“My son sometimes comes in and I have to have a break because I can’t sit and concentrate on what I am doing when he is about.” 2STU76812</p>	<p>“I don’t like my family being involved in my work and the college course is just another ‘compartment’ – a third one.” 2STU33301</p>		<p>“I try to work it round my family really. It’s not taken over my life and I just fit it in if my husband wants to go for a walk for the day because he likes walking then I will do my course work for the day.” 3STU42726</p>

<p>“Yes But we generally have our own Sunday so that cuts Sunday out doing the course work.” 3STU77608</p>	<p>“I like to spend at least 1 day at the weekend doing nothing but being with my family.” 2STU33500</p>		<p>“Um, yes. Yes, I was fortunate because my family is grown up and I did spend about three days literally on the computer.” 3STU109109</p>
<p>“He comes and goes. [talking about son], He yes washing and ironing that’s the only way he infringes on my time.” 3STU512812</p>	<p>“It’s a problem that I am putting in the way of my development. . . .there is just no way for the sake of 1 day school that I wouldn’t not go on my holiday.” 3STU65695</p>		<p>“So I have had to lock out the lazy side and say no I am not going to sit in front of the television tonight I am going to do some work.” 2STU915960</p>
<p>“But it’s mummy this and mummy that and sometimes I can feel myself getting angry but now I just say well Ok we will sort the problem/because I will sit there and I won’t get on so we go away and sort the problem.” 2STU915968</p>	<p>“Then I have chosen to have a weekend away this weekend because I am getting stressed.” 2STU916005</p>		<p>“My husband is great and I will say just look can you take them swimming or something and he is good so if I get absolutely desperate we can find a way round it yes.” 2STU915968</p>
<p>“Have had some personal problems with illness parents really so it’s basically that the time I would normally study I am doing other things.” 3STU916432</p>			<p>“I have always set aside study time which mainly is the time that I am not working”. 3STU916528</p>
<p>“My son sometimes comes in and I have to have a break because I can’t sit and concentrate on</p>			<p>“I think the only conflict for me is that I have chosen not to go out with my</p>

what I am doing when he is about so I wait until he goes out.” 2STU76812			friends.” 3STU916542
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APPENDIX 28

Juggling: Dilemmas and coping strategies

JUGGLE DILEMMA	ACTION TO RESOLVE DILEMMA [Coping strategies]
“Time - keeping fit, the kids, the wife, coming here . . .”	“With horrible nights you don’t feel like going out anyway.” 3STU2954
“Know from now until December that is going to be really busy. ”	“I will cope I will manage.” 3STU42293
“If all the rest of the family are going out somewhere.”	“I will stay at home and do college work.” 2STU33305
“I was probably having 3 tasks on the go at the same time.”	“But I am more organised now. I can do 5 jobs/I can multitask.” 2STU110257
“Each weekend I would do a reflection on the previous week . . . So I would actually write an account of the week, and I would also write in I couldn’t complete item 3 because the fridge broken down. ”	“So that would be number 1 on next week’s and so I would have a tick list every week. It was really useful.” 2STU512396
“Um, er, just coping – just juggling everything around you juggle your home life your work, my degree.”	“And at the moment it’s swimming all right.” 2STU813717
“It is hard to juggle your life I mean I am on my own so I can get on with it but how these/how colleagues like got a husband and family still at home and do a fulltime job as well I just don’t know. ”	“Like over the Christmas period I was just able to get on with it because my family was away.” 3STU814052
“It’s very hard juggling them all about.”	“I have Blackboard as my home page now so I go straight into and I don’t have to look for it.” 2STU916342
“The children have had to accept that mummy isn’t just there for them.”	“My husband [laughs] has definitely had to take it on board and he was very supportive last year.” 3STU916516
“I am finding it/the work isn’t impossible it isn’t it’s manageable it’s difficult when things come up time/you know at the last/there’s just been too many things going on er so it’s really just been balancing.”	“I’ve balanced everything work my home life and my studying.” 3STU916488

APPENDIX 29

Issues of time

ISSUES	ACTION	IMPACT ON WORK
STUDENT 2		
<p>“Only get 5 or 10 minutes at a time.”</p> <p>“Because of limited time.”</p>	<p>“I always give myself as much time as possible.”</p>	<p>“Structuring my time to get the marked work done.”</p> <p>“If I had a lot more time I would do more research.”</p>
STUDENT – 4 STU4		
<p>“Need to Bring all that time together</p> <p>“Concentrate in one big amount of time.”</p> <p>“Make sure I am using it in the right way.”</p> <p>“There is that time now that I can use.”</p>	<p>“My time management is going to have to improve.”</p>	<p>“If I do bits I have to recap on the day before because I have work to do in between times. I mean it’s not like a full time university student who can just do 1 project. I still have to go back to work.”</p>
STUDENT 8 - STU8		
<p>“It’s just too time consuming to read everything</p>		
STUDENT 3 - STU3		
<p>“My initial worry is whether I have enough time to devote to it.”</p> <p>“There are lots of different pressures on my time.”</p>	<p>“I may take a seminar paper to bed with me read it and then chuck it on the floor. All that does it allow me to keep thinking about it in odd times.”</p>	<p>“I may not pick up a pen of sit at the computer for 3 or 4 weeks.”</p>

<p>“I am disappointed by how much time I am spending on the degree – I am not spending as much time as I think I ought to.”</p>		
STUDENT 6 - STU6		
<p>“Messages which are time consuming to read.”</p>	<p>“Just used flexitime to find the time to spend at home to get things done.”</p>	
STUDENT 7 - STU7		
<p>“It’s time isn’t it? It’s time to do it.”</p> <p>“I would have liked to have done more on Blackboard but it was just the time issue of trying to get it done.”</p> <p>“It’s the time finding that time and doing/that were the biggest thing.”</p>	<p>“When I looked at it what we had to do for the degree I thought well I do that in my work any way so that’s easy well not easy but sort of”</p>	
STUDENT 9 - STU10		
<p>“Well and other circumstances dictate don’t they like the family at home you don’t have any time to yourself which is when I can be what I want to be.”</p> <p>“I do have to watch my time.”</p>	<p>“I do like working alongside a work project. It makes you think you are killing 2 birds with one stone.”</p> <p>“So I sort of work flexi and I roughly take a day a fortnight. It suits me better to take a full day and I type or read at home or compose of whatever and get it done that way.”</p>	

	<p>“I like to do my work in chunks you know 2 hour chunks rather than 5 minutes here and 10 minutes there</p>	
STUDENT 1 - STU1		
<p>“My biggest worry I have is the amount of time I have got.”</p> <p>“Difficult finding the time to fit the two in.”</p> <p>“I felt as though it was all collapsing all around me.”</p>	<p>“I have found that everything I have done so far I can put into practise in school so it’s probably saved me time at the end of the day anyway.”</p>	
STUDENT 5 - STU5		
<p>“Demands on my time with work and home life.”</p>	<p>“I need to be able to structure like the learning journal.”</p> <p>“I need to know well in advance what needs to be done and when it needs to be done by.”</p> <p>“I have managed my time effectively.”</p> <p>“Take a day off, it’s time to take a night off</p> <p>“I can afford to have a night off . . . well in advance of my schedule.”</p> <p>“I am not going to any mid week matches because I can’t afford the time.”</p>	

	<p>“I have filled this leisure time with study time so I have very little leisure time.”</p>	
STUDENT 8 - STU8		
<p>“It’s trying to set aside and be disciplined to yourself to set a time.”</p>		
STUDENT 10 - STU9		
<p>“You can build that into the time you have.”</p> <p>“It’s not just a quick course that you can sort of tine the time to wing your way through.”</p> <p>“I do like time off.”</p>		

APPENDIX 30

Employer Support

POSITIVE SUPPORT	NEGATIVE SUPPORT	AMBIVALENT
“I work flexi here.” 2STU108813	“And apparently I am not allowed study leave.” 2STU108813	“[name] no, not really, well he is the IT manager – he knows I am away once a month.” 3STU2934
“I needed some things scanned in and he did that for me.” 3STU21204	“They were not very forthcoming because it is confidential.” 1STU2806	“The IT module I did he read that and he asked me about it.” 3STU21208
“Head of Department who I work for she is really good.” 3STU77764	“Look she wouldn’t give me permission and she wouldn’t print me anything off because I says well you don’t have permission.” 3STU77736	“I don’t think anybody has a clue what I am doing.” 3STU34082
“Oh he is very, very supportive [Head Master].” 2STU110715	“I don’t know because she don’t help any of us. To say she is a Line Manager.” 3STU77768	“Either he is too busy – I have told him what I am doing and I have shown him all the projects I have been doing and he has given me encouragement.” 2STU814004
“I always show him the modules before I submit . . . he is always very complementary . . . he helped me on the work-based project.” 2STU110727	“Support at work a bit difficult because we have got a new head and the old head supported it . . . new head was a big negative at first . . . but I think she is coming round.” 2STU916411	“But he’s very nonchalant about his replies.” 3STU814222
“He counts my course work as school work.” 3STU111702	“Head just said oh I am not sure whether you should have that . . . she got really shirty . . . I’ll have to ask the governors for permission.” 3STU916769	“Um she is changing a little bit . . . she has realized it’s important.” 3STU916873
“I didn’t have any barriers at work because I have got such a supportive boss” 3STU512776	“There was a issue with my colleague [name], who works on a Friday and she was allowed to come here and not make her	

	<p>hours up so I said do I get some time back then and she said no I am sorry it's just tough and I said I don't think that's fair actually and she was very cross about it. Would you mind if I take it to the Governors." 2STU916415</p>	
<p>"She has got confidence in me." 3STU512952</p>	<p>"It hasn't been very good up to now . . . I felt that last year that we did these projects and nobody has ever looked at them, nobody has ever used them and it was a real waste of resources." 3STU916496</p>	
<p>"He has said they are good." 3STU814792</p>		
<p>"I do from my line manager. I said do you mind if I don't come in on Monday yes absolutely. So he is very good like that." 3STU916869</p>		
<p>"She read it and I felt really strange her reading it and I thought it might be a load of rubbish but she said no it's good and I thought Oh, Oh." 2STU76804</p>		
<p>"I think he is quite proud of me." 2STU110735."</p>		
<p>"He thinks I am being too overworked be makes me stay at home to work from home for the day [laughs]." 3STU1 11698</p>		

APPENDIX 31

Student change - What, How, Outcome

WHAT	HOW	OUTCOME
“Something that over that year just writing something.”	“Knowing that it is in a better format, introduction, the body conclusion etc .”	“You have to give this introduction of what the policy is about and then you have to set up the sets and say why you have done this etc so yes, I think I am getting there.” 3STU42667
“I think I have to be organised to get all the modules done.”	“I can do five jobs/I can multitask.”	“If someone comes in and says where’s this and I will know the answer.” 2STU110257
“When we spent time in the afternoon talking about seminar papers.”	“I can learn from what they are telling me.”	“Bring back ideas to the school.” 2STU41751
“The learning and the knowledge.”	“Am gaining more subject knowledge.”	“Is helping me to perform better in my role at work . . . discuss things more knowledgeably .”2STU512352
“I see things differently.”	“I see that there is more value and in depth in something . . .”	“I will make time to read that article . . .”2STU42006
“Pick up an awful lot of good ideas from other people on the course . . .”	“That’s a huge advantage from mixing with the others . . .”	“I take back and modify that we can use them.” 3STU34066
“I am learning a lot of new things .”	“Given me a lot of insight.”	“How other people and what other people do within the school and the department.”2STU65085
“Like this course, some of the things I am learning.”	“I will get to know more about this institution . . .”	“Go into my day to day work so it’s going to be a help for me.” 1STU76158
“Looked at the UCAS system and admission here	“It made me realise how important it was.”	“So I top prioritise them now no matter what I have got.” 3STU77262
That was my worked-based project . . .”	“Um that’s sort of meant/I notice things more . . .”	“I am more aware of things so that’s good.”3STU77266

I think because I can now see it relating to the working situation . . .”	“Relating to the working situation that we are in and the Government’s projects.” 2STU108862
“Everything that I have done so far I have found that I can put it into practice . . .”	“So it’s probably saved me time at the end of the day anyway.” 1STU19868
	“I would say I work more efficiently now.” “I don’t start 3 things and then keep looking at them all throughout the day which I used to do before I start something now then finish it and then start the next one and finish it.” 2STU110249
“It’s like coming out of the darkness into the light you think oh yes that’s why they do that it’s just not realising the theory underpinning the actions that we carry out on a day to day basis.” 3STU512740	“So that’s something we are going to do in future it’s not something we have done before and we weren’t aware of so that’s something that we are going to look at for next year.” “It’s prompted discussion between me and the Head and it’s actually helped her.”3STU512744
“I think in terms of budget planning it has made us more aware of things that we can look out for . . .”	“So it’s given me a greater knowledge.” “But now I think I will be able to get advise to the head and we can work together better as a team.” 3STU512744
“It’s the one thing that brought me down in confidence wise because I didn’t feel that I knew enough about it.”	“I was going through the motions on a day to day basis but I didn’t necessarily understand why.” “So I suppose the Finance module has been the one that has cemented things for me . . .” 3STU512876
	“All but what it has done it’s prompted questions as to perhaps how we apply theory to practice.” “When I am planning the budgets for the new financial year in April things will become a lot clearer as I am actually involved hands on.” 3STU512880
“Because I have got a better knowledge of documents and information . . .”	“Head of ICT has noticed this and it’s actually helping me . . .” “Made myself a little bit indispensable they are wanting to keep me on.” 2STU915859
Got ideas from here or documents that I have read . . .”	“That’s opened a door for me and this will lead on to other things.” “So that’s what I mean by opening doors widening that network really so it’s very beneficial.” 2STU915859

<p>“I think I am learning new skills . . .</p>	<p>“It’s like it opens your eyes to certain things and you think actually sometimes I perhaps ought to think about this.”</p>	<p>“I can go into a meeting now and be a little bit more intelligent about it rather than assuming certain things.” 3STU916655</p>
<p>“I think I am learning new skills which I can apply to work.”</p>		<p>“I can go into a meeting now and be a little bit more intelligent about it rather than assuming certain things. You know what I mean don’t you. It’s like it opens your eyes to certain things and you think actually sometimes I perhaps ought to think about this.” 3STU916655</p>
<p>You think oh yes that’s why they do that.” 3STU512740</p>	<p>“It’s like coming out of the darkness into the light”. 3STU512740</p>	<p>“It’s just not realising the theory underpinning the actions that we carry out on a day to day basis.” 3STU512740</p>
		<p>3STU111219 “I think because I think that the management team definitely rely on me more.”</p>
<p>“So yes huge amounts of confidence in and knowledge” 3STU109239</p>	<p>“And even to answer queries that they have on it.”</p>	
<p>“Given me a much broader perspective at work.”</p>		<p>“Is a huge benefit at work.” 2STU33606</p>

APPENDIX 32

Progression at Work

HOW THEY PERCEIVE THEMSELVES	HOW THEY PERCEIVE THE ORGANISATION THINKS OF THEM	GAINING RESPONSIBILITY	TAKEN SERIOUSLY
<p>“I see myself more important.” 3STU42655</p>	<p>“More important I really do and I think strangely enough I think the Head does.” 3STU42655</p>	<p>“I am more involved in the decision making process at school now.” 3STU11127</p>	<p>“I have proved I am serious about. It’s not just a little job.” 3STU111227</p>
<p>“The confidence to do something else.” 2STU110432</p>	<p>“I think he is quite proud of me.” [The Head] 2STU110735</p>	<p>“Think that the management team definitely rely on me more.” 3STU111219</p>	<p>“They can see that I am serious about it . . . and in doing a degree course they can see it is going to lead somewhere.” 2STU915867</p>
<p>“I would like to recognized but that I have done this for work.” 3STU814444</p>	<p>“Finished I think already people are recognizing I am doing a course and already at work letting me have more access to documentation and letting me have a little bit more responsibility.” 2STU916201</p>	<p>“I think they see a future for me as well in this role to improve the role so they involve me more in decision making process.” 3STU111227</p>	<p>“I am hoping that they are going to give me some more responsibility.” 2STU916201</p>
<p>“People have said me you won’t be in tomorrow because you are going to Huddersfield . . . so it is a recognized thing that I am doing and I think it boosts you up a little bit makes you feel more confident, important, valuable, capable.” 2STU108965</p>	<p>“They turn around and think she does know.” 2STU916201</p>		<p>“I did say you know there is money for training . . . I can’t believe she has just turned round and said yes.” 3STU916566</p>

<p>3STU512856 “I think it makes you feel very good if somebody respects you and values what you do.”</p>	<p>“Head teacher do you know about such and such initiative and she will say how does that work then and she knows that I am clued up on things.” 2STU916201</p>		<p>“Because I know what they are talking about and I think perhaps as a sort of admin role managers think you don’t know what they are talking about in detail.” 3STU109247</p>
	<p>“And maybe for them to give me an increment.” 3STU814444</p>		
	<p>“In a way as well it has lifted my profile in the school in the environment.” STU512345</p>		
	<p>“I guess I do appear a little bit more efficient/I probably do appear a bit more knowledgeable.” 3STU916566</p>		

APPENDIX 33

Student change and work

WHAT	HOW (CHANGE)
“It has lifted my profile.”	“And that chip falling off my shoulder that I feel I am becoming more equal with fellow professionals.” 2STU512345
“I have understood much more what is going on.”	“I attend a fair number of senior management meetings as I do the minutes – I do feel I am one of them.” 3STU109231
“Yes, I think I have felt slightly more confident.”	“I think it boosts you up a little bit makes you feel more confident, important, valuable, capable.” 2STU108965
“I think it’s given me that confidence and that ability to actually think look I am doing a degree . . .”	“I must be capable of doing something like this so I do.” 3STU42644
“I see myself more important.”	“Strangely enough I think the Head does too”. 3STU42655
“My confidence is just growing.”	“And I am respected for the knowledge.” 3STU512844
“I think it’s given me more self-confidence.”	“I know a bit more about what I am talking about when like my directors ask me it has given me an understanding.” 3STU814160
“I have picked up things every now and then.”	“Like my line manager will say we can’t use money for this and I will say actually I think we can I will check that for . . ./I probably do appear a bit more knowledgeable yes and I have the confidence to say that as well.” 3STU916566
	“The management time definitely rely on me more.” 3STU111219
“I have proved I am serious about.”	“I think they see a future for me as well in this role to improve the role so they involve me more in decision making progress.” 3STU111227

APPENDIX 34

1 BLENDED LEARNING AND E-LEARNING

Key research findings:

- The Foundation Degree delivered by blended/e-learning delivery is providing a good match in today's technological age as it is flexible, affordable and efficient.
- Online learning creates and maintains a learner-centred approach and students quickly realise the benefits.
- Online learning greatly adds to student learning processes by helping to produce self-directed, independent learners.
- Students previously unfamiliar with contemporary and computer based learning technology quickly adapted and found the online resources combined with peer group and tutor interaction, both online and in person, to be particularly effective.
- The use of a VLE in delivering learning materials gives students more control over their learning (anytime, anywhere) and also allows students to print off learning materials – previously the tutor may have had control of this content.
- Being able to print off online hard copy of learning and support materials enables students to annotate and use their time effectively.
- The use of the VLE Blackboard greatly contributed to student learning by creating the opportunity for students to see the whole course modules mapped out ahead of them and this aided planning, increased motivation and learning opportunities.
- Discussion boards give students the opportunity to reflect before uploading contributions. This gives the less confident student more opportunity to make a contribution to discussions.

- The inclusion of discussion boards helps with idea generation, gives support to less confident learners and thus increases motivation.
- Consideration needs to be given to the needs of ‘digital immigrants’ who are not used to communicating by text messages.
- Students transfer social relationships formed during day schools to on-line communication (“our little group”).
- Social interaction is maintained during absences of face to face communication, by email and or/the use of discussion boards.
- The new cohort of students on Foundation Degrees significantly impacted on the role of the tutor who became in this new mixed environment that of e-mentor, facilitator, enabler and counsellor.
- The use of email in student to tutor communication increases students’ expectations of tutor support and communication and thus impacts on the workload.
- Tutor and peer access via email or messaging/discussion board ensured support was always available, reduced feelings of isolation and helped maintain motivation and focus.

2 ISSUES CONCERNING SUPPORT

Key research findings:

- Good support from a variety of sources including partners, peers, colleagues and tutors is critical in maintaining motivation throughout the degree and keeping attrition rates low.

- Although employer support was mixed, this did not appear to be a significant problem as long as tutor support was good
- Day Schools were critical for engagement on a social level which in turns helps with the formation of supportive groups which are transferred on line.
- Peer learning and support has is an important part to play in maintaining motivation, learning and achievement.
- Tutor support is a significant factor in motivating students.
- Technology is allowing students to access materials to support their learning but they still need one-to-one contact with tutors for support. Email helps this to happen but the benefits of face-to-face communication are essential to promote learning and maintain motivation.
- Immediate and effective tutor support by email is essential to build student confidence.

3 GENDER

Key research findings:

- The student cohort is mostly female and this has produced a supportive yet competitive environment.
- The success of the Foundation Degree in meeting student aspirations, particularly mature female learners.
- The attractiveness of the Foundation Degree to female students due to it's work-based focus and flexibility

4 POLICY AND EMPLOYMENT (THE FOUNDATION DEGREE)

Key research findings:

The Foundation Degree experience has:

- Increased the employability, professionalism and self-confidence of the student.
- Is suitable for academic re-entrants and has created the opportunity for non-traditional Higher Education learners to achieve their aspirations.
- The Foundation Degree potentially transforms students' life prospects leading to economic success by increasing self-awareness and self esteem and a growing self-confidence in their perceived ability.
- Students perceived expectations of the benefits of the Foundation Degree were exceeded, in particular the benefits to their work
- The Foundation Degree is important as a stepping stone to a full degree for less confident students.
- Students on the Foundation Degree demonstrate a drive to achieve the degree for three reasons: one to enhance their career aspirations and prospects; secondly, to make up for lost time where they feel they should have achieved a degree when they were younger; thirdly for personal achievement (to fulfill their potential).

- Funding is central to widening access, removing barriers and increasing opportunity, especially for single parents
- The Foundation Degree is suitable for academic re-entrants and has created the opportunity for non-traditional Higher Education learners to meet their aspirations.
- The Foundation Degree gave confidence to progress to the Honours Degree

5 ISSUES CONCERNING COURSE DESIGN

Key research findings:

- As students are non traditional Higher Education students, are employed and often have family commitments, the course design needs to be flexible and supportive and meet the needs of students and allow them to manage their time and prioritise flexibly.
- Day Schools gave the opportunity for students to learn from one another and gain feedback of their own performance by communicating and by self-comparison to other students.
- Small group work, as well as online activities, are essential to ensure students feel peer and tutor support is readily available.

- Tutor guidance, feedback on progress and personalised attention can be achieved effectively through email but this should also be backed up with telephone and face-to-face tutorial as requested and/or required
- Peer to peer contact at day schools impacts positively on student learning and this means that personal contact is essential as e-learning on it's own would not give this opportunity or dimension.
- Hosting organizations need to be aware that adult learners may encounter health and stress issues, particularly in relation to the use of technology and in meeting critical dates eg formative assessment deadlines.