Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

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Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

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I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that it embodies the results of my own research unless otherwise stated and that it has not been embodied in another thesis.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Abstract:

This thesis concerns the performance of former Access students pursuing courses in higher education. Access students as mature entrants are a subset of non-traditional entrants and as such are part of the widening participation agenda which predominates educational policy thinking today. In this thesis a quantitative approach was used to study the performance of former Access students in two universities and a quantity of former Access students pursuing the study of Higher National Certificates and Diplomas in further education colleges throughout Scotland. A number of interesting trends and observations were made as a result of this phase but other aspects of factors affecting their performance could not be addressed by these means alone. Thus, a series of interviews with former Access students in three different institutions were conducted (two universities and one further education college) to research the validity of a model of mature student performance which was suggested by the quantitative phase and an extensive literature review. Students were asked to construct a Learning World Map to identify those who have a major effect on their learning world. By an examination of these maps, plus the findings of the programme of interviews, adjustments were made to the theoretical construct (The Castlecary Viaduct of Learning) of factors impinging on performance resulting in a refined model.

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Acknowledgements

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**Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students within Selected Scottish
Educational Institutions.**

A thesis by

Alastair T. Ferrie.

1.1   Context and Background to this Study.

In this research, I examined the relative performance of former Access students in various higher

educational settings. In particular, a detailed statistical study of former Access learners studying at

two universities and a sample of 653 students who pursued Higher National Certificates and

Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs) in various Further Education Colleges (FECs) in Scotland. This posed

questions concerning relative performances. What were the factors that affect performance and

progression for mature students in higher education? Was there a model for mature adult learning

that could be gained from such a study? Hence, a review of the literature involved in adult

participation in general and Access in particular was pursued. This was deemed necessary in order to review the factors that affect participation in learning programmes such as Access courses and factors that affect successful participation in learning for adults.

This research began with an examination of performance and progression at an "old"[1] university in Central Scotland. The standard of data made available at this university was outstanding and it resulted in a very high level of quality data for analysis. The result of this phase of research is recorded in chapter five.

This was further followed up by attempts to gather data from an "ancient" university and the quality of data made available was of such a low standard that it made any profitable analysis impossible.

Another profitable phase was made possible after the gathering of data from another old university in the West of Scotland. The analysis of this phase of the research is recorded in chapter six. In some respects the choice of two similar universities was useful in the removal of unwanted extra variables in examining the performance and progression of former Access students. The two universities chosen were neither elite nor new and both had a policy of encouraging articulation

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1. An explanation of the terms old and ancient university is dealt with in chapter two.

from Access students. Both universities had flexible modular structures with significant numbers of Access students being admitted.

It became clear however that the standard of data being made available from institution to institution was so variable that there would not be any homogeneity in data and hence no common standard of rigour about research in these various universities. A lowest common denominator of research data was considered but the standard of some of the data was so low that this possibility was discounted. None of the universities approached were able to offer anything like the same detail as the first university. It should be pointed out that this phase of the research began before the introduction of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collection procedures being introduced and indeed bridged the bringing in of HESA returns.

Even after the homogenisation which occurred due to this policy it was found that the level of detail given under HESA was not comparable with that offered by Institution A in the first instance.

At this point in the research an opportunity opened up for the examination of screen dumps from the computer records of 653 former Access students currently studying HNCs/HNDs in various FECs throughout Scotland. This was made possible through cooperation and assistance of the research department of SCOTVEC (now Scottish Qualifications Authority or SQA). This

information was gathered on one occasion then updated at a much later date to attempt to improve the quality of data. The result of this phase of the research is recorded in chapter seven.

Since it had now become clear that collecting more and more non-homogeneous data from several institutions was unlikely to produce comparable conclusions from institution to institution and hence no further way forward in terms of comparative and definitive study, a new approach was required. Also quantitative data in itself provides only a macro level of analysis. It is a means by which trends are searched for.   Hence it may provide possible clues as to explanatory reasons for differential performance by gender, class, type of institution etc, but does not offer any underlying explanations.

It was clear that new approaches would be required to carry the research forward. The first of these was a short programme of focus groups to investigate reasons for choice of articulation routes out of Access. This was because of the differential in performance and progression between former Access students pursuing higher education courses in an FE environment and former Access students pursuing degree study in HE institutions. The focus group study is dealt with at the beginning of chapter eight. The second was an extensive literature review to inform the development of a new model for understanding the processes of post Access learning. This is recounted in chapter two. Since this research progressed through a number of phases, the following chart is supplied to map out the progress of the research.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions: Alastair Ferrie

Figure 1: Overview of the Research.

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│  Quantitative Studies   │
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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│  Quantitative Studies       │
│  Of Former Access Students  │
│  Studying Higher Education  │
│  Course in F.E.             │
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      │   Focus Groups   │
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      │  Questionnaires  │
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   │  Qualitative Phase     │
   │  Interviews with Former│
   │  Access students in HE │
   └────────────────────────┘
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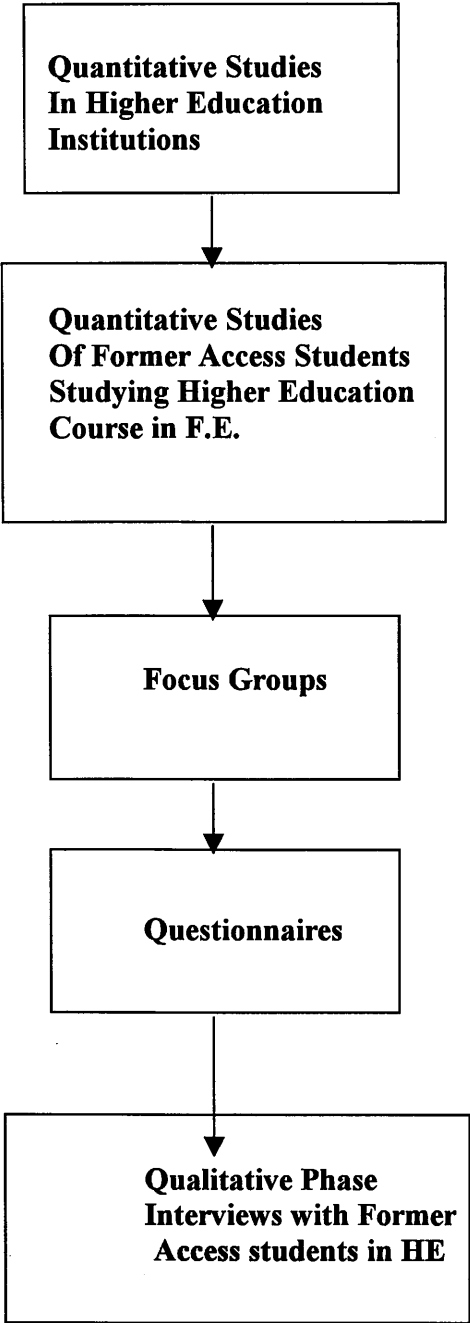
1.2 Principal Research Question.

Since the first inception of Access in 1978 (DES 1978:1) in England there has been much debate about whether Access was an appropriate preparation for higher education. Its appropriateness must in the last analysis be established by examining the performance of Access students in higher education (HE). Indeed, it would be appropriate to examine performance in a wider sense and examine performance with reference to different forms of entry qualifications to search for trends, which would identify the appropriateness of a number of different entry modes. In this research, the first goals were to examine TE's (traditional entrants)[2] from both the English A- level route and the SCE (Scottish Certificate of Education) Highers and their performance at a university scrutinised. Further, NTE's (non-traditional entrants) from a number of different sources were also examined to look for performance trends at the same university (Osborne, Leopold & Ferrie 1997).

Access has become a central theme of debate across the UK. Questions as to the efficacy of various routes have become prominent (Fulton & Elwood 1989, Lieven 1989, CNAA 1992, Parry

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[2] In some of the early literature the term Non-Standard Entrant or NSE has been used. It is thought that this term is somewhat pejorative and there was no uniform definition across national boundaries. In Britain a mature entrant has been fairly widely defined as an entrant into HE who has achieved the age of 21 years on entry. Non-traditional entrants are those who enter into HE study with something other than the declared entry qualifications for school leavers. In general such mature entrants have been found to make quite successful students and hence to speak of them as perhaps not having achieved the standard for university entrance may be misleading. Their qualifications for entry include prior learning over a wide range of experiences and competencies. Bourgeois and Frenay (2001) define the non-traditional entrant as "A new mature student entrant (by age in respective countries) with no previous HE qualification whose participation in HE is constrained by structural factors additional to age."

& Wake 1990, Kelly 1991, Gallacher & Wallis 1992, Munn et al 1993, Osborne & Gallacher 1994, Betts et al 1995, Parry 1996, Osborne et al 1997, Osborne et al 2002, Murphy et al 2002, Houston et al 2003, Boylan 2004). This will be discussed in greater detail in the literature review in chapter two.

It has never been more important to perceive the relative merits of recruiting students from a variety of entry modes, and the validity of NTE's as viable students if indeed that is true. It should be understood by all in education and others involved in the decision-making processes whether or not Access programmes, or other forms of non-traditional entrance is as valid a means of recruitment as any other.

The issue of research question is reviewed more fully in chapter three. However it should be stated succinctly here that the central and overarching question may be summarised as the following:

> What are the chief factors affecting the performance and progression of former Access
> students as an illustrative example of widening participation mature students?

In the process of examining this chief research question a number of other questions are examined in order to facilitate the pursuit of this chief question. These would allow the examination of the performance of former Access students in comparison with other subsets of the student population.

Preliminary research questions were examined at different phases in the research and this matter is dealt with in more detail in chapter three. It is clear that there has been some progression and evolution in terms of research questions addressed which is part of the movement of the research. There are significant questions which are investigated before being marginalized as the focus of the research moves inexorably towards its natural climax. There are demographic variables which are assumed as important as the research begins but relegated to secondary issues by the progress of the research itself and the development of the literature review which forms chapter two. Issues such as age, gender, previous educational experience and social class are chief among the suspected contributory characteristics to performance and perseverance amongst non-traditional entrants into higher education. In chapter five, there was a comparative study of the performance of Access students and traditional entrants by the A-level and Scottish Highers routes. Broadly this led to a confirmation of the ALAW principle dealt with in chapter five.   Thus non-traditional entrants were identified as performing as well as traditional, except for a higher level of drop out.

This was followed in chapter seven with a study of over six hundred former Access students pursuing higher national qualifications in further education colleges throughout Scotland.

It became clear that the performance and progression of these students in further education was at a much lower level than those in either Institution A or B. As it might have been expected that the reverse be true, that those pursuing less rigorous courses of study might be expected to do better

than their counterparts in degree study, then there had to be another explanation for such variability in performance. A different model of adult participation and learning had to pertain to explain this.

1.3   Aims and Objectives of the Research.

The aim of this research was to reach an understanding of the factors which prevent former Access students from being successful in HE. It is clear from this research and from the literature that there is a very variable level of progression and success across many variables. I aim in this research to arrive at a construct which aids understanding why some of these students are successful and some are not. In so doing this understanding may be helpful in pointing a way forward to support the learning of these WP students and thus enhance their learning experience, and as a by-product enhance rates of continuance in HE in general.

In pursuit of this aim there were a number of intermediary objectives that had to be met.

Objective 1:   To make a comparative study in Institution A of the performance and progression rates of former Access students and other subsets of the student population and by doing so arrive at indicators to aid our understanding of factors that affect performance.

Objective 2:   To make a study of the progression of former Access students at

Institution B and pursue understanding about any trends discernible

in the performance of these students.

Objective 3:   To make a study of the performance and progression of 650 former

Access students engaged in the study of HNC and HND

qualifications across a wide range of Further Education Colleges

throughout Scotland.

Objective 4:   To engage in a qualitative study based on semi structured interviews

with a group of 18 former Access students engaged in HE studies

and pursue understanding of the learning world of these students.

1.4   Methodology.

This research is based on a mixed approach, which involves both quantitative and qualitative

research methodologies. The quantitative phase was utilised to identify trends of performance and

progression amongst former Access students and in particular to compare these with the

performance of traditional entrants. This was useful in assisting the research to clarify the major

issues which affect performance of former Access students. In chapters five through seven the

story of quantitative research is narrated. Two old universities were studied and the data made

available by them analysed. This presented a story of post Access performance or progression.

Performance was made clear in Institution A, but the lower level of data made available meant that

only progression could be studied in Institution B (chapters five and six).

Comparison was made with another HEI which was unable to carry the argument further as there

was a lack in comparative data for TEs in that institution. (ch 6)

Chapter seven allowed us to examine the performance of former Access students pursuing HN level

study in FECs.   Surprisingly the performance of these students was at a significantly lower level

than former Access students studying in HEIs and also significantly lower than the performance of

all HN students. Clearly these findings caused us to search for a causal factor in the literature.

It became clear that the research was moving through a major evolutionary change at the end of the

quantitative phase and it was unclear for a time what the way forward should be. It became clear

that no one methodological approach was sufficient to address the issues raised in this research and

a mixed approach was developed through which the various research questions could be addressed.

An extensive literature review was engaged in, in pursuit of a model of adult learning that would be

instructive in terms of differential levels of performance and progression amongst former Access

students. A full discussion of this literature

review is recounted in chapter two. This led to the formation of a model for post Access learning which is discussed in chapters eight and nine.

The most promising of these variables was identified to be social class. According to this approach, HE is seen as an elitist middle class environment, and the entrants coming from Access and other non-traditional routes have enhanced levels of lower social classes, serving the ends of widening participation. This social mismatch might lead to a higher level of non-continuance amongst these students operating in a more elitist higher education environment.

This might suggest that those students operating in the less elitist FE environment might be expected to flourish in an environment which is less of a mismatch and an environment in which they have established a level of comfort during their Access year. Yet that expected result is not borne out by the research (ch 7).

As various factors were examined in the extensive literature review, a search was made for a factor or factors which would address this anomaly uncovered in the quantitative research. Perhaps the causal factor(s) is not as simple as any single demographic variable or indeed any combination of such variables. There is clearly merit in discussions which point out that lower social classes find the social environment of higher education alien. Yet if that were the whole story why is it in

chapter seven that those Access students progressing into the FE environment did not do better than their HEI counterparts?

This led to a consideration of factors in the affective domain. This would suggest a more individual approach to the student experience. No two students have the same experience of HE even in the same institution and on the same course. For no two students have the same experiences of education, culture, social networks and supports. Thus those who trace a class element are not deemed to be mistaken, but that demographic factor alone is not deemed to be causal. Those from lower social classes may often be disadvantaged because their social network is more disrupted by the move into HE. Because the experience of HE is often absent in their social network, it is possible that there may be less understanding and perhaps less support. Because there are extra barriers to participation in a full sense in the life and culture of the university then the ability to make supportive networks in the institution are hampered. There is often less confidence to relate to members of staff and interface in a complete sense with the institutional culture, and this is limiting to the cross cultural student, and lower social class students may be viewed as cross cultural. All of these affective factors are additive. They must be seen as additional barriers to successful participation, above and beyond the more traditional barriers experienced by every new student.

Thus in chapter two when the literature is reviewed, it may be noticeable that over one third of the literature review reflects literature dealing with the affective domain. Chapters eight and nine address the qualitative phase. Thus by means of focus groups and a programme of interviews, investigation of the affective domain was pursued with a group of eighteen former Access students engaged in HE study. A fuller discussion of the methodologies employed in this research is to be found in chapter four.

Figure 2: An Overview.

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │ Comparisons of performance │
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                    │ Various entry modes (ch 5) │
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┌─────────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Consideration of factors │      │ Comparison of           │
│ via literature          │      │ performance across      │
│ Ch 2.                   │      │ institutions ch 5-7.    │
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                    │ Core Factors            │
                    │ The affective domain    │
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                    │ Investigation of affective domain │
                    │ Interviews with students (ch 8) │
                    │ Findings (ch 9)               │
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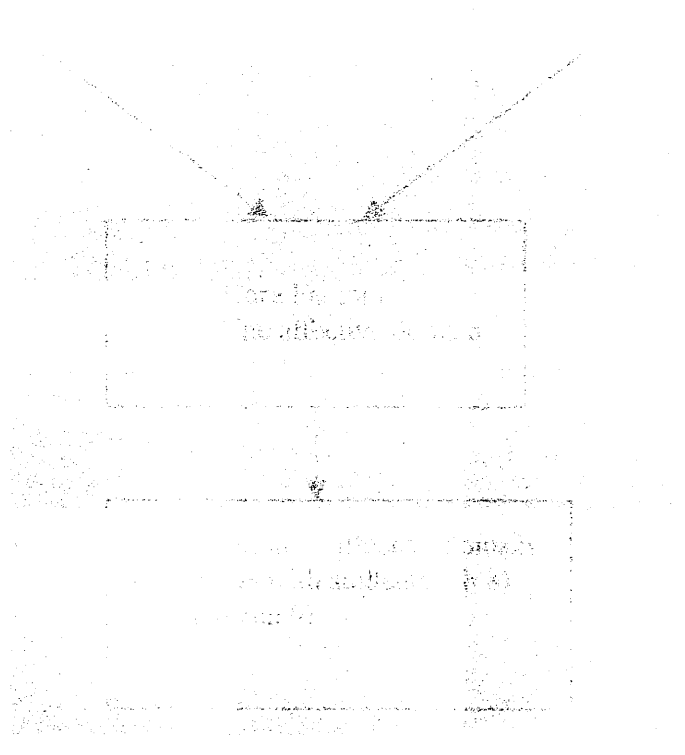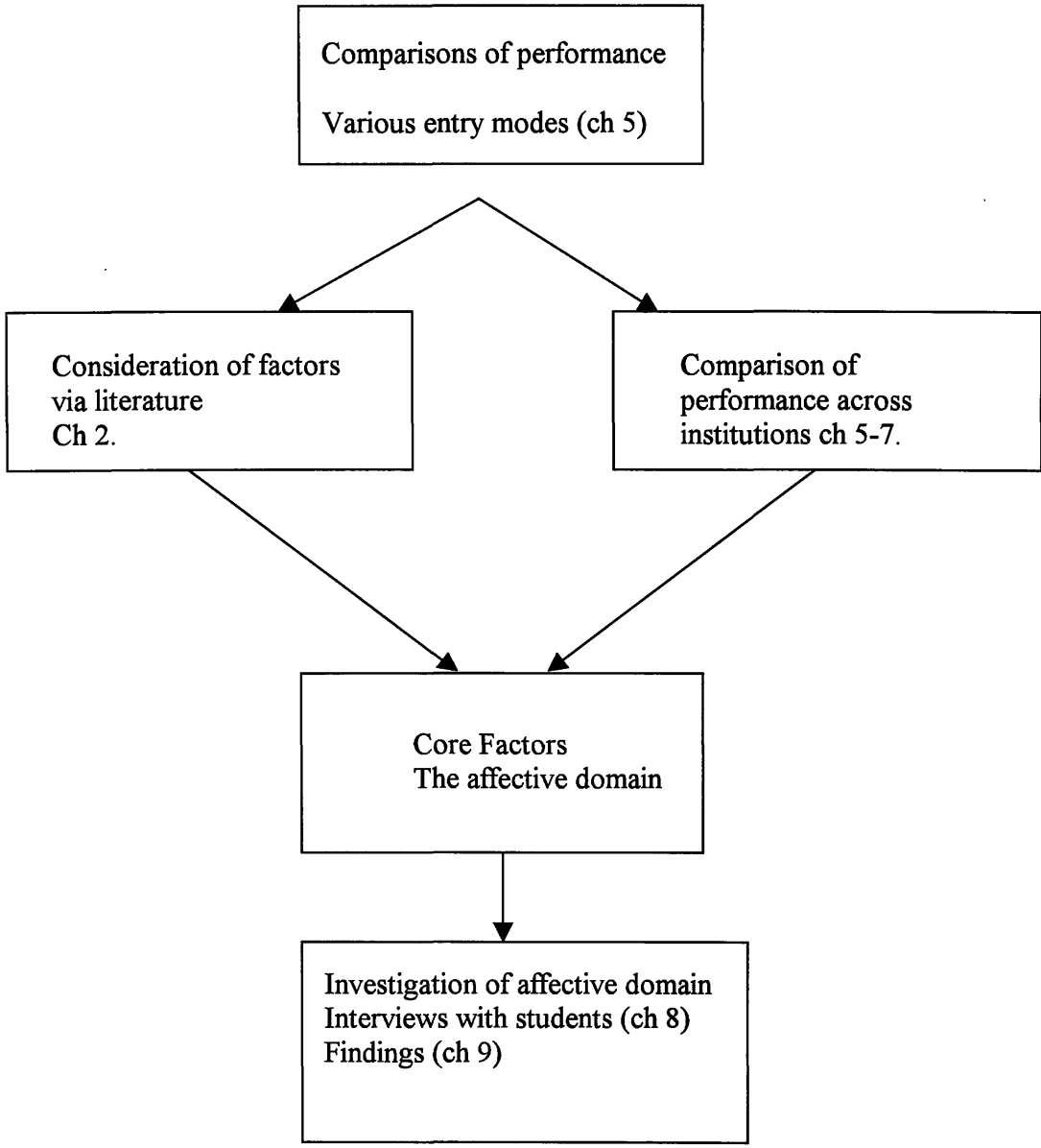
1.5   Significance of the Study.

Higher education is engaged in the process of encouraging wider participation and widening access to university study for NTE's. It is noted in this research that some mature students still express the feeling that HE is a young environment and is geared to the young. Mature students in interview expressed the view that they still felt like interlopers in an alien environment. Several studies referred to in chapter two have pointed out that there is a much higher attrition rate amongst mature students. And since this is a costly experience for both students and institutions it should be regarded as important that we come to a clearer understanding of the forces at work in the learning experience of mature students, in order that we might enhance the learning experience and reduce the numbers of such students who leave their studies prematurely.

Widening participation initiatives are going to be of limited value if they encourage widening access for non-traditional students into a traditional higher education environment. Getting them in should not be viewed as the end of the matter. Keeping them in and helping them through should be viewed as a goal and ambition of higher education.

As this research has a focus which examines the experience of former Access students as a subset of mature entrants in HE, it is of vital importance to the whole HE endeavour at this time. What are the reasons for perseverance and success?   What are the reasons for non-perseverance and drop out?

The significance of this research is that it attempts to address these matters and arrive at

conclusions concerning the reasons why mature students survive or fall. It does so by attempting to

address a more holistic view of the mature learner, the mature learner in the midst of his/her

psycho-social environment (learning world), approaching the learning experience. It is hoped that

this assists in understanding the principal factors which affect the mature learner.

1.6   Limitations of the Study.

This study presents a snap shot of the learning worlds of twelve students from two old universities

in Scotland and six students studying higher education courses in a further education college in

Scotland. These are an examination of the affective domain of these learners in the midst of

pursuing their studies.

One limitation is that there is no time triangulation of these particular students and it is possible that

our understanding may have been enhanced by taking the same interviews at various stages of their

learning. Specifically it may have been instructive to have conducted the interviews at the end of

their Access year, then during each year of study. It may have been particularly instructive to have

conducted the interview with students who did not persist and hence draw comparisons or contrasts

between those who persevered and those who did not.

Further triangulation may have been introduced by interviewing the significant others in the learning world map and asking their perspective on the identity transformation. A particular feature of the research was the revealing nature of findings with reference to academic advisors and the contrast of their roles in FE and HE settings. Further examination of these matters from the standpoint of the academic advisor may lead to a greater understanding of the apparent failure of the role from the perspective of mature learner interviewees in this study.

Time constraints did not permit the follow up on these matters, but they could have added further dimensions to the study and perhaps increased understanding on the Learning Viaduct introduced at the end of chapter two and developed further in chapter nine. Perhaps these limitations could be suggested areas for follow up in future research projects.
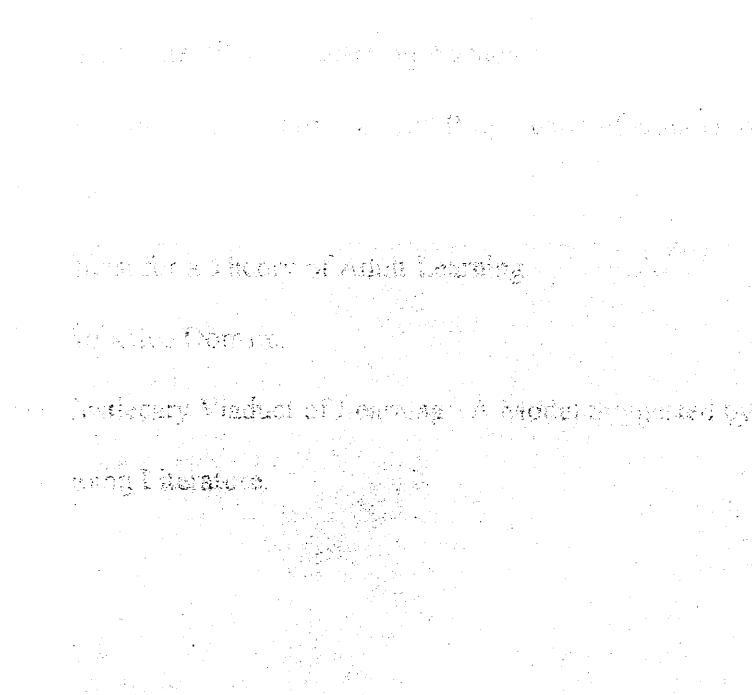
Chapter Two

Literature Review.

The literature review is divided into various sections as the research covered a wide sweep of

various kinds of students entering into university study.

2.1   Early Development of Access .

2.2   Later Access Development and the Expanding HE Market.

2.3   Access and the Lifelong Learning Agenda.

2.4   Factors Affecting Performance and Progression of Non-Traditional

          Students.

2.5   The Quest for a Theory of Adult Learning.

2.6   The Affective Domain.

2.7   The Castlecary Viaduct of Learning: A Model Suggested by the

          Foregoing Literature.

2.1 Early Development of Access.

2.1.1   Governmental Initiatives: Access defined

In this thesis a differentiation is drawn between Access and access. The provision of Access

courses is an early subset of the emergence of policies of widening access which has now come to

the fore. The term Access is best defined by measures developed following the Robbins report

(Robbins 1963) which put forward a principle that courses of higher education should be available

for all those who are qualified by ability to pursue them and who wish to do so (Bolton 1986).

In 1978 the Department of Education and Science (DES) invited selected local authorities to

provide a route into higher education and access for non-traditional students into HE studies

(Millins 1986). It was sought to establish a relationship between FE and HE institutions through

which courses were defined, planned and implemented. Collaboration was also encouraged to

select, monitor and assess students and identify their suitability to articulate into the HE course.

Access courses were to be distinguished from other foundation level or preparatory courses in that

the student exit into a higher education course had been previously negotiated, conditional on levels

of participation or at least completion of the course. Another difference is that the HE institution

participates in some way in design and development of the Access Course and may participate in

publicity and recruitment, assessment of Access students and possibly in delivery of the course

(Woodrow 1986).

The policy itself had grown out of the perceived alienation of black young people in major cities. It was broadly suggested that there was a need for members of ethnic minorities to train as social workers, teachers and youth workers. In support of this policy, the DES letter was sent to encourage preparatory courses catering "particularly though not exclusively" for ethnic minorities to encourage more people from these communities into teaching and other caring professions (Parry 1996). In 1978 the DES invited eight local education authorities (LEAs) to set up new courses for adults as part of a pilot scheme.

In the DES circular of 1978 it was envisaged that Access courses would primarily meet the need to provide more teachers and social workers in England, but even at that time it was perceived that they should prepare the student for entry to HE more generally. In practice, this was generalised by practitioners into a concern for access to higher education for various groups who had previously been largely excluded including working class women and men from manual working class backgrounds. Though there had been earlier attempts, this was entirely new in that it was a national initiative and the courses would be based in the national network of further education colleges.

In the Further Education Unit discussion document (1987), the idea of access into HE in general was discussed. It was noted in particular the following statement, "Recent surveys of Access provision, notably the DES-funded Millins report on Access studies, indicate that the demand for higher education among non-traditional students is considerable".

In England, a number of agreements grew up between FE and HE which had the blessing of government. Lieven (1989) stated that the relationships between further and higher education establishments developed on an ad hoc basis and varied from the patronising to the creative and innovative.

Access in Scotland is clearly identified with the establishment of a centralised initiative in 1988. However attempts at widening access by universities and others predated that by a very substantial period. From 1727 to the mid 1980s there were a number of initiatives in Scotland aimed at opening up higher education to a wider audience (Jordinson 1990). The earliest efforts at widening participation are identifiable at both Glasgow University and Edinburgh University in the 18th century. In the 19th century there were more systematic attempts to offer courses at Mechanics Institutes to artisan classes and these proved extremely popular. In the 20th century there was an enormous increase in the provision of adult education additional to the work done by the universities. Local authorities shouldered the burden of much of this work. By 1909-10 there were 127,000 enrolments in evening classes. In the 1950's and 60's there was a gradual increase in participation in non vocational education growing from 104,000 to 218,000 in the twenty years up to 1972 (Jordinson 1990, p77).

During the 1970's there was a period of reorganisation resulting in vocational education being based in colleges of technology and central institutions whilst non vocational study would be school and community centre based. Just prior to the introduction of the Scottish Wider Access Programme, there were a number of initiatives at Glasgow, Dundee and Strathclyde Universities involving over 300 Access students. These in-house Access courses were not the only pre-SWAP Access initiatives.   In 1987, two full time Access courses were developed in the Strathclyde Region, one in Science and Technology and the other in Business/Social Studies and they were run as a collaboration between Further and Higher Education institutions.

The Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) was set up by the Secretary of State for Scotland, Malcolm Rifkind in April 1988 with resources coming from the SOED, the Training Agency and regional authorities. (SED 1988).   Munn et al (1994) pointed out that in Scotland the development of Access was centrally led and originated by the Secretary of State for Scotland in April 1988, by the setting up of the SWAP.   It was intended to provide a national framework for the development of Access provision in Scotland. The three main aims of SWAP were to improve the rate of participation in HE by older students, to target traditionally under-represented groups in HE (e.g. those from semi-skilled and unskilled occupations, and ethnic minorities), and to encourage collaboration between institutions of further and higher education.

The basic idea was to provide a one-year full time course, which would prepare students to take up study in HE. Although this could be regarded as a "tall order", it was recognised that adult returners

brought to their studies a degree of maturity, various skills which though they were uncertificated would be of great assistance in pursuing their studies, and a strong motivation to improve their situation in life which would compensate for lack of recent study skills and knowledge. The SWAP programmes were made up of recognised national qualifications, particularly SCOTVEC National Certificate modules. This had the advantage of using an already existing programme of learning, which could be implemented very easily by a "pick and mix" approach. This was further seen to be advantageous in that each student would gain certification for each element of his/her programme, and this certification could, at least in theory be used to articulate with any number of courses of advanced study. Thus SWAP concentrated on providing a multi-exit provision with maximum flexibility.

Wider access to higher education was seen as being generally beneficial to the needs of society, arguing that there would need to be a will among the providers of education and employers for this to happen (Ball ,1989). Ball quoted a CBI report Towards a Skills Revolution (July 1989) as saying, "Repeated studies have shown that Britain's work force is under-educated, under-trained, and under-qualified". Thus the underlying principles which led to the development of concepts of the Learning Society and Lifelong Learning were already present in embryonic form. These would be crystallised later and formed the policies that govern educational policy thinking today.

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) policy discussion paper (1989) quoted the following, "Continuing Education needs to be fostered not only for its essential role in

promoting economic prosperity but also for its contribution to personal development and social progress. It can renew personal confidence, regenerate the human spirit and restore a sense of purpose to people's lives through the cultivation of new interests".

2.1.2   Access and Increasing Participation: The Policy Context

Access courses were an early means of widening access generally and may be seen as crucial to adult learners in that they assist mature students in learning to learn. This skill will be invaluable in the knowledge-based economy. The NIACE in England and Wales have stated that they saw a slight rise in overall participation between 1990 and 1996 and that the level of participation in 1990 was itself higher than that found in a 1980 survey. These figures all refer to registrations on formal adult education and training programmes as indicators of adult involvement in lifelong learning of some kind. Access courses would be one manifestation of this.

The desire was expressed in a number of quarters for a more liberal policy in accepting non-traditional entrants into university courses. In his conclusion Ball (1989) stated, "The major conclusions reached in this interim report are that, in spite of considerable effort and change in recent years, UK HE is still not meeting the needs of the nation, either in scale or nature. Nor are we realising the full potential of our citizens. We must aim higher".

The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing 1997) was the first major review of HE since the report of the Robbins Committee (Robbins 1963). Dearing highlighted four main aims which HE should address. These were a] to develop the individual for personal intellectual growth and hence to be equipped for work and thus make a contribution to society; b] to increase knowledge and encourage its application; c] to serve the needs of the economy; and d] to contribute to a democratic civilized and inclusive society.

The concepts of social inclusion and widening participation were and are central to HE policy in the Labour government. David Blunkett (then Secretary of State for Education and Employment) stated his vision of education as involving developing people to their full potential to enable them to contribute economically and play a full part in citizenship (David Blunkett 1998). Social Inclusion and Widening Participation in HE were perceived to be central planks in government social policy. The Dearing report emphasizes the need for widening access to HE. This was in a sense nothing new in that this had been reflected in the Robbins report in 1963 (Duckett 2001). The Robbins report led to the setting up of the new 1960's Universities as a way of addressing the need for widening participation. Following Dearing, widening participation was set to address the inequalities in society by opening up HE to groups in society who were under represented in HE. The political arguments suggested that inclusion of such groups in HE would lead to their enhanced representation among the ranks of those who are economically active and hence socially included. In reality, the economic arguments are not as unambiguous. Some studies have suggested that the growth in earnings which would result from becoming a graduate would be between 24 to 61 per

cent for women and 18 to 57 per cent for men (OECD 2001, p82ff). However the reduction of employment for those over the age of 55 means that the years of economic activity for older LL students may reduce the economic viability of participation (OECD 2001, p91ff). Osborne comments that student decision making now takes into account :

> "… financial circumstances and attitudes to debt; educational background, experience and qualifications; domestic situation and location; occupational status; perceptions of labour market opportunities, and value of HE qualification; career aspirations, and support (if any) from employers." (Osborne 2003, p11)

A number of initiatives were embodied in the Dearing report which included the offering of financial inducements to enrol students from particularly disadvantaged localities (Dearing, 1997:110). Although the Scottish counterpart of the Dearing Report (the Garrick report, published as part of the same set of volumes) did not make such explicit recommendations to funding driven initiatives to improve inclusion, the Scottish Office response to (Scottish Office 1997) stated that its "first priority is widening access to higher education to all sectors of the population". Generally this was recognized as a goal for educational policy (Forsyth & Furlong 2000, Raab & Storkey 2001, Forsyth and Furlong 2003). Further, the Garrick Report was not so explicit in its recommendation for expansion of HE courses below degree level, but did emphasise the importance of the links between colleges and higher education institutions (HEIs) in the development of HE, and recommended that "colleges and HEIs should actively collaborate to enhance and publicise Access and articulation routes into degree programmes for

students at further education colleges" (Garrick, 1997: 49, Section 4.62 and Recommendation 7).

Historically many courses for adults were made available in specialist units known commonly as "extra-mural", "adult education" or "continuing education" departments. More recently, these endeavours have come under the umbrella of Lifelong Learning or Widening Participation initiatives. This reflects the change of emphasis to improving access generally and specifically to certain constituencies previously excluded. Important national initiatives have sought to increase the proportion of entrants from non-traditional backgrounds. These initiatives included the Scottish Wider Access Programme, the Scottish Vocational Education Council (now Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)) qualifications, and the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (SCOTCAT). The SQA have been responsible for the development and validation of a great many HNC and HND courses which have had a major affect on participation in HE in Scotland where the growth of participation in HE in the FE sector has been phenomenal and have also been used as a vehicle for progression into degree study. SCOTCAT, established in 1991, provided a formal agreement between all the main HEIs recognizing a framework for accumulating credit towards the award of a degree. Thus the combination of Access courses, HNC/D developments and credit accumulations which have grown out of the WP and LL agenda have been the instruments of governmental and educational policy intended to address the need for a more socially equitable participation in HE.

The precursor of the current policy debate was the European White Paper, Teaching and Learning: Towards the learning society, (EC, 1995). The focus in the white paper was on economic impacts of internationalisation and the scientific world, and the need for a socially cohesive and inclusive society. These emphases were reflected in the British policy documents including the Dearing (1997), Garrick (1997) and Kennedy (1998) reports. The Dearing report presented a vision of the learning society expanding HE provision with particular emphasis on the sub-degree level. It reiterated the need to address under-representation of certain social groups in HE. Garrick, with relevance to Scotland echoed these concerns and called for enhanced routes into HE from FECs. The Kennedy report *Learning Works* (1997) argues that FE is the key to these endeavours. Not only can FE become a platform for entry into degree study, but FECs are generally located in geographical proximity to areas of social deprivation and their clientele consequently contains a higher proportion of lower social classes. In this respect many colleges can increasingly be seen to play an important role in developing widening access and hence facilitate the widening access agenda.

2.1.3 Access and its Targets for Inclusion.

Munn et al (1994) in their review of SWAP courses in Scotland commented on the effectiveness of Access courses in attracting the students they set out to provide access for. They stated that the

courses had attracted people living in areas of social and economic deprivation and the over 30's.

However they had been less successful in attracting ethnic minorities or students with disabilities.

They found that almost half SWAP students were over 30 years of age, and that over half SWAP

students were female. Also they found that over one in three had been unemployed prior to

enrolment in the SWAP course. Further they found that over 40% of the students in 1991-92 came

from areas broadly designated as "deprived".

Lieven (1989) quoted the Millins report as showing that the parental socio-economic background

of candidates accepted onto university courses were over 70% in social categories I and II whilst in

Access courses, only 13% of Access course students were in II and some 63% were in category III.

This tended to suggest that the original purpose of Access had to some degree been addressed in

obtaining access to higher education from some disadvantaged groups in society. There has been

less definite corroboration on ethnic and gender grounds, particularly in Scotland.

There have been higher levels of participation by adults in learning. By the mid 1980s, the further

education colleges had overtaken local authority adult education centres as providers of education

and training for adults. Recruitment of adults to colleges became an attractive route for colleges to

pursue with their removal from local authority controls (incorporation as it was referred to), and

flotation as separate economic entities. Colleges energetically pursued growth in student numbers

as an economic necessity and the mature learner was seen as an important market for their learning

products.

Similar patterns were also seen in the HE sector. Government policy sought to dramatically

increase participation levels in universities. It was thought that falling birth rates may necessitate

recruitment to take place amongst mature students if targets were to be met. These economic

considerations became the driving force for a wider access and wider participation model for H.E.

courses.

Data on entry routes for adult entrants were quoted in table 3 by Osborne & Gallacher (1994)

employing figures supplied by the Scottish Universities Council on Entrance (SUCE). This

information referred to NTE's over the age of 21 to full time undergraduate study in the eight older[3]

universities in Scotland. The figures suggested a small but statistically significant entry of 8.4% in

1990 and 9.2% in 1991. It is instructive to note the various entry modes, since entry modes were a

major interest in this piece of research. Classifications of entry mode must be noted and used to

---

[3] In Scotland there are four ancient universities, namely Glasgow, Edinburgh, St Andrews and Aberdeen, i.e. those universities formed before the 19th century. This was the situation up to the 1960's. There are 21 HEIs in Scotland. These are made up of 13 universities, the Open University in Scotland, one university college, two colleges of higher education, two art schools, a conservatoire and the Scottish Agricultural College (Morgan-Klein and Murphy in Osborne et al 2004). Scotland's 13 universities developed in three phases. The four ancient universities date from the 15th and 16th centuries. Following the Robbins report in 1963 there was a policy implemented to expand the university sector in Scotland and four further universities were founded, which are now referred to as the "Old" universities. These are Dundee, Heriot-Watt, Stirling and Strathclyde. These changes reflected changes which occurred in England. The expansion of the 1960's and early 1970's came to an end with the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. There was a cut in university funding in 1981 and this resulted in a cut in the numbers of those able to go to university (McLaurin 2003). In the early 1990's, 5 former polytechnics were granted university status by the Further and Higher Education Scotland Act 1992 in a move to increase the numbers able to avail themselves of university level study. In Scotland these "new" universities were Abertay, Glasgow Caledonian, Napier, Paisley and Robert Gordon. Thus the "new" universities are those given university status after 1992.

help in the analysis of the data in the research conducted at the University A during 1994 (See chapter 5).

When the figures for Scottish and UK Access entrants were combined they provided the biggest contribution within the NTE category. Hence although, relatively recent on the scene, the Access route had become very significant. This has come to be known as the third route into HE. (The first route being A-levels or SCE Highers, and the second being vocational qualifications such as HNC/HND etc.)

Osborne & Gallacher (1994) pointed out that the percentage of students aged 21 and over on entry to full time HE courses rose steadily from 20.4% in 1985 to 31.4% in 1991. Relevant figures for part time study were more dramatic rising from 54.3% to 70%. (Though this increase was not a steady one with figures remaining quite static except for two notable jumps from 1985 to 1986 and from 1990 to 1991.) This clearly indicated a considerable increase in adult entry to full time courses from 1985 onwards. Reasons for this could be speculated upon and range from the economic condition of the country, increased unemployment and redundancy, to the growing need for retraining as some industries failed.

There was a significant growth of numbers in SWAP based Access courses over the period 1989 to 1992. (Osborne & Gallacher 1994) In the year 1989-90 there were a total of 750 students enrolled in SWAP Access courses, and by the session 1992-93 this had grown to 2103. This represented a

growth of some 280% in four years. In Science and Engineering, the growth over the same period

is listed as going up from 276 to 626. This represented a growth of 226%. It should be

remembered that this was in an area where it is commonly regarded to be more difficult to recruit

students. And hence this growth has a certain "value added" dimension. Osborne and Gallacher

made mention of the fact that in the last couple of years of those figures, the rise had flattened out

and had apparently reached a plateau. Recent trends have substantiated that the global numbers did

in fact plateau though there was significant growth in some areas (e.g. Primary School Education)

whilst areas like Science and Technology experienced a decline. SWAP (2002, p5) stated that in

considering the numbers of students participating in SWAP from 1988 to 2002 there had been an

increase of 31% in total enrolments. Withdrawal rates from SWAP Access courses stood at 24%

per year. However from those students which stayed the course, 86% progressed on to some form

of HE course. The distribution amongst those progressing to HE was that 71% progressed to HEIs

and 29% to a study of HE in FECs (op cit p5).

Figures quoted by Murphy et al (2002) in a report to the Scottish Executive summarize the position

for participation in Scottish universities in the period 1994-99. The following is quoted from their

appendix B containing these figures:

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions:
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Table 1. Trends in participation 1994-1999, Scottish Universities

Indicators	Group	1994 No.	1995 No.	%	1996 No.	%	1997 No.	%	1998 No.	%	1999 No.	%
Class	Professional	3230	3546		3616		3549		3303		3396	
	Intermediate	7482	8285		8732		9257		8979		8741	
	Skilled Non-manual	2001	2213		2489		2830		2687		2667	
	Skilled Manual	2914	3481		3678		3638		3583		3585	
	Partly Skilled	1308	1618		1795		1907		1873		1812	
	Unskilled	277	349		328		391		336		399	
	Unknown	1287	1676		2289		2564		2758		2904	
Sex	Female	9342	11175		12130		12893		12659		12816	
	Male	9157	9993		10797		11243		10860		10688	
Age	Under 18	5214	5800		6406		6640		6482		6380	
	18	7824	8271		8582		9473		9024		9133	
	19	1136	1442		1592		1728		1887		1882	
	20	607	887		1100		1174		1132		1333	
	21	494	592		740		742		757		782	
	22	375	497		497		503		561		481	
	23	335	390		421		399		394		386	
	24	251	354		382		358		333		332	
	25-29	954	1198		1224		1257		1176		1012	
	30-39	888	1206		1352		1249		1126		1224	
	40 plus	421	531		631		631		547		559	
Total		18499	21168		22927		24136		23519		23504	

Source: Murphy et al (2002)

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions:
Alastair Ferrie

Table 2. Trends in participation 1994-1999, Scottish Universities (Continued)
Source: UCAS, Widening Participation Dataset, Scotland quoted in Murphy et al (2002)

Indicators	Group	1994		1995		1996		1997		1998		1999	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Ethnicity	Asian	481		579		682		709		709		720	
	Black	41		63		65		75		76		85	
	White	17298		19733		20862		21820		21013		20970	
	Other	114		109		126		126		126		147	
	Unknown	565		684		1192		1424		1595		1582	
Main Qualification	A/AS Levels	635		578		597		815		630		577	
	Scottish Highers	14090		14891		15333		15827		15390		15659	
	Access	953		911		970		779		636		539	
	Baccalaureate	20		12		26		30		24		16	
	BTEC/SQA Higher	1326		2757		3429		3245		3600		3626	
	BTEC/SQA Lower	311		425		344		290		218		141	
	Foundation	0		0		0		80		62		30	
	GNVQ	0		37		51		96		64		56	
	None	196		638		1128		2021		2024		1883	
	Other	735		621		747		659		586		658	
	Other Degree	15		18		16		8		20		13	
	Partial Degree Credits	23		23		26		31		19		23	
	UK Degree	195		257		260		255		236		283	
Total		18499		21168		22927		24136		23519		23504	

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2.2 Later Access Development and the Expanding HE Market.

The later development of Access was couched within an expanding framework of the
widening participation and lifelong learning agenda that prevailed since the mid
1990s. With government policy focussed on increasing participation rates in HE, the
widening participation agenda steadily gained momentum.

2.2.1 The Key Role of Further Education Colleges in Widening Participation.

Within the present political climate FE colleges are viewed as key institutions in
widening access, and promoting social inclusion and lifelong learning. FECs are
viewed as having vital links with local communities and offer the best options for
routes into formal education and hence participation with the learning society. The
Kennedy Report, while focussing on FE in England, has had a UK-wide impact. In
this it is stated that 'FE is the key to widening participation' (Kennedy, 1997: 28). It
also refers to the 'progression opportunities', which 'have the potential to break
through existing barriers and deliver the widening of participation' which FE can
encourage (Kennedy, 1997: 28, Osborne et al 2000).

There was pressure generally in society for wider access and participation in higher

education. Higher education could not be seen as merely an opportunity for the elite,

but if the nation were to prosper, it would need to be made available to a much wider

spectrum of society and include sections of society which were in continuing danger

of remaining excluded. Thus the backdrop for the later policies from 1995 onwards,

of social inclusion was building a substantial head of pressure for change. This

pressure perceived that widening access was an educational and an economic

imperative. It was broadly argued that if larger portions of British society were not to

experience social exclusion then something had to be done to widen access to

learning. Public discussion in the political arena argued that the creation of a

Learning Society was seen as the way out of the social exclusion problem. Abstaining

from the Learning Society would be seen to be the only criterion for exclusion or

inclusion. Some would opt out of the Learning Society and exclude themselves.

However if the cohesion of society were to be in some sense preserved then wider

access to higher education was an imperative not to be ignored.

Osborne & Gallacher (1994) outlined the reasons for the unstoppable pressure to

widen access into higher education as stemming from the following areas:-

      i)   the perceived need for a more highly educated and trained workforce

      as a national resource.

ii) the implications of demographic changes which were to come to a head

in the mid-1990's with a declining birth rate having an effect on the

numbers of school leavers being available to take up University places.

iii) the desire for social justice in giving "second chances" to talented

people who for whatever reason "missed the boat" the first time round as

far as education is concerned. This principle of social justice has been

strongly held by teaching staff involved in providing Access courses and

by the largely Labour Party dominated regional authorities (viz.

Strathclyde). Thus the idea of social equality and justice, equality of

educational opportunity is innate in the Scottish scene.

Recent policy documents also incorporate this vision of FE as instrumental in

facilitating lifelong learning (LL) in the wider community.

Scotland's FE sector in the new millennium should form an accessible network of

colleges, local learning centres, support agencies and flexible outreach

arrangements, enabling people from every sector of the community to pursue

lifelong learning for both vocational and personal development (Scottish Office,

1999)

2.2.2   The Growing Importance of HN Level Study in Scottish FE.

Further there was evidence that the importance of the HN route for widening

participation and the inclusion of mature learners. In a study involving six different

FECs 63% of the sample of HN students studied were 21 years of age or older.

Similarly the importance of this route for widening access was confirmed in that 49%

of the sample were from social classes 3m, 4 or 5. Within this sample of students of

HN students, who the researchers were able to track, 65% proceeded to degree study.

(Gallacher et al 1997) Thus the importance of a route through FECs into HE is

validated for mature and/or socially disadvantaged learners. It may be that the

proximity of FECs to areas of social disadvantage, and hence enhanced accessibility

prove a winning combination to draw such learners into formal education and thence

onto HE.

The underpinning philosophy of recent policies and practices are best understood

within the context of the government's vision of a learning society as described in

the Green Papers published in 1998 (DFEE, 1998; Scottish Office Education and

Industry Department (SOEID), 1998; Welsh Office, 1998). These were influenced

previously by the thinking of the European White Paper *Teaching and Learning*

(European Commission, 1995).

Recent policy developments however, have challenged the perception of

commitment to widening participation, since it has been paralleled by declining per

capita investment in overall student numbers. Further in general, the per capita

investment in HE students in FECs is lower than in the university sector. This has

resulted in discussion in the press and other places of what is referred to as a funding

crisis in higher education. In the recent White Paper, *The Future of Higher*

Education, the Secretary for Education and Skills has signalled that the English HE

sector faces some 'hard choices on funding, quality and management' (DfES 2003a,

p. 4). In this White Paper, whilst there is a continuing commitment to expanding the

HE system and to narrowing the social class gap, the proposal is to allow universities

to charge 'top-up' fees as a means of addressing the funding crisis. This has been

seen as a somewhat controversial solution as it may be counter productive with

reference to the goals of improving and widening access. Nevertheless the UK

government appears to favour this solution and to support those who can't pay such

top up fees through a means-tested bursary system (DfES 2003b Section G).

Parallel development of policies occurred in Scotland through *Opportunities for*

Everyone, a strategic framework for FE (Scottish Executive, 1999) and *Scotland a*

Learning Nation (Scottish Executive, 2000) though there have been some important

differences in the policies of the devolved Scottish government. Chiefly, there are

no fees for undergraduates and little prospect of the introduction of top up fees in

Scotland. The Scottish Executive reversed the decision to impose fees in response to

the Cubie Report (Scottish Executive 2000). From 2000-01 Scottish domiciled full-

time students no longer had to make the £1,000 contribution to fees. Most recent

principles underlying policy in this area have espoused the concept of an entitlement

to lifelong learning. (Scottish Parliament 2002)

Flett (2001, p160) commented that the main thrust of widening participation policy

has been to encourage "a wider range of students to enter higher education, as a

further step on the ladder of opportunity. The terminology underlines the fact that

education is still seen essentially in elitist terms." H.E. has thus been seen as the top

of the pyramid, a goal to be achieved only by an elite subset of society.

There has been a remarkable growth in the provision of H.E. in FECs and a growing

interest in collaborative links between FECs and HEIs (Osborne et al 2000).

Osborne et al (2002, p 4) carried out a review of these links and stated,

> "The importance of the links between further education colleges (FECs) and
>
> higher education institutions (HEIs) in the provision of higher education (HE)
>
> must be understood in the context of two developments. Firstly the steady

growth of HE in FECs as a result of which the majority of HE students in

Scotland now begin their studies in FECs".

These growing links between the sectors opened up the possibility of former Access

students completing an Access programme at one college, articulating from there onto

an HNC or HND programme at that same college or another, and finally articulating

onto degree study at an HEI with advanced entry. These intermediary steps could be

seen as enhancing student opportunity and contributing to widening access, or perhaps

introducing further intermediary hurdles at which students may falter and fall.

Gallacher (in Osborne et al 2002, p 5) commented,

> "FECs moved from being fairly marginal and often low status institutions to
>
> having a much more significant role in the Scottish tertiary education system.
>
> The number of people participating in courses within FECs has risen from
>
> 175,216 in 1985-86 to 383,543 in 1999-2000. Within this overall growth it can
>
> be noted that the area in which there has been the most steady, and in some
>
> ways the biggest growth, has been in full-time higher education courses. These
>
> figures represent a growth of over 300% over this period. This has been mainly
>
> in HNC/D programmes, although there has been some limited growth of degree
>
> programmes".

During this period there was considerable pressure on FECs to extend their activities

and hence income by expanding aggressively into the H.E. market. Since the mid

1990s there has been considerable expansion in HE in Scotland both in HEIs and in

FECs. The following figures were downloaded from the Scottish Executive Statistical

website and show the mushrooming of provision.

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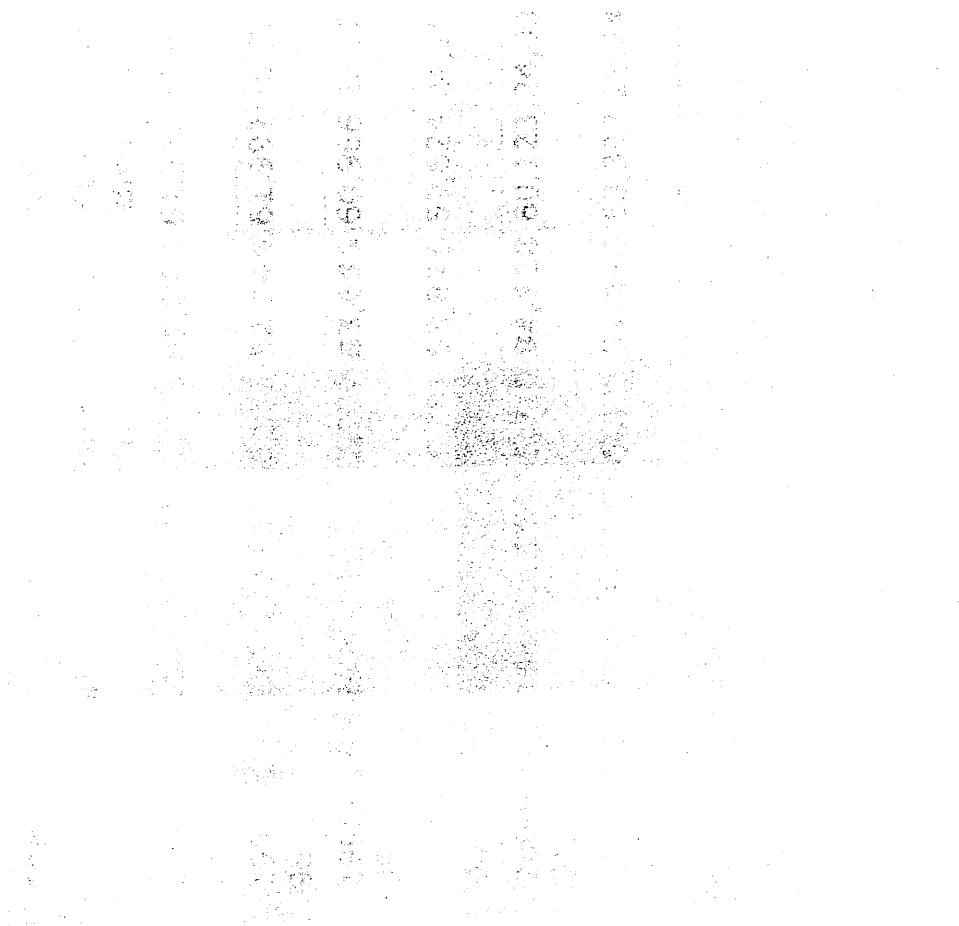
Table 3: Source: Scottish Executive 2004

Year	Total			Male			Female		
	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time
1996-97	171,964	128,998	42,966	81,008	61,547	19,461	90,956	67,451	23,505
1997-98	178,575	132,549	46,026	82,744	61,992	20,752	95,831	70,557	25,274
1998-99	184,853	132,626	52,227	83,695	60,966	22,729	101,158	71,660	29,498
1999-00	187,381	132,100	55,281	83,876	59,624	24,252	103,505	72,476	31,029
2000-01	189,964	134,254	55,710	84,128	60,123	24,005	105,836	74,131	31,705
2001-02	208,538	142,710	65,828	91,646	63,397	28,249	116,892	79,313	37,579

The above table indicates a steady growth in provision. The most notable part of that

growth is in part time provision. We note a 50% increase in participation in part time

H.E.

Whereas there has been some development of part time degree programmes, the

substantial component of this is in the form of part time HN level study in FECs.

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Table 4: Source Scottish Executive 2004. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/00342-00.asp

Students in Higher Education In Scotland: 2002-03

Table 1 - Students in higher education in Scotland by mode of attendance (numbers, FTE and percentage changes), 1995-96 to 2002-03

Year	Total			Full-time		Part-time	
	FTE	Numbers	% increase	Numbers	% increase	Numbers	% increase
1995-96	162,645	214,261	5.4	145,634	1.0	68,627	16.0
1996-97	174,943	238,093	11.1	156,997	7.8	81,096	18.2
1997-98	181,747	247,656	4.0	162,332	3.4	85,324	5.2
1998-99	186,721	255,963	3.4	162,969	0.4	92,994	9.0
1999-00	185,990	259,388	1.3	161,941	-0.6	97,447	4.8
2000-01	187,645	262,913	1.4	165,616	2.3	97,297	-0.2
2001-02	192,516	272,627	3.7	170,320	2.8	102,307	5.1
2002-03	191,475	267,029	-2.1	172,132	1.1	94,897	-7.2

One aspect which is a specific feature of the growth in provision in Scotland has

been the substantial and dramatic growth of the provision of HE in FECs which has

dwarfed the growth in the HEIs. The provision of HE in FE has been much more

dramatic leading to a growing percentage share of the HE market being met within

FECs.

Table 5: Students enrolled in FE colleges by level and mode

	1985-86	1990-91	1995-96	1999-2000
FE F/T P/T	30,374 114,817	27,500 199,600	30,709 194,130	38,176 273,360
HE F/T P/T	6,996 23,029	9,431 23,722	25,328 35,390	29,841 42,166
Total	175,216	260,253	285,557	383,543

Source: SOEID 1999 and SFEFC 2001 (note these figures exclude students
registered on non-vocational courses)

Gallacher (2004. p2) stated that,

"As a result of this growth further education (FE) colleges are now major

providers of higher education (HE) at undergraduate level in Scotland. In

2001-02 29% of all HE level undergraduate students in Scotland were

enrolled in FE colleges".

Table 6   Undergraduate students in Higher Education in Scotland, 2001-02, by
             mode of attendance and sector

	HEIs	FEIs	Total
Full-time	122,602 (78%)	27,592 (43%)	150,194 (68%)
Part-time	33,936 (22%)	36,032 (57%)	69,968 (32%)
Total	156,538	63,624	220,162

Source: Gallacher 2004.

It is noticeable that in the FE sector 57% of students pursuing HE courses are part

time. This emphasizes one area of difference between the two sectors. In the FE

sector there is a greater degree of flexibility in delivery, in locality, and in structures

of delivery. A substantial number of these students (20%) are attending at the

evenings or weekends, while 10% are studying through some distance or open

learning mode (Gallacher 2004, p7).

Although part time HN provision in FECs is an important growth area, there has

been remarkable growth of full-time HN courses. The Table above indicates that

the numbers enrolled on full-time HE level courses increased by 347% over the

period 1985/86 to 1999/00, while the overall growth of HE level provision was only 141%. This growth has been particularly concentrated in HND programmes, where 90% of students are full-time. However, there has also been an important growth of full-time HNC programmes, where 42% of students are now full-time, (SFEFC, 2001).

In chapter seven in this thesis there is an examination of the progression and performance of students studying in HN programmes having entered via an Access course. Very often the Access course is provided by the same institution as the HN programme. Gallacher commented that to date there have been no systematic studies of the experience of HN students on their college courses. It is therefore difficult to comment on the experience of these students, other than to report anecdotal evidence that they appreciate the relatively small classes in which they work, and the regular close contact with tutors. Studies of this kind are now planned, and it is hoped to provide more systematic evidence on these issues in future papers. Perhaps chapter seven provides some insight into the progression rates of a subset of these students, i.e. former Access students. Attempting to establish completion and withdrawal rates for HN programmes is difficult, since data in this form are not currently published by SQA or SFEFC. This partly reflects a number of difficulties with the existing data. A major problem here is the fact that many HN students are part-time students who may take several years to complete

their programmes making it difficult to establish completion rates for any given cohort. This would require a tracking process for which current reporting systems do not appear to be designed.

The data presented by recent research (Gallagher et al 2004, McLaurin 2003, Osborne et al 2002) show that HN provision within the FE colleges is now a major aspect of the HE system in Scotland which makes a very distinctive contribution to HE in Scotland. These courses attract a high percentage of students from areas of social deprivation, and make a valuable contribution in widening access to higher education.

The Higher Still development in Scottish Education sought to unify vocational and academic streams of education offering parity (Ferrie 1996, Cloonan & Canning 2000). Thus the delineation of differing levels and differing styles of qualification were drawn together into a framework. The growth of HN provision in Scotland has also been associated with a blurring of the distinction between vocational and academic forms of provision as HNC/Ds are increasingly used by students to prepare them for transition to degree study, as well as being used for more traditional vocational preparation.

2.2.3 Access and the Learning Divide.

The recent emphasis on the importance of lifelong learning (LL) has also led to the recognition of the importance of the 'learning divide' which must be tackled if social divisions are not to become entrenched and the socially excluded not to be confirmed in their exclusion due to a lack of opportunity to engage in profitable learning as a means of inclusion. "This has led to the recognition of policies designed to ensure that groups who are in most danger of social exclusion are enabled to participate in education and training and through this to improve their position within the labour market and escape from problems of poverty and social deprivation". (Osborne et al 2002, p 6-7)

Different models for admission are employed in different institutions (Walker 2000) and McLaurin in Osborne et al (2002) showed that it is much more likely that a student taking an Access Course in an FEC will enter an ancient or older university rather than a new university or other institution. By contrast a student taking an HNC/D is more likely to progress to a new university. This is illustrated by the figure below.

Figure 3:
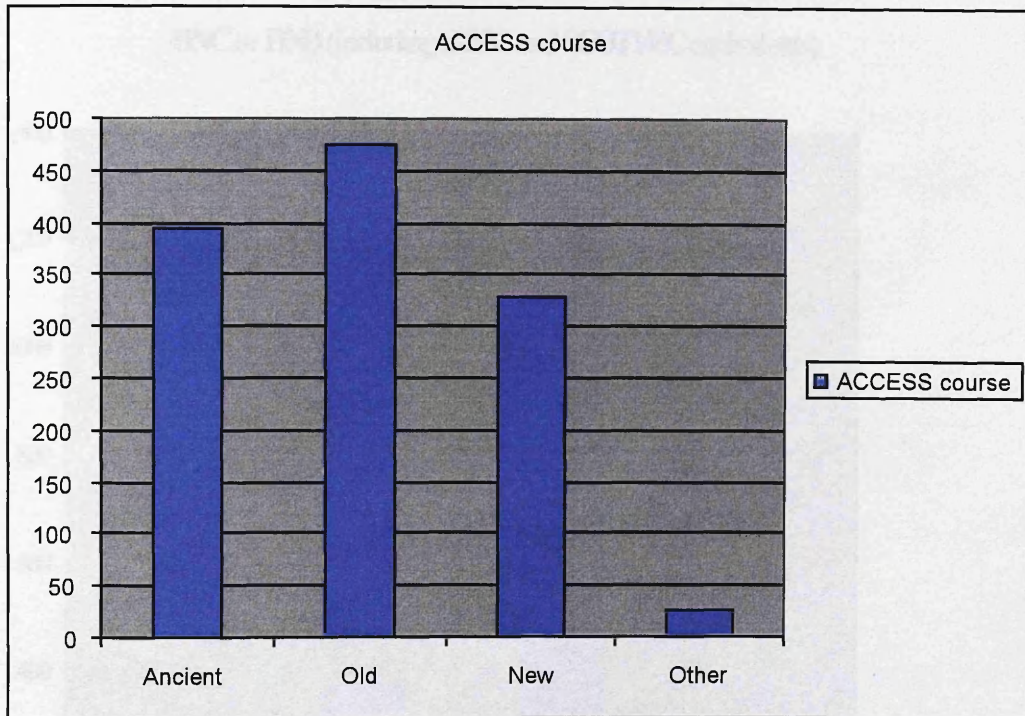
Source: McLaurin (2003) and quoted in Osborne et al (2002)

Figure 4
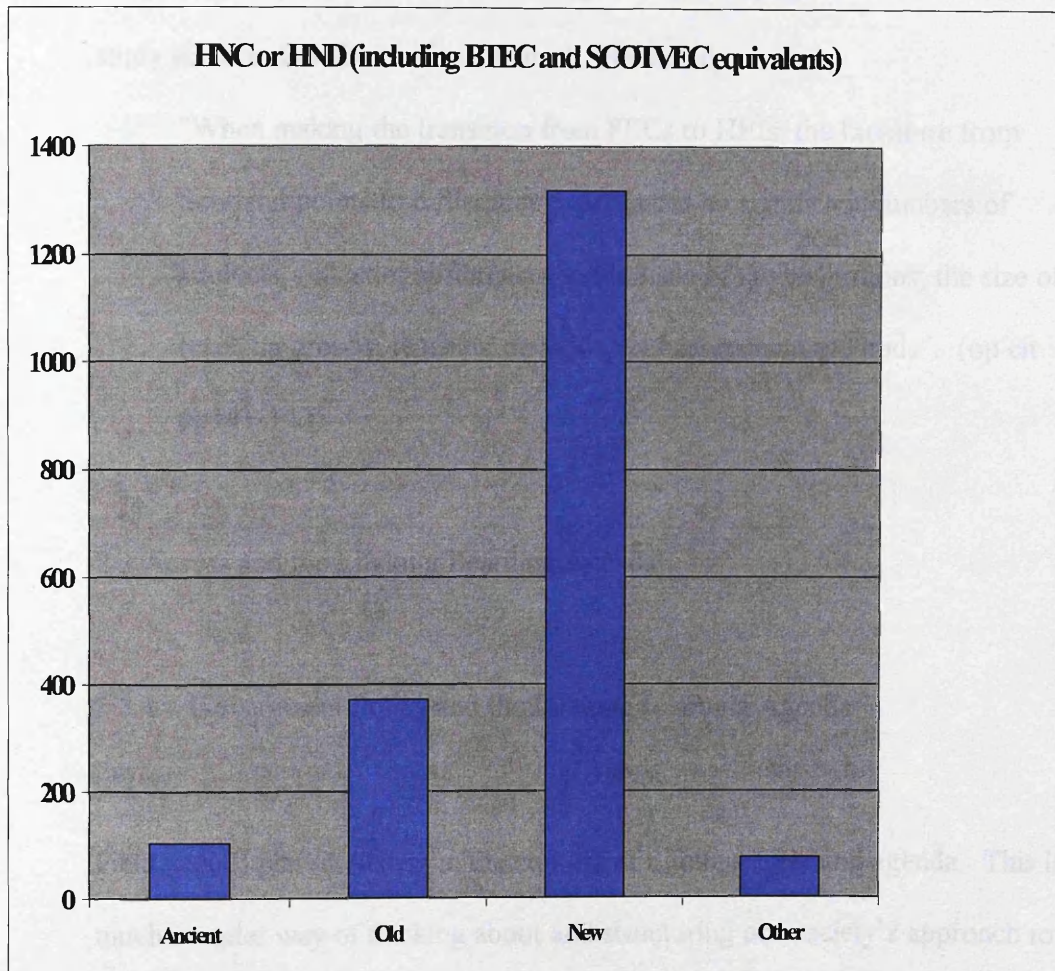
Source: McLaurin (2003) and quoted in Osborne et al (2002)

Osborne et al (2002) spoke of the culture and ethos of the different institutions, study skills and methods of assessment. He stated,

> "When making the transition from FECs to HEIs, the literature from Scotland points to difficulties experienced by significant numbers of students, reflecting differences in the scale of the institutions; the size of teaching groups; teaching methods; and assessment methods". (op cit pp141-142)

2.3 Access and the Lifelong Learning Agenda.

2.3.1 Government Policy and the Lifelong Learning Agenda.

Field (2000) placed Access in the context of Lifelong Learning agenda. This is a much broader way of thinking about and structuring our society's approach to education. There is a current trend making "Lifelong Learning" a catch-phrase which captures the attention of politicians and hence policy makers in general. Access must be seen as a subset of this. In 1998, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment wrote in a compelling way in a White Paper that learning enables people to play a full part in their community. The claim was made that it strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation.

Such evangelistic language speaks eloquently in favour of movements towards
greater social inclusion in education.

The incoming Labour government in 1997 appointed Dr Kim Howells as the
country's first Minister of Lifelong Learning. Britain is not alone in this
development of lifelong learning strategies and policies. As well as organising its
Year of Lifelong Learning, the European Commission published its own white
paper on education and training subtitled, "Towards a Learning Society" (CEC,
1995). Lifelong Learning policy papers have also been published throughout
Europe. Hence the Lifelong Learning agenda is a feature of most advanced societies
and the move for wider participation in education and training an integral part of
policy.

However, it must be admitted that much of the glorious rhetoric in favour of such
horizon expanding learning opportunities is motivated by the need to develop a
more productive workforce, seeking to reduce the unemployed underclass and bring
such members of society into a more economically active state, or simply to
upgrade the skills of the workforce to make them more flexible for an ever changing
employment market. It may be argued that the debate has been driven by economic
factors.

A generation ago most educators were still speaking of education as the truth that makes men free, and the expansion of personal horizons as the ultimate goal of a liberal arts education. But in the period since the mid 1990s it has been the economic argument that has prevailed in the drive for social inclusion.

Field (2000,p 35ff) and Giddens (1991, p2ff) commented on the broad explosion of informal and self-directed learning that has taken place. This is Lifelong Learning but not in a formal educational sense of full time courses in F.E or H.E. institutions leading to a nationally or internationally accepted qualification. It is an ad hoc form of learning, which is entered into more or less consciously in order to pursue everyday goals which may be associated with employment. Field comments, "Marred by its narrow vocationalism, this dominant definition of lifelong learning has rightly to be criticized by those who seek a more humanistic approach".

One criticism that has been levied of the current trend is that there appears to be a clamour for lifelong learning but this is not necessarily accompanied by policies which enable. All will proclaim that they support "apple pie and the flag" but is this translated into policies that are supportive or developmental of lifelong learning strategies? It has been argued that the term in itself is *used as a vision*, but may be empty of content, with no real clue as to how such ideals may be implemented in

any real way in society. Thus lifelong learning is seen as a medium for social or economic inclusion.

2.3.2 Lifelong Learning and Participation Trends.

In recent years it has become more likely that the individual will not be educated once for a lifetime in a particular role or environment, but it is much more likely that a person will change occupation and even sector more than once during economically active years.

Another factor is the rapidity with which technological advances are introduced into the work place in an attempt to increase productivity and hence profitability. This makes more and more demands on the learning base of the work force to keep abreast with each new development. Even those who do not change jobs will inevitably require to update their skills on a regular basis throughout their working lives. The term reflexivity has been coined meaning those who maintain a permanent learning mode. This reflexivity is already a factor in our society for those who are to remain economically viable.

In the recent study by Murphy et al, a report to the Scottish Executive (2001), they

summarized the position for participation in Scottish universities in the period

1994-99. The following findings are relevant to this analysis:

1. That participation showed a steady increase in numbers from 1994 to 1997.
   The figures peaked in 1997 then tailed off slightly in 1998 and 1999.

2. That this observation held true across the various class groups. Though it
   was noticeable that the participation amongst those in the unskilled class
   remained very small throughout.

3. That the peak for participation amongst former Access students occurred in
   1996 with 970 enrolled in Scottish Universities. The figure in 1999 was
   considerably lower at 539.

4. When you examine the trends for participation in those who are 21 years of
   age or over on entry the following picture emerges:

Figure 5:

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
■ mature entrants	2143	2197	1839	1852	1645	1717
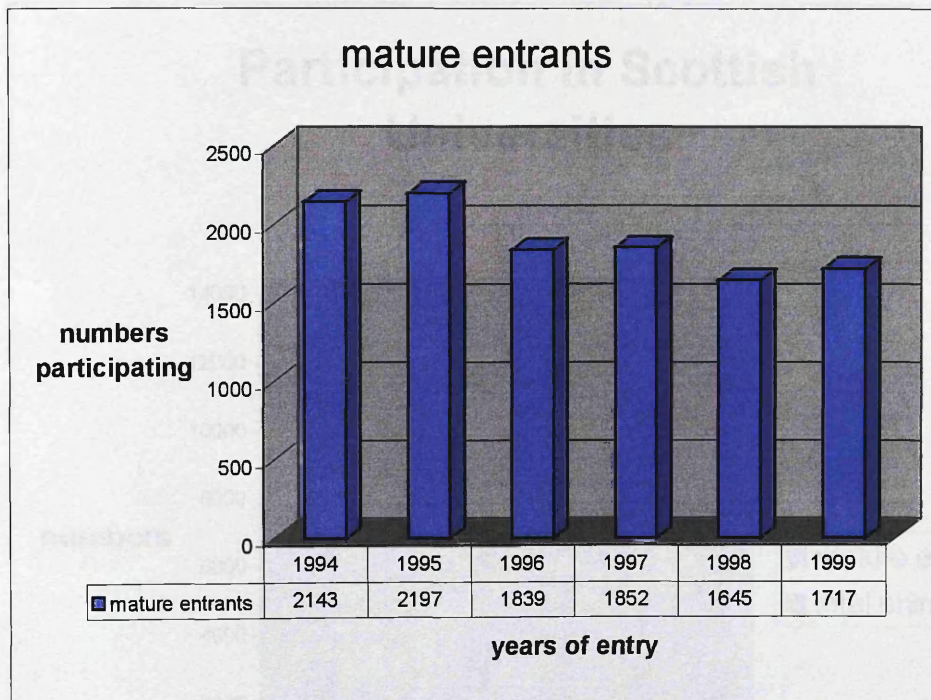
Source: Murphy et al 2002.

We need now to compare this with the overall trend of participation to see any age

related effect. The following graph displays total participation levels and the

participation levels for mature students only.

Figure 6:

Participation in Scottish Universities

numbers

■	mature entrants
■	total entrants

Years of entry
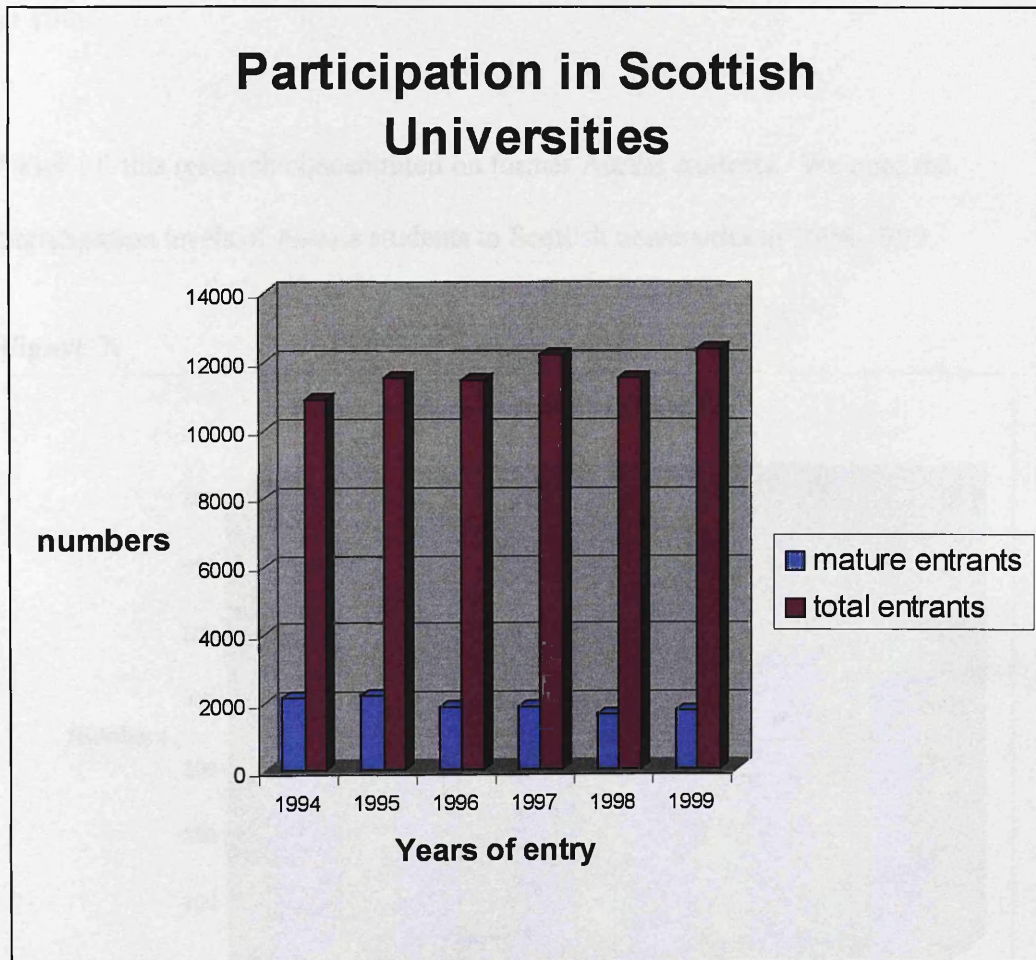
Source: Murphy et al 2002.

We note from the above graph that the overall participation figures peaked in 1997,

fell the following year and then experienced a partial recovery in 1999. The mature

entrants peaked in 1995, also hit a low point in 1998 and showed a minor recovery

in 1999.

Much of this research concentrated on former Access students. We note the

participation levels of Access students in Scottish universities in 1994-1999.

Figure 7:

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Access Students	683	644	690	547	432	403

Access Students at Scottish Universities

Numbers

Year of Entry
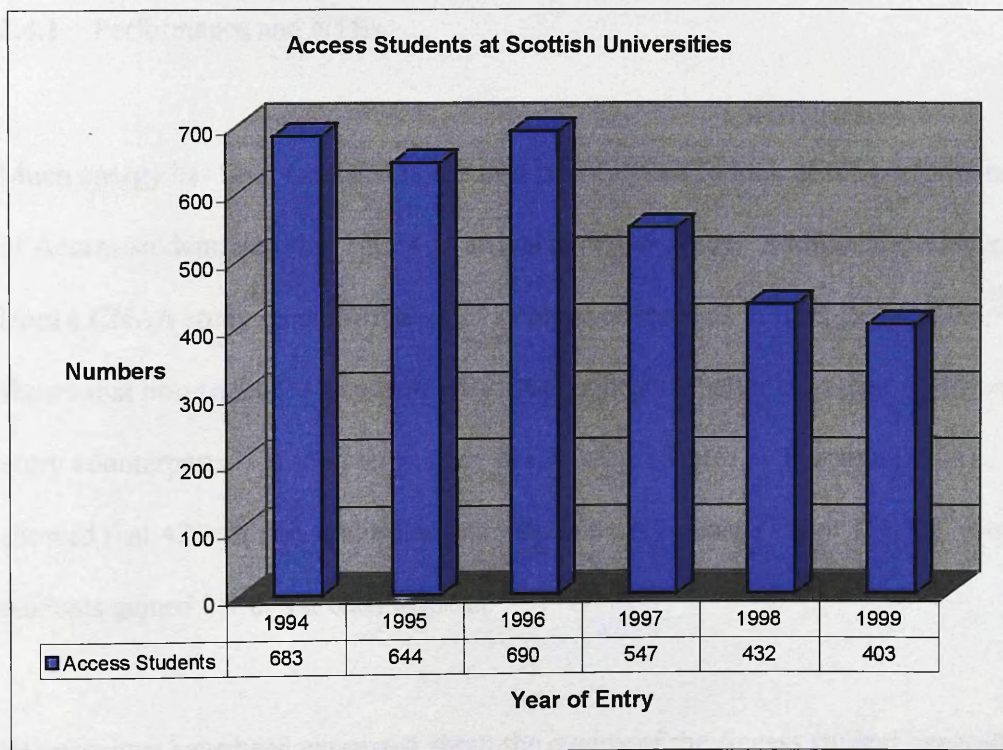
It is noted that the overall numbers in Access entry have declined during this period. Part of this decline is indicative of a rise in articulation into higher educational activity in the F.E. sector chiefly in HNCs and HNDs.

2.4 Factors Affecting Performance and Progression of Non-Traditional Students.

2.4.1 Performance and NTEs.

Much energy has been extended in the past twenty years to look at the performance of Access students or other NTEs on arrival in degree study. Additional evidence, from a CNAA study on performance of a cohort of students at final degree level, shows that non-traditional students perform significantly better than their traditional entry counterparts." A long term study of CNAA graduates by Brennan (1984) showed that 42% of non-traditional entry students as against 31% of 18+ "A" level students gained 2:1 or 1st class degrees.

Reservations have been expressed about the quality of the Access student generally. Again the Millens report showed that 34% of Access students were likely to drop out. This failure rate was seen to raise major questions about the function of such Access courses (Lieven 1989).

Fulton & Ellwood (1989) spoke of admissions policies, which affect the recruitment

of non-traditional entrants, notably those in Access programmes. They pointed out

that A-level point scores do not turn out to be a good indicator of final degree

results. Their final recommendation was that monitoring should be conducted

regularly and systematically, and used for the review of admissions policy and

practice. They further recommended that the monitoring should include data on

applications, admissions, student progress and degree performance.

Of considerable interest was the CNAA project report 34 (1992) entitled "Progress

and Performance in Higher Education". A point of interest in this was the

classification of entrants to the university. Also, it should be noted that the CNAA

study dealt with BTEC but made no mention of SCOTVEC (Scottish Vocational

Education Council), the Scottish equivalent qualification. One table of results

refers to the work of Smithers & Griffin (1986) into the performance of what might

be called TE's and NTE's. Access students were regarded as a subset of NTE's.

Below is quoted their "Table 3.i Degree Quality."

Table 7:

Degree Result	TE (%)	NTE (%)	Access (%)
1st	4.1	2.2	1.5
2:1	28.0	27.9	23.9
2:2	35.1	34.4	38.8
3rd	6.7	6.5	10.4
Pass	1.6	1.5	3.0
Ord. (3 yr)	2.2	1.1	-

Commenting on the above table, the CNAA report made the following statement,

"We would suggest that these measures indicate for the courses sampled a virtual

parity between the performance of NTE's and TE's"[4]. There was considerable

discussion of what is referred to as the ALAW hypothesis. (Note that this stands for

the "At Least As Well" hypothesis.)

Kelly (1991) working at Bradford University commented,

> "Senate has noted from time to time that 'wastage' from undergraduate
>
> courses is significantly higher from 'mature' applicants than for candidates
>
> entering University shortly after leaving school".

This implies that though performance of mature students may be described as

following the ALAW principle, persistence levels amongst such students are lower.

---

[4] Note that they referred to these as NSEs and SEs and this has been amended here to use the less
pejorative term. See earlier note on p2 on this nomenclature.

Special note was taken of the study of Gallacher & Wallis (1992), which examined

a number of similar issues. i.e. completion rates and degree performance. They

were interested in the percentage of each cohort that completed the course of study

on which they had set out, and a measure of the "quality" of the degrees obtained by

those who graduated. (i.e. first class honours, upper second etc.) Further, they

raised the issue of the "value added" component when dealing with students of non-

traditional entry qualifications. They quote the work of Molloy & Carroll (1992)

which shows the rate of completion for various types of student and quote the

following figures:-

Table 8:

	TE (%)	NTE (%)	Access (%)
Degree obtained within conventional period.	77.6	74.3	77.6
Still proceeding	3.6	4.6	4.5

The above results were considered to be a virtual parity between TE's and NTE's.

These results were taken from 25 degree courses over 5 institutions.

Gallacher & Wallis (1992) commented with regard to degree performance,

"Most of the research which has been undertaken indicates that with regard to final degree performance, mature students with non-traditional qualifications perform at least as well as traditionally qualified students with whom they have been compared". (Comparable research in Cope et al 1993). They quoted Bourner & Hamed (1987) as saying that 39.5% of those graduating from CNAA full-time or sandwich degrees in 1983 who had non-traditional entry qualifications obtained "good degrees" (i.e. firsts or upper seconds), while only 34.9% of graduates who were A-level entrants achieved good degrees, and the figure for all entrants was 35.8%. The date of this work meant that much of the recent development of Access courses would not be included in these figures.

Boylan in Osborne et al (2004) has written of a similar effect in USA following widening participation developments since the 1960's. It was noted that in order for higher education access to be meaningful, those who have attained access must have a reasonable opportunity to also attain a degree. It is not just a question of "getting them in". It is also a matter of keeping them in and assisting them through to a successful completion of a course of study. Although many non-traditional students flourished in higher education as a result of their newly won access, many others failed. These high attrition rates among non-traditional college students lead to increased research interest in the areas of teaching and learning and student retention. The community of higher education scholars and policy makers believed

that attrition could be reduced if teaching techniques more appropriate to non-

traditional students were discovered and employed. It was also stated that student

services could be organized and delivered in ways that would reduce attrition.

Although these observations referred to the American situation, the widening

participation policies in both countries made these observations particularly relevant

here also. Retention has become a major concern.

Houston et al (2003) made a study of a single cohort of the University of Paisley

moving through three years of study. They commented:

> "In general, non-traditional entrants attempt fewer modules and are more
>
> likely to discontinue study after completing one year, relative to Scottish
>
> school leavers. Those entering with lower level FE education have
>
> particularly weak attachment to, or are little engaged with, Paisley
>
> programmes- not only do they attempt fewer modules and are likely to
>
> discontinue after one year, they are more likely to withdraw during the first
>
> year" (Muir et al 2003, p2).

Scottish Executive policy states that,

> "We need to see real improvements in the proportions of students from the
>
> most economically disadvantaged groups benefiting from provision in our

HEIs and to improve retention rates across students from all backgrounds"

(Scottish Executive 2003, p60).

They state their intention to develop new measures and targets on improvements in

access from the most economically disadvantaged groups and to make an

improvement in retention of students from all backgrounds. They further state that

they expect the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) to put in

place incentives and disincentives in funding to ensure that these outcomes are

delivered (op cit p63).

2.4.2   Factors affecting Participation, Persistence and Performance.

There are considerable differences between the experience of students on HN

programmes in Further education colleges (FECs) and students on degree

programmes in HEIs. Attrition may in this case be associated with the culture and

ethos of sectors and/or specific institutions. Gallacher in Osborne et al (2002)

declares that these are associated with: the scale of the institutions, the size of

teaching groups (groups in FECs tend to be relatively small) and teaching methods

or assessment methods. These differences can create difficulties for students when

making the transition from FECs to HEIs. These have been documented by

Gallacher as follows:

Table 9: Problems experienced after starting the degree programme (Degree students, N=126)

Assessment procedures	27%
Teaching methods	27%
Availability of staff	25%
Other problems	17%

Source: Osborne et al, 2002.

Gallacher mentions a figure of a total of 64% of these students experiencing one or more problems after starting their degree programme. It may be stated that the difference between continuers and non continuers is not rooted in gender, age, previous educational qualifications, but it is difficult to overstate the needs for support from others and specific encouragement from tutors (SCRE 2001). The reasons for withdrawal were grouped and the following analysis obtained.

Table 10:

Factor	Label
1.	Poor quality of student experience.
2.	Inability to cope with demands of the programme.
3.	Unhappiness with the social environment.
4.	Wrong choice of programme.
5.	Matters related to financial need.
6.	Dissatisfaction with aspects of institutional provision.

(Adapted from information quoted in Muir et al 2003, p 8, similar analyses in Yorke and Davies 1986, Yorke 1999, Bolam and Dodgson 2003)

We note that institutional provision was ranked last in this analysis, compared with other reasons for withdrawal. Amongst the factors grouped in rank 1 would be financial difficulties. Academic problems were ranked 2 and matters concerned with social fit were ranked 3.

Munn et al (1993) did a survey of former Access students in H.E. to establish the problems they experienced which adversely affected their work. Although the largest reported difficulty was financial problems, it was found that it was personal problems in general that were more likely to affect students' work rather than specifically academic ones. The mature student was more likely to have domestic or financial responsibilities (e.g. dependants or spouses) and these tended to encroach on study time and concentration.

Reasons for leaving were a complex mix of motivational factors which included academic, non-academic, personal, institutional and other external factors. Amongst the external factors are the increased student numbers reducing the effectiveness of students' abilities to receive adequate attention from staff. Amongst the personal factors were the changes in domestic and working circumstances of mature students (McGivney 1996).

Conversely, if these aspects are handled more adequately with institutional assistance, they will be the very positive characteristics, which will enhance performance and persistence in degree courses. If these elements in the affective domain are key in a negative sense, then it could be argued they are also key in a positive sense too. And if this is so, then it will be in addressing these issues that enhanced levels of persistence and performance may be achieved.

Bolam & Dodgson (2003) addressed the issue of retention stating that student retention has moved up the agenda of the government and has been addressed in government inquiries and reports (House of Commons 2001, NAO 2002). These are "examples of this new interest in the retention and non-completion of full time undergraduate students in higher education" (Bolam & Dodgson 2003) Consecutive Secretaries of State have requested the Higher Education Funding Council for England to take action to reduce the rate for non completion. NAO (2002) concluded that mature students (i.e. those over the age of 21) were more likely than their younger colleagues to drop out of higher education early.

Figures quoted in Bolam & Dodgson (2003) indicated that during the 1998-99 cohort, 16% of mature full time first degree entrants left compared to 8% of non mature entrants, and 10% of all entrants.

All of the above makes reference to retention and persistence in courses of study in

higher education.   In Wales, the work of Betts et al (1995) concerned the

progression of former Access students and was a study commissioned by the Welsh

Office. It was concerned to provide measures of success of the Access route into

higher education and to investigate the experiences of Access route students in

higher education. Their third aim followed on directly from the other two and that

was to evaluate the success of Access courses in providing a foundation for higher

education study.

The performance data were gathered in the form of final degree classifications for

two cohorts of students graduating from 13 higher education institutions in Wales in

1994 and 1995.

The data on student experience was gathered from telephone interviews conducted

with over 500 students registered on higher education courses in Wales. Although

there were many experiences that they shared with other entrants, they "can be

distinguished from other groups in terms of their greater expressed dissatisfaction

with teaching and assessment methods in higher education and in terms of their

perception and expression of difficulties encountered with their courses of study".

They were also more likely to experience difficulties with their studies stemming from family circumstances and responsibilities. Their level of dissatisfaction with the quality of learning and teaching in Higher Education was in marked contrast to their level of satisfaction with their experience during the Access year. In particular they appreciated the good interpersonal relationships between staff and students. They obviously benefited from the high level of support given to these students by such relationships. This is seen to be a key issue in this research and it shall be postulated later how these supportive relationships are the key to success and failure, persistence or withdrawal.

In their conclusions of the research they indicated that the performance of Access route students in the higher education institutions in Wales, as measured by degree classification, was broadly similar to the performance of the rest of the student population. Completion rates and reasons for drop out were matters of considerable interest but they were unable to follow this matter up.

2.4.3   Rounding Up the Usual Suspects.

There are a number of factors which affect progression and persistence amongst former Access students which have been identified. And in an examination of

persistence, progression and performance certain key elements are frequently

identified. Factors such as previous educational background, previous experiences

of formal education, socio-economic status, gender, ethnic background and age

have all been suggested as factors which may affect performance and persistence.

The work of Betts et al (1995) concerned the progression of former Access students

in Wales (this study was referred to earlier). It attempted to provide measures of

success of the Access route into higher education and to investigate the experiences

of Access route students in higher education. Their third aim followed on directly

from the other two and that was to evaluate the success of Access courses in

providing a foundation for higher education study.

Their level of dissatisfaction with the quality of learning and teaching in Higher

Education was in marked contrast to their level of satisfaction with their experience

during the Access year. In particular they appreciated the good interpersonal

relationships between staff and students. In particular the role of the guidance tutor

was perceived to be important. They obviously benefitted from the high level of

support given to these students by such relationships. Thus we see that the key to

the Access student's success in the Access year is very closely associated with the

supportive relationship established with their guidance tutor. The guidance tutor

became not just a source of information but a source of support and inspiration to

get through the difficult times and proceed through the course to its conclusion. As is so often the case when mature students falter and fail to complete it is not so much associated with academic failure as it is with coping with the myriad roles and responsibilities of the adult learner that the traditional entrant does not have.

The overall finding was that Access route entrants appear to be "performing on a par" with other entrant groups, the evidence of their research suggests that the performance of Access route entrants might be enhanced through the implementation of measures based on a more informed understanding and appreciation of the educational aims and requirements of both providers and receivers.

Julie Beasley (1995) studied the performance of former Access students over three different types of H.E. institutions: viz. Chichester Institute (a university sector college), University of Brighton (a new university) and University of Sussex (an old university). There was a variability to the exact nature of the data available but sufficient overlap to draw reasonable conclusions.

With regard to academic performance it was found that 80% of all students obtained a second class honours as compared to 76% of Access, 80% of non-Access mature

entrants, and 82% of non-mature entrants. It was however found that fewer Access

students obtained a first class honours. (4% of Access and 8% of non-Access

mature students and 6% of non-mature students.) Also, more Access students

failed (3% of Access and 1% in each of the other two categories).

However when this study was broken down to an institutional level, it was found

that there was considerable variation between institutions. At Chichester, more

Access students obtained firsts (10% against 6% and 4% for the other two

categories) and there were no fails recorded. At Brighton, the ration of firsts was

3%:8%:4% with a fail ratio of 0%:0.5%:0.25%. It was very notable that the picture

at Sussex was quite different. The ratio of firsts was 1.5%:10%:7% and the fail ratio

of 8%:3%:2%. Hence we note that in the old university the performance of the

former Access students was considerably worse than at the other two institutions.

Beasley concluded that Access entrants "fare not better or worse than the majority

of students entering H.E. from other routes as far as academic performance is

concerned. However, the nature of the student experience seems to vary between

each type of institution..."

Non-traditional students are similarly more likely not to complete and this may be

due to the fact that their educational qualifications are less, their educational

background is likely to be less elitist and financial help is unlikely to be as good as those from more advantaged backgrounds (McLaurin 2003). In indicating this, McLaurin is suggesting that there are increased educational, social and financial barriers, which inhibit the progress of such students. And there are significant pieces of research that suggest that this is connected with social class.

It could be argued that students from lower socio-economic classes do not participate in HE because to do so would be to participate in an activity which is part of the cultural patterns of higher socio-economic groups and not their own (McGivney 1990, p21). Further when they do participate they are engaging in an activity and a culture which is alien to their experience.

There have been government driven initiatives to increase participation in H.E., and it has been seen as a priority to promote social justice by encouraging participation by those in disadvantaged social groups (Raab 1998, Raab & Storkey 2001, Forsyth & Furlong 2004). However these two goals do not necessarily work hand in hand as increased participation has been seen to disproportionately assist middle classes "amongst whom participation rates are reaching saturation point" (op cit p163). However numbers participating is only part of the story, and a much clearer picture may be derived by some measure of how qualified young people are being differentially channelled into certain courses and institutions (Raab & Storkey 2001,

p16). And even in schools in deprived areas, students who remain in school into sixth year are heavily weighted towards those who occupy the higher social class groups. And so attrition in upper secondary school tends to exclude the lower social classes. Raab concludes, "The research evidence shows that able young people from disadvantaged backgrounds fall behind others with similar achievements, at every step of the educational ladder". (Raab 1998, p7)

On the face of it, arguments concerning social class seem to present a compelling case for a class link to participation and for that matter perseverance and performance. However in this research, it is proposed that the causal link goes deeper than this, and that the social class of the student is indicative of other barriers to effective participation even when entry to HE is achieved. "Distances are not just physical distances, but cultural distances for people from backgrounds that have had little contact with HE." (Raab 1998, p 43)

These matters are not causal in themselves but they point to emotional and psychosocial factors that are effective barriers to the integration of non-traditional students into an elitist traditional educational system (Forsyth & Furlong 2003). Since they are operating in a middleclass environment, they are less likely to form a network of supportive relationships, and they feel less confident about doing so. It

becomes more difficult for them to relate in a constructive way with staff and other students since there are perceived barriers which prevent the formation of such relationships.

2.4.4   Retention Rates and Complex Numbers.

Studies of retention and non continuance in recent years have agreed on one finding universally. That is that the factors are not easily analysed. There is seldom only one reason for non-continuance. There exists a complex combination of factors that cause it. The reasons for progression and high performance it may be concluded, do not lie with demographic matters of gender, socio-economic factors, past educational record or the like. But the reasons appear to be more complex than this. Hall (2001, p iv) concluded that

> "retention rates differ by sector of education, age of the students, level of course, subject of course, socio-economic group and institution...... Reasons for student drop out operate at individual student, institutional and supra-institutional levels".

All of this is to say that reasons for retention and non-retention are very complex. And oftentimes the data available on this is of poor quality and may be inaccurate

or misleading. Non-retention may be due to the kind of support mechanisms offered in the various institutions. It may be associated with other factors not readily identified by broad demographic categorisation. This formed the backdrop to this research and it was sought to establish whether the ALAW principle held at the Scottish universities studied and whether there is a wide variation of persistence and performance which may be associated with the levels of support provided in terms of tutors, guidance, peer, and institutional support.

2.4.5   Persistence and the Learning Environment.

Several researchers (like Marsick & Watkins 1990) discussed the notion of the organisation as a "learning environment". Learning does not happen in a vacuum. The learning environment will have a radical effect on the quality of learning that may occur there. This is more than teaching, though the quality of teaching is certainly a factor.

This idea of the learning environment is a key factor in progression and success. i.e. to what extent does the organisation present a learning environment with appropriate supportive relationships between staff and student, student and student, student and the institution at large. Boshier (1973) theorized that drop out and non-participation may be connected… i.e. that the reasons why some people will not

participate are related to the reasons why some were not successful in their

participation. If this is so then we can learn much about the reasons why some

students are not successful in their courses from the reasons why several students

will opt out of participating altogether.

A number of variables which may affect participation and hence by implication may

be postulated to affect perseverance or performance. Among these are:- educational

background, and socio-economic status (Percy 1983, Woodley et al 1987,

McGivney 1993a , McLaurin 2003).

A 1977 OECD report identified the following non-participant typologies:

- Unemployed young adults (especially premature school leavers)

- Some rural populations

- Immigrants

- The aged

- Urban poverty groups

- Unemployed and underemployed workers with little education

- Unskilled and semi-skilled workers

- Some groups of women (housebound mothers, women from lower socio-economic groups)

- People with linguistic problems.

Taken together these groups add up to a large number of people, whose main characteristic is social and economic deprivation. Even in these enlightened times of social inclusion and widening participation, it is clear that these areas of social exclusion are not being adequately addressed.

2.5   The Quest for a Theory of Adult Learning.

Before these issues of differential rates of progression and performance can be addressed, it is necessary to wrestle with the reasons why some learners are more successful at staying their course and peforming well on their course than others. It is clear that it is necessary to address the issue of Adult Learning on a theoretical level.

In 1981, Mezirow complained that the absence of theory is a pervasively debilitating influence in adult education. And Cross comments in 1981 that theory is almost non existent. Adult education has tended to be essentially pragmatic-learning what measures work in assisting others to learn. However, if there is to be true development in the field of adult education it must be based on theory.

In recent years (and specifically since the interventions of Knowles) there has been high profile consideration of whether there is in fact a theoretical model that embraces all of adult learning.

Knowles raised the issue of whether in fact there is something signficant about adult learning (andragogy) which separates it in some fundamental way from child learning (pedagogy). This has concentrated the attention of all those who are engaged in the process of adult teaching and learning. This dichotomy has been strongly contested by several writers and researchers and a critique on this will be returned to later in this discussion. As Physicists have pursued a "Theory of Everything," then educationalists have engaged in a similar quest for the Holy Grail or a "theory of everything" in the field of Adult Education.

2.5.1 Theories of Adult Learning.

It is unlikely there will ever be a single theory of adult education. Instead there will be many theories which inform our understanding of adults as learners. Some of the main theories we may wish to accommodate are:

- Force Field Analysis: (Harry L. Miller)

- Andragogy: facilitating learning in adults. (Malcolm Knowles)

These theories are about totally different aspects of adult education. The first is concerned with motivations for adult education and the second with the actual processes of teaching and learning.

Miller's force field analysis tackles the interface between socio-economic status and adult education. He builds on Maslow's hierarchy of needs which maintains that people cannot be concerned about higher human needs (such as status, achievement and self actualization) until the lower fundamental needs are catered for (such as survival, safety and belonging).

When applied to adult education, socio-economic background is likely to have a profound affect on participation (Forsyth & Furlong 2000, McLaurin 2003, Forsyth & Furlong 2003). The assumption made is that those from lower economic groups will be more likely to pursue education that meets survival needs, mostly job training and basic education whilst the upper classes will have already fulfilled those needs and will tend to be interested in education which will lead to achievement and self actualization. However the motivations for participation in reality are much more complex than that. The influences on participation may be

associated with financial factors. The equation on profitability will be calculated and the point at which the accumulated debt and costs of study will be weighed up against the perceived benefits of increased earning potential. Mature students will work out this equation in terms of how many years of economic productivity beyond graduation will be available to them and weigh this up against the costs of the years of study (Osborne et al 2001). Prospective students will also form judgements concerning the accessibility of the curriculum, styles of learning and assessment, mode of delivery, geographical accessibility, length of course of study and a number of other factors. Also, the social aspects of study, the social environment of the HEI may make working class students feel inferior (Osborne et al 2001).

Blicharski (1999) confirmed that three recent changes (socio-economic factors and the cost of a degree, the lack of guaranteed jobs for graduates, and the development of a short-termism in the psyche of potential undergraduates) had had a profound effect upon new undergraduates.

Roger Boshier (1973) reached the conclusion that "both adult participation and drop out can be understood to occur as a function of the magnitude of the discrepancy between the participant's self concept and key aspects (largely people) of the educational environment" (quoted in Cross 1981, p119). It is argued that non

participants manifest self/institutional incongruence and do not enrol. Boshier
implies that a number of incongruencies (between self and ideal self, self and other
students, self and teacher, self and institutional environment) are additive; the
greater the sum, the greater the likelihood of non participation or drop out. To over-
simplify , if an individual feels uncomfortable with herself, her teachers, her fellow
students, or the educational environment, she has a potential for dropping out.

It is certainly true on an anecdotal level that many students who opt to continue
their advanced study in the FE environment are those who have less confidence, and
that is a factor in their choice. They have less confidence to embark into the new
environment of university and opt to remain in the more familiar environment in
which their Access studies took place. This was reflected in focus groups
conducted by this researcher.

The chief cornerstone of the hypothesis seems to be that people with low self
esteem do not do well in achievement oriented situations (which education is
thought to be) and this has been the king-pin of psychological theories of
motivation for some years. (Cross p123 summarising research theories on
motivation for learning.)

There are a number of assumptions being made here which have not been

demonstrable from empirical research. Maslow's assumption that a learner may not

pursue personal fulfilment through learning till "lower" needs have been met is not

sustainable through research.

2.5.2   Knowlesian Concept of Andragogy. A theory of Adult Education or an

Idealistic View of How Adult Education Should be.

Cross lists Knowles theory of Andragogy as the only other major theory of adult

learning up to that point of writing (1981). Andragogy is based on four crucial

assumptions about adult learners that are different from assumptions about child

learners:

1. self concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of

   being a self directing human being.

2. accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing

   resource for learning.

3. readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks

   of social roles

4. time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject centredness to one of problem centredness.

Malcolm Knowles writing in Edwards et al (1996) revisited his theories of andragogy as contrasted with the pedagogy of childhood education. He begun by stating that most of what is known about learning is based on studies of learning in children and animals. Most of what is known about teaching is based on teaching children under conditions of compulsory attendance. From these theories and assumptions there has emerged the technology of pedagogy- a term derived from the greek stem "paed" meaning child and "agogos" meaning "leading". So pedagogy means specifically the art and science of teaching children.

However, it has become commonplace to use the word "pedagogy" to refer more generally to all forms of teaching and learning including all forms of clearly adult education. It is extremely common to find texts on adult education with references to "the pedagogy of adult education", without any apparent discomfort over the contradiction in terms (Youngman 1986, Linvingstone 1987, Bevis & Watson 1989, Simon et al 1991, Freire 1993, Hedge & Whitney 1996, Chappell et al 2003). The following statement from Knowles emphasizes his approach to adult learning and

illustrates the Knowlesian approach to the theory of adult learning and teaching which has played a prominent part in the field of adult education for the past twenty years: "Indeed in my estimation, the main reason why adult education has not achieved the impact on our civilization of which it is capable is that most teachers of adults have only known how to teach adults as if they were children".

Knowles emphasizes an appropriate learning climate for the adult learner... beginning with the physical provisions of adult sized seating, informal arrangement of furniture, appropriate lighting etc. Further he emphasizes the psychological climate for learning must be right. This is something I see as central to the theoretical model being put forward in this research. i.e. adults need to feel accepted, respected and supported.... there should be a feeling of mutuality between teacher and student, as joint inquirers. There should be freedom of expression without the fear of punishment or ridicule.

Hanson in Edwards et al (1996) reviews the debate over the theoretical basis for adult education, asking whether in fact andragogy is a viable theory of adult learning. She is in essence giving her critique of the work of Knowles and others. In this respect her writing is indicative of the writing of a number of others who saw

in Knowles' theory of Andragogy a number of flaws, assumptions which had been taken on board without full consideration.

The focus of the debate surrounding the alleged dichotomy between pedagogy and andragogy had important consequences in practice but a closer examination of many of the theories does little to provide real evidence that adults and children are absolutely different in their learning.

Richer forms of analysis may lie in more specific examinations of the characteristics of specific individuals and their contexts with regard to what they are learning, the setting in which they learn and the relationships with those peers and tutors with whom they learn. All these considerations may contribute to how individuals learn.

The assumptions in theories of adult learning therefore need to be questioned. If the underlying claims of those who support andragogy are a set of normative humanist values, it would seem that they are as valid for children as they are for adults, in which case the pedagogy/andragogy debate is artificial.

The search for a separate theory of adult learning thereby became problematic as wider questions were addressed; about the nature of education and training and the relationship between learners, what is taught, and why, how and by whom. Issues of knowledge, power and control had to be addressed.

Any theory of adult learning which advocates the importance of each individual as an individual, but avoids the issues of curriculum control and power does little to address the actual learning situations of adults. Hanson classed andragogy as an ideological assumption.

Writers such as Rogers and Knowles promoted the idea of the teacher as the facilitator of learning. This is meant to signify a warm open relationship. Yet, once again, constraints on the actual learning setting may make such a relationship an aspiration rather than an actuality. Curricula are primarily socially constructed prescribed areas of knowledge and skills external to the student.(i.e. not negotiated). Thus the cultural constraints of formal curricula act upon the learners and the tutors, and have an impact upon the relationship between them. The de-humanizing and mystifying effects of formal curricula and their role in reproducing the dominant culture and acting as a form of social control have been pointed out by many writers (Freire 1993; Sharp & Green 1975). Theories of adult learning which do not take

account of culture and power do adults little service, even if they aim to produce

self-directed learners.

Yonge (1985), Podeschi (1987), and Griffin (1983) are among those who have

criticized the assumptions of andragogy and its goal of self direction. This seems to

assume that becoming an adult is an all-or-nothing experience. Others, notably

Mezirow (1981) have also used self-direction as a defining characteristic of

andragogy, but attempted to situate it within an understanding of the context of

culture, knowledge and power.

One of the early conclusions of this research with adult learners was the realization

that mature students were not a homogenous group and that there were dangers in

treating them as such. Within any group of adults, there are significant differences

regarding biographies, experiences, perceptions, and as a result, different

expectations and approaches to learning. Some adults are more pedagogical than

others, some are more strategic, some more deep. Each learner is an individual,

even within the class group.

Hanson (1991a, 1991b) argued that broad generalisations about adult learners as

opposed to child learners may have limited validity. The differences between one

child and another, or one adult and another may be as much if not more than the differences between adults and children.

Davenport (1993, in Thorpe et al) separated out both the semantics of the term and the ebb and flow of different positions for and against. Whilst recognizing its publicity value, he concluded that "adult education could survive quite nicely without andragogy" (op cit p 116).

There is no single point, in a modern industrialised society, at which a person suddenly and unambiguously becomes an adult (Squires 1987, p176). In the UK it is a process which is often thought to begin at the age of 16 with the termination of compulsory pupil status and to be complete by the age of 21, with the attainment of full adult rights, roles and responsibilities. In between there are many important markers, such as the right to vote, drink or marry without one's parents' consent; and of course the processes of maturation may vary greatly from one individual to another. It is clear that definitions of adult in adult education are not and cannot be clear.

Rachal (2002) concluded that the concept of Andragogy contained untried assumptions that had proved difficult to confirm in real situations. He stated that,

"the assumptions Knowles makes about the adult as a learner are problematic and
tend to focus on ideal situations" (Rachal 2002, p 224) He went on to state,

> "But if andragogy is to be science as well as art; and if it is to be more than a
>
> slogan,more than an evangelical shibboleth, and more than a fond illusion, it
>
> must coalesce into some form of roughly agreed-upon testable hypothesis
>
> (p224-225)".

It may be that the formulation of all embracing theories only get in the way of
developing an understanding of the differing strategies necessary to enable diverse
adults to learn different things in different settings in different ways. There are
differences but they are not based on the difference between adults and children, of
andragogy and pedagogy. They are differences of context, culture and power.
Institutional, socio-political and cultural constraints influence the scope and quality
of adult learning endeavours.

Upon careful analysis then, it is clear that andragogy and pedagogy describe not two
distinct arts and sciences of teaching,. They rather present two different approaches
to the education of children and adults (Elias 1997 p 252-255).

2.5.3   Learning and Perspective Transformations.

There is a transformation of perception which is an integral part of the process of education. It is inevitable that there will arise new learning which does not fit easily with previous experiences. Not all parts of the curriculum will fit easily into what Vygotsky calls the zone of proximal development. Even students who feel they have prepared themselves well for new learning experiences, through Access or preparatory study, enter new situations which may challenge assumptions and result in the re-assessment of beliefs and understandings, about themselves as well as what they are learning.

Learning may then result in a change in perspective in which there is conscious recognition of the differences between one's old and new perspectives and a decision to adopt the newer as being of more use and value. This qualitative reassessment is the process by which a transformation of perspective can occur. Thus learning may not always be a step-by-step, comfortable steady even climb up a gentle slope. There are clearly steps that present themselves and have to be negotiated resulting in uncomfortable transformations in understanding and mapping.

It was Mezirow (1978, 1981) who developed the theory of perspective
transformation as central to adult education. He saw "meaning perspectives" as
important for adults' learning as they help to develop a critical awareness based on
past experiences in a current context:

> "A meaning perspective refers to the structure of cultural assumptions
>
> within which new experience is assimilated to- and transformed by-
>
> one's past experience. It is a personal paradigm for understanding
>
> ourselves and our relationships". Mezirow (1981)

Mezirow claimed that there was a difference between becoming aware of our
awareness and being critical of our awareness. Perspective transformation involves
becoming critically reflective on the cultural assumptions which govern the way
adults think, feel and act. Mezirow sees critical reflectivity and particularly
theoretical reflectivity as a distinctly adult capacity. This is achieved through
perspective transformations which become the guiding paradigm for the practitioner
with adults.

Brookfield (2000) contends that Critical Reflection is a much more crucial aspect of
adult learning than age. More recently Mezirow has drawn strongly on the work of
Jurgen Habermas to propose a theory of transformative learning

> "that can explain how adult learners make sense or meaning of their
>
> experiences, the nature of the structures that influence the way they construe
>
> experience, the dynamics involved in modifying meanings, and the way the
>
> structures of meaning themselves undergo changes when learners find them
>
> to be dysfunctional." (Mezirow 1981)

2.5.4   Other Factors in Theoretical Constructs of Adult Education: Adult
Education as a Social Construct.

Eraut et al (2000 in Coffield p 251) spoke of the development of knowledge and
skills at work and quoted the work of Tracey et al (1995) who examined the factors
associated with both the learning culture of 505 newly trained supermarket
managers. They found that the most influential group in shaping these constructs
was the small self-selected work group, and that both constructs had significant
positive effects on manager's performance. Thus we see that in the general context,
the learning culture established within the firm or learning institution is central and

the other important factor is that of a learning group. This learning group provides a social support system which is enabling to the learning experience.

They declare that their analysis (Eraut et al 2000) of the impact on learning of these situational factors can be summarised in terms of a triangular relationship between confidence, challenge and support. (Alderton 1999) Offering support to an individual, particularly at critical junctures, leads to them developing confidence in their capabilities. Eraut et al argue that increasing confidence enables them to better manage more challenging work, which if successfully achieved, increases the confidence further. A virtuous circle of positive development is established.

This tends to lead us to see adult education as essentially a social activity, or at least an activity which is integrally connected to other people. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that almost all significant acts of learning are conducted in the context of a social group of some kind. Learning is a "compresent" phenomenon (Forsythe 1983).

Most learning activity takes place in the direct company of others. Thus it must be assumed that the willingness, determination or motivation to engage in learning activity has something to do with one's integration within or membership of a larger

social unit , with one's relationship to others and, overall with one's pattern of socialization within the larger community of others. Thus an integral part of the learning process is more concerned with the social context of learning within a specific learning group, formal or informal, and within a larger society of learning which is defined by and determined by the learning institution (Courtney 1992).

Courtney quoted an old work of Beale (1956) which looked at participation of adults and examined variables like income, age, residence and so on. He considered these to be static because nothing could be done to change them. Hence though social class, ethnicity, gender, etc may be factors in the learning equation. They are factors over which no control or little control can be exerted. They formed the indelible identity of the participant. Beale found two factors among the statics which were important in deciding whether they would be involved in cooperatives:

1. overall social participation or sociability
2. socio-economic status.

Further he sought dynamic factors (as opposed to static factors) which affected participation, those which reflected a person's understanding of the purpose and operation of the organization; his identification or satisfaction with it and his

feelings of responsibility towards it. These are the dynamic factors which radically affect the learning process that can be changed which are the focus of our endeavour to understand and to modify.

Brookfield (1995) said that despite the plethora of journals, books and research conferences devoted to adult learning across the world, we are very far from a universal understanding of adult learning. It would appear that the attempt to construct an exclusive theory of adult learning- one that is distinguished wholly by its standing in contradiction to what we know about learning at other stages of the lifespan- is misplaced. Indeed, a strong case can be made that as we examine learning across the lifespan the variables of culture, ethnicity, personality, and political ethos assume far greater significance in explaining how learning occurs and is experienced than does the variable of chronological age.

The research cited suggests that adult learning needs to be understood much more as a psycho-social phenomenon which is rooted in the complex ways in which human beings process information and encompass new ideas into the framework of their existing psyche and it is a socially embedded and socially constructed phenomenon rooted in how human beings grapple with their sense of belonging in the learning environment.

2.6   The Affective Domain.

This literature review has been pointing more and more clearly in one particular direction and this is to look at the affective domain and how that plays a central role in the learning pathway for the student.   Among other good cognitive learning strategies, it is also necessary that students need to have positive feelings about themselves as learners and about learning, and indeed to some extent be able to manage their feelings amidst the highs and lows of study (De La Harpe & Radloff 2000, p170).   Students need to be motivated to learn by having a positive attitude towards learning and confidence in themselves as learners.   These affective characteristics are linked to academic achievement (op cit p171).

2.6.1   Identity, Confidence and Acceptance.

The key ideas are self confidence, self-identity and self image. Chickering (1975, p13) stated that identity refers to the self or the person one feels oneself to be.   It is a combination of "bodily sensations, feelings, images of one's body, the sound of one's name, the continuity of one's memories and an increasing number of social judgements delivered through the words and behaviour of others".

If the affective domain is viewed as a central issue, then it may be strongly argued that those who show high discrepancy scores between self and ideal self will be likely to show a high drop out. They will not perform as to their potential. They are likely to project their own dissatisfaction with themselves onto the environment and to drop out of almost any kind of environment. To what extent does this affect Access students in FE and HE? Many adult returners are driven by two dominant feelings: a total lack of self confidence, and the need for positive change (McGivney 1993b, p63). These are competing emotions, one demanding the need for change and the other undermining the confidence required to progress into change. This implies a need for counselling support to deal with such fundamental challenges to self-identity, and help may be required to cope with the change process (McGivney 1993b, p64). It may be construed that Access students who have progressed to FE instead of HE are those students who lack the confidence to proceed directly to university. They are those with a higher level of self to ideal self discrepancy hence they feel a higher level of dissatisfaction with self and hence with their educational environment and this colours their ability to progress or perform adequately in their course of study.

This would explain why those in FE seem to perform at a much lower level. i.e. their lower self esteem took them into FE instead of HE in the first instance. But whereas former Access students in HE follow the ALAW principle, their lower self esteem colleagues who stayed in the FE sector performed less well than the general cohort of all students, because their lack of self esteem, their high level of discrepancy between self and ideal self framed their whole approach to study and hence prevented progress and performance from reaching the levels of other students.

Hence it may be suggested that it is the psychological and social support mechanisms which may be viewed as the support for learning which is vital. In what ways can we offer support for the learner? There are many different factors involved in this necessary support scaffolding.

A major component of drop out by adult learners was due to psycho-social reasons.

"The psycho-social approach considers aspects of the adult learner's self-esteem and how this affects their chances of remaining on educational courses. An interactionist perspective works on the premise that dropout is a result of maladjustment between the student's motivation and personality, and their lecturers and fellow students" (Waters & Gibson 2001 p16-17).

They argued that personality traits of the student, environmental factors (psycho-
social environment in the learning domain), and the interaction between them are
fundamental factors affecting drop out. The transition into formal education was
seen as a move into a completely unfamiliar environment,

> "amongst strangers – students and tutors they have not met before, a
>
> language that is at times completely alien to them. We shall argue that these
>
> students often feel threatened and overwhelmed by their initial experience
>
> of returning to study. It is, therefore, vital to establish bonds of trust and
>
> respect that begin the process of increasing self-esteem in the student-
>
> building confidence in their ability to cope and trust in the educational
>
> establishment" (op cit p19).

The transition to HE presents the same difficulties as any transition into alien
environments. The university may be only a few miles further away, but it is a
much further journey psychologically than geographically (Mc Givney 1990, p63).

Merrill (2000) wrote of the formation of a "community" within an FEC
commenting that "community does, however imply some collective identity" (op cit
p14). Other sources of identity may spring from geography, social class, ethnicity,

values, position in the labour market, housing and income. She commented later, "Colleges are located within communities, but as institutions they are also communities within themselves"(op cit p 33). They have a social system with each member of the society having defined roles. Behaviour is governed by rules, regulations, policy and practice. And social interaction occurs within and between groups in this society. "An FE college has clearly defined goals and missions, which determine its ethos and culture" (op cit p33).

When a large scale investigation into withdrawal of students from FE courses in 31 colleges in England and Wales was conducted, perceptions of current students and withdrawn students were compared over a number of issues to investigate reasons for withdrawal. Students were asked what they liked most and what they liked least about their courses in six of the colleges. The most frequent answers about what they liked most were:

- relationships with other students (mentioned 406 times)

- relationships with staff (326 times). (Martinez & Munday 1998).

It is noticeable that the factors which students identified as most liked and least liked all had a strong social dimension. This emphasizes the view that learning

must be seen as a social activity, socially embedded, and social relationships form a vital part of the educational process.

Schuller (1995) has commented on social dimensions of learning and says,

> "This category covers many levels, from the immediate family to the wider community and beyond. The fruitfulness of human capital theory needs to be supplemented by broader approaches that take into account the networks in which learners and institutions are embedded.. How supportive of learning are these, and what modes of learning do they encourage? It may well be that some networks are extremely powerful in reinforcing informal rather than formal approaches to learning, posing challenges for formal education and social policies."

2.6.2   Integration and Disjunction: Elements in the Affective Domain.

Susan Warner Weil (1993 in Thorpe pp159-177) speaks of two contrasting conditions disjunction and integration. Disjunction is a psychological and affective domain in which learning is hindered. A sense of disjunction can be felt to be associated with

- who one is

- where one is

- how one's present experience as a learner relates to previous or concurrent

  experiences within and outside the formal learning context.

Disjunction can be associated with feelings of alienation, anger, frustration, and

confusion. When disjunction occurs it arrests or distorts the growth of further

experience and the overall sense of identity as a learner can be fundamentally

undermined.

There are however academic learning situations that by design, intent, or tradition

afford little or no possibility for individual or collective structured reflection on

what it means to learn there or on how the situation might be made more effective.

It may be argued that this may well be the definitive factor in the determination of

differential rates of performance and progress for former Access students.

On the other hand integration within this conceptual formulation implies that one's

sense of personal and social identity does not feel itself to be fundamentally at

issue, or at risk, in a particular learning environment. Integration tends to be

associated with a sense of equilibrium, or an "all-together" feeling. Integration does

not give rise to learning itself, but rather helps to create the conditions conducive to

an individual learner being able and willing to learn in a particular learning

situation. It may be viewed as part of the fundamental requirements or scaffolding

which will support a learning environment. The difference between an integrative

and a disjunctive learning experience depends upon the ability to negotiate a series

of attitudinal stages which have their roots in aspects of the social context.

Learning cannot be separated from the social context in which it takes place

(Bamber & Tett 2000, p59). Each of us are positioned in society according to

hierarchies of power constructed around factors such as class, race, gender, and age

(op cit p62).

The negative condition of disjunction can be compensated for by certain influences.

A relationship with a particular tutor could positively mediate an overall sense of

disjunction with regard to that course or learning context as a whole.

Students found that experiences of disjunction could be positively mediated by prior

experiences (such as Access courses) in which confidence had been built, and self

esteem with regard to one's learner identity and potentiality began to develop.

However, the change of environment from the supportive realm of Access in the FE

college has been replaced by a totally new environment of the university. This may

reduce the feeling of integration and reintroduce a feeling of disjunction which will

hinder the student from learning by removing part of the support mechanism which is required.

Relationships with partners or spouses also played a vital role in enabling learners to make sense of and manage experiences of disjunction. The significant others in a student's life can have a strong positive or negative influence on the self image and self esteem of the student. And since many Access students are parents, there should also be included here the influence and support of children (Merrill 1999, Cuthbertson and Smith 2001). Children are one of the chief concerns of mature students. Some enter into education with the motivation of becoming better providers for their children. And the care of these children remains a chief concern of the student throughout their course. This can be positive if the children are supportive of the student's learning, or negative if the learning is perceived as robbing the children of needed care and attention. Thus the attitude and supportiveness of the student's children is a major factor (West 1996).

Very often, learners seem to have required repeated experiences of integration to enable them to feel sufficiently resilient and able to withstand forces which could otherwise damage them. Even then, the path of development of such resilience and confidence is by no means linear. Certain experiences could spiral the learner back

into feeling the scars of prior experience. To survive and thrive in academic

contexts, it seemed that some of these integration experiences need to have occurred

within the formal education setting.

2.6.3   Institutional Culture: A further element in the Affective Domain.

Other factors in overcoming disjunction would be the experience of the learning

institution itself. What learning environment is created by the culture of the

institution? This would include the bureaucracy of the institution, the library and its

provisions, and study facilities provided by the institution. This is about facilities

but it is more than facilities. It is about the attitude displayed towards the learner

and hence the psycho-social environment of the university or college. Does the

learner have the impression of the institution being concerned about their social,

psychological and educational welfare? Or are they just a number, a sucker dragged

in by the advertising and marketing to make up the income of the institution? Is the

student the focus of what the institution exists for? Or is the student an

inconvenience, getting in the way of important research?

Two broad sets of factors shape the nature of the orientations and relationships of

students in college. The first set flows from the character of the larger society.

Students come to college with certain resources- material, moral, intellectual,

emotional, spiritual and cultural. These resources are largely determined by the life

experiences the students have had, and these in turn are shaped by the status they

and their parents have held in larger society. The second set of determinants derives

from the nature of the colleges themselves: their historical development, their value

climates, their structural features, and the shaping environment thus provided for

student life. A college is not simply an aggregation of students, teachers and

administrators. Although the character of a college is greatly influenced by the

nature of its staff and students, it also has qualities and characteristics which are to

some extend independent of the people who fill its halls and offices at any given

moment.

Note the effect of this is to suggest that there is an institutional culture with which

the student interacts. Is that culture a welcoming, or accepting one... or does the

mature student find the environment cold, threatening, judgemental, non-accepting?

i.e. are the three core conditions of Rogers reflected in the institutional culture in

which the mature student finds himself?

This leads us on to key individuals in the institution. Studies have indicated that

students rated the relationship with the guidance tutor in FE as crucial in the Access

experience (Murphy 2003). Very often it was this supportive relationship with the guidance tutor that enabled the student to persist in studies even when other difficulties and disappointments presented themselves. There was a definite association with that tutor who was seen as an ally and one who was on their side against all the odds to enable them to complete and be successful. Other studies have mentioned the sense of disappointment that the same level of support was not available in the university setting (McGivney 1996). Hence the personal tutor or guidance tutor is the key person.

For those in greatest risk of social exclusion, the personal tutor can play a positive role in supporting these students, reducing anxiety, providing active advice and assisting them to achieve their full potential (Doyle & Cumberford 2003). They argue that there are two essential features of a successful personal tutor: availability and approachability (op cit p 35).

Further there is the relationship between the student and other teaching members of staff. The teaching staff are the clearest manifestation of how the university relates to the learner.

The following quote is from Verna Rosen's research in Thorpe (1993, p 189):

"I was helped by most staff.... I felt they were concerned with our getting

ahead, [and] did not treat us as a bunch of idiots. This probably helped me

to be in a better frame of mind about taking in the academic side of the

course by removing a block".

Gremmo & Abe (1993 in Thorpe, pp 194-206) commented on the idea of

supporting learning as follows:

"Observation of almost any kind of learning session will show that a good

part of the teacher's time is taken up with "supporting" the learner-

congratulating him on his performance or his progress. Learners tend to be

rather sensitive at such times for two main reasons: the first is the inequality

which exists between the one who knows and the one who doesn't know. The

second reason is that the learner is reorganising his cognitive system and it is

known that during such periods the assimilation of new elements can have an

upsetting effect on the individual, he even seems to lose part of the

knowledge he had previously acquired, and this phenomenon of regression is

often accompanied by periods of depression. The other members of the

group may increase or decrease the individual's degree of discouragement.

The learner may find his own performance inadequate when compared to

other members of the group, or he may find that they are not getting along

any faster than he is, a discovery which encourages him. In any case, the

teacher is continually trying to upgrade learners' opinions of themselves by

complimenting them on their performances and so on" (op cit p 205).

2.6.4   The Role of Teachers and Peers in the Integrative Learning Experience.

Another of the teacher's roles, and a vital one, is that he is the leader of the group:

he is the one who is responsible for its cohesion, the one who sees to it that

everyone is at their ease, who smoothes over the differences between members, who

sees that the course is properly organized and who distributes speaking turns.

Carl Rogers (Rogers 2002, Rogers & Freiberg 1994) is regarded by many as the

father of modern counselling but his concepts have impacted greatly on teaching

and learning. His concept of the core conditions for counselling may be seen as the

core conditions for learning too. The following are qualities that facilitate learning:

- Realness in the facilitator of learning: Genuineness is the most basic of

   these qualities. Rogers emphasized being a real person that the learner can

   relate to and being open to such a relationship.

- Prizing, Acceptance, Trust: In counselling terms, Rogers referred to this as

  unconditional positive regard. In the educational context, this may be

  thought of as prizing the learner, prizing his/her feelings, his/her opinions,

  his/her identity as a person.

- Empathic understanding: This is the ability of the teacher to understand

  the student's reactions from the inside. It is a sensitive awareness of the way

  the process of education and learning seems to the student, which leads to

  the likelihood of significant learning. Rogers (2002) wrote that, "This

  attitude of standing in the other's shoes, of viewing the world through the

  student's eyes is almost unheard of in the classroom".

An ethos of emotional as well as academic support both by tutors and peers is

essential in order to promote retention. The significance of this support and the

responsibility students feel towards the course and peers should not be

underestimated. On the occasions when committed students have to withdraw, they

feel they are not only letting themselves down but more importantly their fellow

students and tutors too. (Bamber & Tett 2001)

Rogers in Thorpe et al (1993) has this to say:

"… the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal

qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the

learner. We came upon such findings in the field of psychotherapy, but now

there is evidence that these findings apply in the classroom as well". (Op cit

p 230)

Cuthbertson & Smith (2001) commented strongly on the importance of the role of

the personal tutor which is apparent throughout by the frequent reference students

make to this issue when given the opportunity to freely respond to areas they

perceive as important. Although the supportive role which has been extended to

students has clearly been valued by some, there is a strong representation from the

respondents that improvements could be made to the system. In particular students

wish greater levels of accessibility to their personal tutors throughout their course

and while on clinical placement. Some students felt that they had not been able to

build up a relationship with their personal tutor.

The idea of supportive personal relationship may be seen as pivotal. Indeed in

reading this section we cannot help but see the parallels with Rogers' concepts of

the counsellor. Approachability, availability, personal relationship, all of these

factors point to a counselling style role, creating the core conditions for counselling as a backdrop to a supportive relationship to support learning.

Overwhelmingly, in interviewing Access students prior to their engaging in degree study, they suggested that HEI's could be more supportive and accommodating to mature students.

The barriers to progression into formal Higher Education from informal education will tend to be the very same reasons why mature students need to overcome if they are to persist and progress in HE courses.

> "The obstacles to progression into formal learning settings for working class people are well known. They include: lack of encouragement, information and guidance; insufficient networking and links between sectors and providers; absence of appropriate next learning steps and bridging programmes; insufficient mechanisms and arrangements facilitating movement between different learning environments and levels; and lack of practical help and support for learners" (Bamber & Tett 2001 p20).

Achieving in some learning endeavour is linked to factors within the student... a sense of integration and self confidence and with factors in the context of the

learning institution. viz. the level of encouragement which surrounds their learning environment. This may include the family context, and relationships formed within the learning environment. (staff-student and student-student).

Boylan (2004) commented, "In essence, the research indicated that access worked best when those who had attained it were integrated into the institutional community".

How the student places themselves within a learning context, whether formal or informal, is fundamental. This is not just a matter of attitude towards a subject, in so far as it defines the learner's engagement with the material; it represents the very stuff of learning ... how the learner positions self towards others in any educational setting.. is what governs the limits and possibilities of their engagement together, what shapes and defines the material that is constructed out of that engagement. The new student is placed in a social context in which (very often) they feel cut off from previous sources of help and there is a need to establish their own new networks of support (Earwaker 1992, p8).

Baxter & Britton (2004) asserted that the process of study makes radical changes in the student, thus changing identity and the perception of identity. When talking

about how education has changed them, the students in the study identified two key

themes. The first of these is 'becoming more assertive and confident', whilst the

second, related theme, is 'taking on a new language of academia'. This can be

conceptualized sociologically as a process of acquiring new forms of cultural

capital through education, which has significant effects on their sense of self, as

well as on relations with friends and colleagues who still inhabit the 'old' world.

Baxter says,

> "Education changes people, therefore, by giving them a new language which
>
> reflects their different understanding of the world which surrounds them. In
>
> this sense they experience themselves as having become different sorts of
>
> people, of having developed aspects of themselves in different ways. In this
>
> process they risk losing parts of themselves and their former lives as they
>
> struggle to manage the different worlds".

Most significantly students rate support from peer groups to be instrumental in

getting them through the course with over half the respondents (55.8%) in one study

indicating this as most important (Cuthbertson & Smith 2001).

McGivney (1996) questioned the factors which have a bearing on retention, mentioning earlier works postulating sex, age, previous educational qualifications, occupation and place of residence as the factors related to completion. However she then went on to state, "they (the variables) may have been acting as proxies for other features for which data do not exist" (op cit p61). She goes on to deal with the experience of former Access students and their experience of going from Access into degree study. The contrast is made between a very supportive environment in Access and the less intimate and less friendly atmosphere of a large and intimidating higher education institution. Quoting some earlier research at the University of Brighton, she comments...

> "The most common reasons for intermitting were expressed as pressure caused by the different levels of tutor support between Access course and the undergraduate programme, combined with the increased workload. There is a potential for culture clash for some students who come from a climate of intensive individual support on their Access courses" (op cit p103).

The student's ability to be integrated into a learning environment has a major influence on whether they are able to complete a programme of study. McGivney quotes Tinto in 1975 as identifying a major reason for non completion as being the failure to integrate "both socially and academically" into the life of an institution

(op cit p112). It is identified that Access students who left the course lacked a sense of belonging to the group (social acceptance, sense of integration or relationship) and had not developed a real involvement with the institution where they were studying. McGivney stated, "Any student of whatever age who feels isolated, lonely, and out of place and who does not develop a sense of belonging to the learning community is at risk of leaving a course in early stages". Increased numbers in classes, and lecture theatres have often contributed to this feeling of disjunction amongst mature students whose Access experience of a more intimate, more personal approach to learning, left them with a feeling of disappointment. Seemingly inconsequential things like lecturers unable to learn the names of their students had a disproportionate affect on students already experiencing culture shock in the alien environment of higher education. "The progress and well-being of mature and non-traditional groups of students often largely depend on the amount of support and understanding they receive in an institution" (op cit p130). She concluded that the the evidence suggests that non traditional students in large institutions which provide little opportunity for interaction with members of staff and where staff display little understanding of their needs are more at risk of non-completion than other learners.

The reasons for a student dropping out are complex as the needs of these students also vary and are difficult to summarise (Bloomer & Hodkinson 1999). Nor were these needs constant throughout the course but changed according to developments in the life and experience of the individual student. They spoke of strong feelings of attachment forming between students who developed common senses of identity when sharing teaching or tutorial groups. These groups consisted of up to 20 people and students reported that they "always seemed close as a group... so the social aspect was great" (op cit p 34). Some students even identified that the lectures were not the most important thing, and they could just come in for the breaks and get what they were really interested in out of college (op cit p35). Bloomer & Hodkinson (1999) spoke of the need for FE colleges to develop a culture of acceptance, in order that diverse student groups can flourish in their institutional culture. Substantially the three FE colleges in their study did have such an accepting culture. They had developed this by being aware of it as a priority and working very hard at being accepting (op cit p 113). It is debatable that HEIs have their cultural development as perfected as FECs do in this respect. These issues will be returned to in chapters 8 and 9 of this thesis.

In Bloomer & Hodkinson (2000), influences were seen to be operational which included the wider social, economic and cultural contexts of the student. Gallacher

et al (2000) and Crossan & Gallacher (2000) studied a number of students in four FE colleges and concluded that the complexity of factors which led to non completion, participation or non participation covered a wide area. Institutional factors emerged as very strong factors in understanding why students continue with their studies. In particular they cited relations with college staff (op cit p113) and peer group support (op cit p 35).

It is evident that these studies suggest that helping and supporting students should not be seen as an "extra", a supplement to the educational experience, but rather an integral element in the student experience. It was also stressed that it should not be remedial only, looking only at students' problems. All students, whether they appear to have particular difficulties or not, need help and support. This support should be proactive not reactive. The aim in providing support is not simply to enable students to survive, but to ensure that they derive maximum benefit from their course, and indeed, from their whole experience of student life. (Piette & Murphy 2001)

The key is the level of support given to Access students during their Access course and the level of support after they entered into degree study in university (Gibson & Waters 2002). In Gibson and Waters research, the analysis of students' responses

in answer to questions about their relationships with their tutors revealed an almost unanimous vote of confidence in the tutors on the Access course. Again and again they praised their patience, understanding and willingness to give time to support them. They reported that those were tutors they could relate to, tutors who seemed human and hence could help them more than tutors who came over as superior. Indeed this sense of relationship is vital to the whole process of education and a sense of relationship between students and tutor is at the heart of the feelings of integration (Earwaker 1992, p 79).

However, most of the comments regarding the level of support given by some tutors on the degree course were critical. They spoke of some tutors who failed to keep appointments and offered no apology, who appeared distant and remote and who were too busy with their own research.

Students for whom HE is an alien environment need to negotiate a series of attitudinal transformations in order to build on and integrate their learning. For institutions, this means providing sustained support to students throughout the course. For its part the university must accept the implications of offering access to non-traditional students does not end, but rather begins at the point of entry (Bamber & Tett 2001).

Experience of student support has very clearly demonstrated that when students come on a course, they bring their social context with them, and there is a continuous interactive relationship between the individual student and the wider social context. Students arrive having been shaped by previous experiences and social environments, but also produce change in their own environments taking back from their university experience new knowledge, confidence and skills.

The statement of Piette & Murphy (2001, p 345) is of particular relevance:

> "In summary we agree with Barber and Tett that student support is a crucial factor for non-traditional students on an intensive course that lasts over a lengthy period of time. We would agree with them too, that as providers, we should not put students into such a difficult situation. We need to be aware that practical difficulties that have tended to preoccupy providers, such as financial support, timing of classes, and location of resources are perhaps only the tip of the iceberg of difficulties that students are likely to face during the course of their studies. The staff resources needed to support students are considerable, and institutions need to consider ways in which they can be more pro-active in meeting students' needs, rather than assuming

that it is the students who must always meet the requirements of the institution".

A central concern of this study was to understand the transitions that adult learners go through in gaining access to higher education. Previous analysis of interviews with 92 students during their first year of university showed that different educational identities were produced through narrative accounts of initial schooling and post school experiences of family, paid work, and education (Green & Webb 1997 ; Webb 2001) The stories these learners told showed how they were re-inventing themselves, adjusting and shifting their identities, and re-describing the past from the perspective of their new position as higher education students.

Chappell et al (2003, p27) spoke of the effect of educational programmes as suggesting,

> "an element of self- transformation for participants involved in the experience. Learners, either explicitly or implicitly, are thought to emerge from the learning experience different in some way from when they entered. They emerge more 'knowledgeable', 'skilled', 'motivated', 'assertive', 'creative' or 'critical', depending on the particular aim (and success) of the programme."

They further stated that identities are constructed through various strategies and are
produced in specific institutional sites at particular historical moments. Indeed any
course of action, any course of study, any endeavour of the human spirit must by
definition lead to an act of redefining ourselves, recreating ourselves and
transforming our identity to a greater or lesser extent. Every experience of social
interaction leads to the construction of the "self".(op cit p40) The reflexive identity
is one which the individual regards himself as being. The relational identity is one
which is defined by social interaction of all kinds. An integrated personality is one
who experiences some degree of congruence between ones reflexive and relational
sense of identity. For the mature student, there can be a sense of dissonance
between these two identities, at least initially, and this defines this process of
identity transformation.

Julie Murphy completed a study of all validated Access programmes of the Open
College Network of Central England in 1998-2000.   One of the chief issues raised
in this research was that of support for learning.

Of those who had considered withdrawing from the programme and did not actually
withdraw, 45 percent indicated support as the reason for staying on the programme

with 32 percent specifically mentioning the college or programme tutors as the source of this support (Julie Murphy 2003, also confirmed by Bloomer and Hodkinson 1997, p 20).

Of those interviewed in Murphy's research, 69 percent mentioned peer support as a significant factor in contributing to their staying on the programme. Further, 62 percent of interviewees stated that partners and family were supportive, though this ranged from encouragement and approval to practical help with childcare and housework. The findings of Murphy provides a theoretical suggestiveness which informs this thesis.

Learner identity is not necessarily to be viewed as a fixed quality or quantity (Field 2001). This is in a constant state of flux as non-learners become learners and as learners experience set backs and discouragements which affect their self-view. Hence there is mobility between classifications as the self-view fluctuates with experiences. Clearly the social settings of learning will have a profound effect on self-view in learners and hence the sense of social identity. An experience of mixed messages on learner identity is likely to lead to ambivalent learners, unsure of their status as learners. Paechter et al (2001, p 142) states that, "Each individual is the synthesis not only of existing relations but of the history of these relations". Hence

one derives one's identity from the sum of social interactions and relationships one has and that one has had historically up to that moment.

Disjunctions would be inevitable at major transitions in life, as relationships pertaining to a previous identity overlap with the formation of new relationships which validate the new identity as learner. One's identity is a complex amalgam of the ways in which we conceptualize ourselves and the way we are conceptualized by others round about us. Because of the many transitions in life, this must be almost constantly in a state of flux as we are continually called upon to reinvent ourselves for new incarnations in different relationships and situations. Shah in Paechter et al (2001, p 143) states that she is "committed to the belief that society and the position(s) we inhabit within it shape us into the kind of individuals we are".

An emphasis on the construction of identities is a main theme in social identity theory, which attempts to explain the process of becoming a member of a social category and of becoming committed to that membership. (Whittaker & Mayes, 2001) They comment,

"If social identity theory can underpin the notion of learner identity, then
participation in learning should result in a social identity being formed in
relation to a particular learning event or situation…. That learning something
involves not just a change of knowledge or skill, but a new identity" (op cit p
422).

There are three components to social identity (Whittaker & Mayes 2001, p 423): the
cognitive, the evaluative and the affective component. The cognitive should be
seen as how a person thinks about him/herself. The new learner requires to go
through a process of self-categorization within a hierarchy or perceived identities.
However the inclusion of an affective component is vitally important. And how the
learner feels about self in the midst of this new learning environment will in large
measure be influenced by situational factors, and most strongly affected by social
dimensions (Ferrie 2004). Whittaker & Mayes (2001) maintain that it is a matter of
the combination between personal and social identities (individual and collective
selves) that give individuals a combined sense of belonging and uniqueness. This
affords individuals a sense of optimal distinctiveness, and may facilitate the
maintenance of a positive social identity (op cit p 424).

Group size and constituency can be important in the construction of identity. Membership in a small but distinctive group implies a relatively large overlap between the collective self and the individual self. Following this argument, learning groups may have particular potential to enhance the evaluative and/or affective component of social identity associated with the group. Group size may also have an influence on commitment in terms of the possible learning relationships available in the group.

An identity as a member of a learning group may therefore have good potential as a source of motivation for learning. The affective commitment that "support and acceptance" imply, may spur on a continued or greater conformity to group norms, which within a learning group are likely, although not certain, to include learning activities. Thus group formation within the student cohort may be regarded as an affective imperative to support learning.

The nature and strength of an individual learner's motivation, in terms of an individual's commitment to maintaining a learner identity, might be evaluated through examining the number and strength of ties to other people associated with the identity. Recently, Fowler & Mayes (1999) have discussed the idea that various

learning environments should be designed around recognition of the importance of the learner's personal identification with others.

This process of collaborative learning based on social interaction and social identity is identified by Barry Dart writing in Sutherland (1998). He writes… "Many writers emphasize the importance of social interaction in bringing about changes in understanding" (op cit p31).

Anyone working in groups with adult learners, such as Access students, is soon aware that there are strong social forces operating in small groups. These social pressures acting on group members are immediately obvious, in that no matter how structured the task the group is gathered to carry out, most individual group members tend to be apprehensive of evaluation by others and clearly monitor their own and others' social behaviour. Further it is always clear that in any group there are very marked individual differences in the extent to which group members are prepared to speak out, especially initially. These social and interpersonal pressures undoubtedly affect group members but the extent to which such changes enhance (or indeed detract from) members' social or communicative skills is more difficult to monitor or evaluate. It can be easily seen that these powerful forces could be utilised to assist learning rather than allowing them to detract from learning.

However there are other forms of support which are also required and the general experience seems to be that mature non-traditional students make greater demands on tutors, counsellors and advisers (Leslie Wagner in Parry & Davies, 1991). An unfamiliar environment leads to a lack of confidence and much time needs to be given in the early stages to providing reassurance.

In general, mature students bring into higher education a much larger and more complex baggage of commitments and external constraints than their 18 year old colleagues. And when these are combined with the psychological demands of academic study they produce, for some, intolerable stress which tutors, counsellors and advisers try to relieve.

Alan Tuckett (in Parry & Wake: 1990, p 113) begins his chapter with the following statement:

> "Adults learn best in contexts sympathetic to adult learners, yet the creation of such contexts in higher education has received comparatively little attention. A final and major anxiety thrown up by Access course provision is that it may provide a non-traditional route into traditional educational provision."

The differences between mature and traditional-age entrants to higher education are manifold (Justice & Dornan 2001). Despite family commitments and economic pressures mature students perform as well or better than their younger counterparts. However they noted that older students experienced the college classroom differently from younger students. They cited the work of Donaldson & Graham and their hypothesized factors relating to academic performance in adults (also relevant is Tennant 1988). Two factors were seen as crucial:

1. Psychosocial factors

2. Value Orientation (which includes motivation and self confidence).

It is clear from this that affective factors have a major influence on cognitive processes. Both of the above factors are in the affective domain. The first deals with relationships formed in the cohort of learners and between learners and facilitators of learning. The second involves how the student identity interfaces with the learning process.

2.6.5   The Learning Community.

Assumptions have been made that students learn in an emotional vacuum. However Taylor affirms that emotions are indispensable to rationality and that one cannot

reason without emotions or feelings (Taylor 2001). Thus, much more attention needs to be given to the role of emotions in engaging the learning process. The fields of neurobiology and cognitive psychology seem to offer much support to research in the field of adult education on the emotional component of transformative learning. Taylor suggested that teachers and educators need to know how to manage the emotional climate in which learning takes place. Thus, emotional literacy becomes a vital point of interest. This is the development of emotional intelligence which allows people to manage their emotions well and interpret and deal effectively with other people's feelings. People with well developed emotional skills are also more likely to be content and effective in their learning. People who cannot marshal some control over their emotional life experience internal battles that may sabotage their ability to learn.

This analysis is related to the analyses by Rogers and Knowles as they are based on the same humanistic standards and value systems, in seeing the human needs of the students as learners.

Group dynamics is the crucible which reveals the secrets of how the person forms, and is formed by, the social environment. Humanistic approaches may emphasize the individual, the autonomy of the individual, self direction, etc. In group

dynamics we see the individual as part of a group and his attitudes, abilities to learn, attitudes towards learning, are contingent on relationships formed in the learning context. Groups are said to promote self understanding through shared support and mutual feedback. They generate the experiential base for learning, they encourage interaction, self determination and trust.

There are various factors affecting the learning process (Schaufelle & Baptiste 2000, p 448-458). They emphasized four different aspects of humankind which are areas which affect the process of learning. These are the physical, the emotional, the cognitive and the spiritual. In this overview we see these as being indicative of areas of concern which necessarily impinge on the process or processes of learning as follows:

Initial teacher training programmes make special mention of physical factors such as heating or ventilation, adequate lighting, appropriate learning aids such as hand outs or overheads etc., seating, arrangements of seating etc. All of these have an affect on the quality of learning or the learning experience of the student.

Cognitive is most directly related to learning theories and approaches to learning which must take into account the cognitive processes which students go through in

order to learn. Some writers may concentrate on repetition, visual impact,
individual reading, role play, the relation of new learning to existing learning, mind
maps etc. However it should be noted that approaches to learning may be
individualised and hence mass means of imposing approaches to the cognitive
process may be doomed to failure with a proportion of the students in any
programme.

Schaufelle and Baptiste make the point that spiritual factors will also have a part to
play in effective learning. By spiritual we mean the belief and value systems of the
learner. There must be a recognition of the higher metaphysical motivations and
understandings of the student, rather than a base appeal on a physical level. Each
learner will have their individualised value system which may or may not be
influenced by a Judeo-Christian tradition, an Islamic tradition, or an
atheistic/humanistic tradition. But it is unlikely that the learner comes to the
learning process in a values vacuum. With this moral and ethical structure, the
student approaches learning, and learning is adopted into this framework.

Finally there is the emotional factor. No man is an island! The student learns in the
midst of human relationships which are either destructive or supportive, or perhaps
something in between, sometimes destructive and sometimes supportive. Humans

are social beings. They form relationships with those around them. And thus

relationships which are formed in the learning environment will have a profound

effect on the quality of the learning experience.

2.7   The Castlecary Viaduct of Learning: A Model Suggested by the Foregoing

       Literature.

Figure 8:
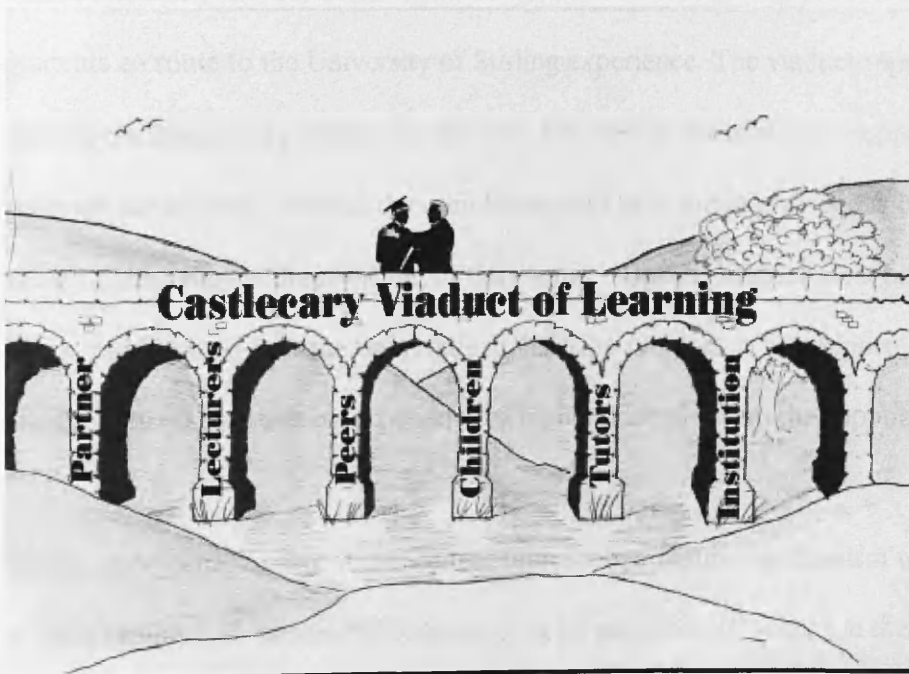
This writer's experience of Access teaching has been centred on two institutions:

Cumbernauld College, a further education college and the University of Stirling.

Indeed a number of students from Cumbernauld College progressed to degree study in the University of Stirling and have since graduated with good degrees.

The above structure at Castlecary is a viaduct carrying the train line from Glasgow through Stirling to Dundee. It is a prominent landmark known well by most locals and must be passed on route from Cumbernauld to Stirling.

In this instance it can be looked upon as symbolic of the learning process that students en route to the University of Stirling experience. The viaduct represents a pathway, a supported pathway for the train line, but in this analogy a supported pathway for learning. Indeed the train line would have much greater difficulty crossing the valley without the aid of the viaduct. But the viaduct must be supported if it is to bear the train. Indeed, learning requires to be supported by such strong pillars if the learning experience of higher education is to be supported.

In this analogy each pillar of the viaduct represents a support mechanism which the student requires, if meaningful learning is to be experienced. What are these pillars? What forms of support are necessary to support the learning of the individual? Linden West (1996) described a pilot project in which he was engaged which examined the affect of relationships in the life of the student on the learning

process. He writes, "We were to focus on the management of change; the role of significant others in the past and present; social situatedness and feelings of marginality; and the impact of education on motive and feelings about self over time" (op cit p25).

West postulated that relationships in the experience of the learner would have a profound affect on the learning process. It is clear that relationships in the learning environment and surrounding the learner will markedly affect the emotional and psychological climate in which the learner operates and thus possibly affect the outcome. These relationships must include relationships which predated the learning experience. i.e. How does the change of identity in the learner from non-learner to learner affect those existing relationships? Is the change of identity encouraged and supported, or is it resisted and opposed? Also the change of identity will involve the formation of new relationships within the learning environment? Is the person accepted in this new identity and does that sense of acceptance reinforce his self identity? If that is the case then this may be supportive of the learning; if not then it may detract from the learning. New social affiliations will tend to be supportive. A lack of affiliations will tend to act as a disincentive to learning.

How a person feels, could be said to have an effect, and operate on his/her ability to learn. If the student feels marginalized, then the student's sense of identity as a learner will be threatened and no amount of superb overheads, or state of the art computers will compensate. How a student feels about him/herself will have a greater impact on the learning experience, and this must be more directly affected by relationships into which the student is conjoined. What are the most relevant factors? This theme will be developed more fully in chapter eight.

Chapter 3.

Research Questions.

The broad aims of this research were to examine the ideas of progression and performance, particularly with reference to a subset of mature students who had entered into higher educational study by means of an Access route. As a result of this, for the sake of comparison, a means had to be sought to compare this level of performance or measure of progression with the norm of all students entering into such study or those from other routes.

As is the case with all such attempts at research, there was a general evolution of the aims of the research and even moments of mutation when more interesting or more profitable avenues for research opened up.

3.1 Research Questions at the Beginning:

In the first phase of quantitative research, it involved looking carefully at the performance in terms of grades achieved in University study. This was made possible by very full statistical information made available in Institution A. These would be examined in conjunction with the modes of entry of students into their university study. It was hoped by these means to establish whether the student entry mode is a factor in determining performance. Also it was hoped that by examining the incomplete ('X" grades) and the reasons for leaving to establish whether or not entry mode affects the likelihood that a student will in fact leave university without completing studies.

The following Research Questions were addressed:-

3.1.1 What are the relative proportions of the various entry modes of students in Institution A?

3.1.2 How do the performance and progression of A-level students compare with that of SCE Highers students?

3.1.3   How does the progression of Access students compare to traditional

entrants coming direct from school?

3.1.4   Are there subject-specific patterns affecting the performance and

progression of students in maths/science/technology?

3.1.5   What trends can be determined about the performance and progression of

BTEC and/or

SCOTVEC students at University?

3.1.6   For students who leave the University without completing their studies, was

there any observable pattern for entry mode?

3.1.7   Was there any gender affect on performance or progression?

3.1.8   Were there any observable affects on performance caused by the points

score from A-levels or SCE Highers on entry?

As may be observed from the above, research at this stage of the process was an

extremely broad brush approach. All of the questions were in themselves

interesting and comment is made on most of these in chapter five. It can be noted

however that by the time the analysis was done on Institution B, the same quality of

data was unavailable and no performance based information was available for

analysis, only data which dealt with persistence. Analysis is described in chapter

six. And in this case as with the next chapter, data were supplied concerning former

Access students only and the ability of comparison of performance with other modes of entry was not a possibility. In chapter seven, data were examined from the further education colleges, where only the achievement of merits in a unit of study could be described as performance data and it became clear that some of the research questions were not going to be addressed.

Other anomalies, discussed in chapter three led the research to evolve into a more focussed approach, and the research to take quite a different view.

3.2   Revised Research Questions.

The revised objectives of this research were as follows:

3.2.1   To examine the performance and progression of former Access students across two different Higher Education institutions in the West of Scotland.

3.2.2   To further investigate the performance of former Access students who pursue higher educational study in the form of HNC or HND study mainly in Further Education institutions chiefly through an examination of their results via SCOTVEC (later SQA) records.

3.2.3 To determine where possible the relative performance of these former Access students in comparison with either all students within the system, or where possible other specific subsets of the student population. i.e. chiefly with what might be referred to as traditional entrants.

3.2.4 To examine patterns of achievement amongst former Access students in HE and higher study in FE.

3.2.5 To seek to postulate reasons for differences in performance between HE and FE sectors amongst former Access students.

3.2.6 To seek to postulate reasons for poor performance in FE sector of former Access students.

3.2.7 To search for a new model of mature adult learning which would help to explain wide variations in performance and progression of former Access students.

3.2.8 To search for a new model of mature adult learning which may be based on non-static[5] elements, which in turn may lead to new approaches to supporting mature learners in higher education.

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[5] The term "static" is here used to denote demographic elements of the student background which in themselves are non-alterable. For example a student's socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, and previous educational experience, are all matters that are fixed and unalterable. However, matters that surround the student in the affective domain are factors that may be changed. If a greater level of psycho-social support may radically change the performance levels of mature students, or their likelihood to continue in course, then these are matters which may be addressed by institutions, or policy makers, or governments in general which may radically affect the effectiveness of wider participation policies and models.

There is an inherent pragmatism about considering only non-static factors that began to drive this research. The differential levels of performance across institutions and sectors suggested that a search in the affective domain may prove more useful. Matters concerning student confidence, perceptions of identity, relationships surrounding the learner began to define a more profitable line of enquiry. Where relationships undermine the new identity as a learner, was there an increased likelihood of poor performance or non-perseverance? And which were the most vital supportive relationships to the student? Were they in the learning environment? Or in the family/home environment? And if the relationships with partners or parents, children or friends were non-supportive, what did that have to say about the institutional relationships and the role of student support generally.

Hence it may be observed that the research now has a more focussed approach, and indeed all research questions have a unity of purpose which binds them together. The whole process is about a new model which will take into account the differential in levels of performance and persistence, regardless of which institution, or which subject discipline, or which ethnicity, or gender, or prior educational experience. It might be said it is about treating the learner as a person. It is a more

holistic approach to the learner as a person. And policies and models must not lose sight of the fact that at heart the learner is not a statistic but a person.

Learning is a social activity engaged in by an individual. It is engaged in by a person with a number of different needs which may be summarised by

- Academic factors

- Intellectual abilities and limitations

- Emotional needs and resources

- Social needs and resources

- Spiritual needs and resources.

The revised set of research questions seeks to gather this holistic view of the student and gather data which takes into account the psycho-social, emotional and intellectual experiences of the mature learner and their effect on the learner as a person.

Chapter Four

Research Methodologies.

4.1 Introduction:

In this section an examination is made of the research methodologies employed in

this piece of research. Hilary Burgess (writing in Burgess 1995a) speaking of the

importance of examining methodology...

> "When viewed from one standpoint, "methodology" seems a purely
>
> technical concern devoid of ideology; presumably it deals only with methods
>
> of extracting reliable information from the world, collecting data,

constructing questionnaires, sampling and analysing returns. Yet it is always a good deal more than that, for it is commonly infused with ideologically resonant assumptions about what the social world is, who the sociologist is, and what the nature of the relationship between them is." (op cit p 179)

This could easily be restated in the context of educational research. The methodology in educational research resonates with assumptions about the educational world, the learning process, the learning environment, the zone of proximal development, the assumptions and ideology of the researcher and the researcher's view of the learning process and the learner, and how the researcher interfaces with the research and the field of research.

The researcher is likely to make certain assumptions about what real research is, about what is reliable research, about what is generalisable, about what is valid. And these assumptions will govern the methodology. In turn the methodology will govern the research and the findings of the research. The conclusion may be reached that there is no such thing then as wholly unbiased, completely "scientific", utterly objective research. There is only the researcher, the ideology of the researcher, the methodology of the researcher and the findings of the research. It may be postulated that research itself has gone through an evolutionary change

(some might say mutation), moving from a Newtonian towards an Einsteinian

Relativistic approach. The greatest service that can be done to objectivity is to try

to understand the frame of reference from which measurements are made and to

understand that the findings are at best relativistic. And the fact that they are

relativistic does not make them invalid, indeed it might be said that such findings

are more valid because at least there is an attempt to take into account the

relativistic and individual frame of reference in which the measurements are made,

and where the observations are taken from.

A research approach needs to be adopted where the methods used are appropriate

for the questions that are posed. In this case, it is not possible to understand the

affect of relationships which impinge on the learning and the learner without

engaging the learner to recount their experiences. The more freely the learner is

able to engage in such dialogue and the more freely the learner experiences the right

to tell their learning story, the more accurate shall be the perspective. In Rogerian

terms, the learner is the expert on his/her learning story. The Researcher has to give

the learner the opportunity to tell the story.

Sherman & Webb (1988, p7) state that,

> "Qualitative research then, has the aim of understanding experience as
>
> nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it. In fact the idea may

be a test for qualitative research, whether it be a philosophical discussion,
an ethnographic report, a literary account, or an historical study. Ross
says that qualitative descriptions 'should transport the reader to the scene,
convey the pervasive qualities or characteristics of the phenomenon, and
evoke the feeling and nature of the educational experience'".

4.2   Understanding this Research.

Mouly (1978, pp26-28) has identified five steps in the process of empirical science:

1. *experience:* the starting point of scientific endeavour at the most
    elementary level.

2. *classification:* the formal systematisation of otherwise incomprehensible
    masses of data.

3. *quantification:* a more sophisticated stage where precision of measurement
    allows more adequate analysis of phenomena by mathematical means.

4. *discovery of relationships:* the identification and classification of functional
    relationships among phenomena.

5. *approximation to the truth:* science proceeds by gradual approximation to
    the truth.

The above analysis by Mouly may be examined and the question asked if this bears any relationship to this current research. Since the current research began as a piece of action research by this researcher as a teacher then it clearly has it roots in experience. It was as this researcher observed the processes of learning among Access students and observing their progression to higher education that the process of investigation began. Attempts were then made at some form of systematisation. How were the phenomena to be explained: in terms of socio-economic factors, curricular factors, age factors, gender factors, ethnographic factors?

4.3   Phases of this research project.

As the research developed it became clear that there would be more than one phase. Although the original design was able to arrive at some conclusions and did unearth interesting data, from which conclusions might be drawn about the performance of former Access students, it became clear that some research questions could not be answered by this singular approach to research. It was necessary to pursue a mixed methodological approach, some questions being addressed by a large scale quantitative approach, and other questions being addressed by a small scale qualitative approach.

In chapter one an overview of the research was given in Figure 1. It began with

quantitative studies in two HEIs. This was followed by quantitative studies in

SCOTVEC computerised records of former Access students. A short bridging

phase of focus groups were entered into to inform the qualitative interview phase

with eighteen former Access students.

4.4 Large Scale Quantitative Research Phase.

The quantitative phase began with Institution A.

4.4.1 Institution A.

The next phase of the research moved on to analysis by use of the mainframe

computer and SUE and XSUE editors (Wylie & Sutherland 1992). Further analysis

was carried out by means of SPSSx of data available from Institution A to

determine any mathematically sound, statistically significant factors affecting the

performance and progressions of former Access students in Higher Education. It

was hoped by doing so that this would identify relationships which would be

functional in explaining the phenomenological findings.

There were logistical problems in this phase of the research which were not resolved and it was concluded were un-resolvable. Some difficulties were resolvable in terms of the use of the SPSSx statistical analysis package, and particularly its very useful "Crosstabs" function which permitted examining how one variable changed with respect to another. However, there were other logistical problems which were not resolved. A careful and intensive study of SPSSx as a method was necessary in order to optimise the conclusions verifiable from the data set. This involved the use of Booth (1991) a dedicated guide and a series of videos, which required to be studied.

The best quality of data was in Institution A and considerable detail on both performance and progression was available. See chapter 5 for further treatment of this phase.

There were a number of different variables listed on the data file which had to be defined for the purpose of analysis and the following headings were created and missing values were assigned to assist the computer in analysis. The variables were important for they defined the kind of information which was stored in the computer and which we wished to analyse.

Table 11:

Variable Name	Definition
REGNO	Student registration number within university
TYPE	Whether student is full or part time.
ENTRYYR	Year of entry into university.
SEX	Gender of student.
BIRTHD	Date of birth.
LEAVE	Date of leaving if applicable.
REASONL	Reason why student left (coded).
UCCA	UCCA code for course entered.
ENTRQUAL	Coded statement of entry qualifications.
MATURE	Whether student is mature entrant (i.e. 21 or over on entry).
DIRECTE	Those who entered from HNC/D study.
A1-A5	Grades of A levels attained prior to entry.
APOINT	Points scored for A-levels.
H1-H10	Grades of SCE Highers achieved pre-entry.
HPOINT	Points scored for Highers.
SESSION	Year of study.
SEMESTER	Autumn or spring semester.
UNIT	Code for unit studied.
GRADE	Grade attained for that unit.

It was of particular interest to establish whether the various entry modes of these students would have an impact. Did those with English A-levels have a noticeably different performance from those with Scottish Highers? Particular interest would be shown in how entrants coming in with NTE's (non-traditional entry qualifications) performed in comparison with TE's (traditional entry qualifications). And, as a subset of NTE's how did students from various Access programmes

compare with other entry modes. And although other patterns were sought by computer analysis, particular emphasis in this study was placed on the idea of progression and performance by entry mode.

Analysis of the data using the SPSSx programme was mainly facilitated by use of the "CROSSTABS" command. By this means, it was possible to cross-tabulate how one of our defined variables (listed earlier) varied with another. For example it was desirable to know how grade varied with entry qualifications. This would provide us a table where entry qualifications were listed by code down one side of the table whilst grades A to X were listed across the way. Obviously this would result in a lot of useful information with numbers and percentages being made freely available.

However, before going into any more detail in the results, the codes that were used in the computer for the various variables must be defined in order to make the results more meaningful.

All of the variables in turn shall now be summarised and the computer listing of these variables classified, defining the codes used.

(i) REGNO:

This was the student registration number and is self explanatory.

(ii) TYPE:

This was coded as either 0 or 1. 0 represented a full time B.A. / B.Sc. / B. Acc student. 1 represented a B.A. / B.Sc. part time student.

(iii) ENTRYYR:

This was simply a two digit statement of the entry year of that student into the university. e.g. "92".

(iv) SEX:

Gender of the student was stated with either an "M" or "F".

(v) BIRTHD:

This information was stored in eight columns with the full four digit statement of the year followed by the month and day.

(vi) LEAVE:

The Leave statement was another eight column statement of the date

on which a student was deemed to have left the university for

whatever reason.

(vii) REASONL:

This was a coded statement as to why a student had left the university.

There were a number of classified reasons which were given codes as

follows:-

Table 12:

10	Successful completion of course.
20	Academic failure.
40	Health reasons.
50	Death.
60	Other reasons prior to subdivision of this category.
61	Other: deemed to have withdrawn.
62	Other: lack of academic progress.
63	Other: financial reasons.
64	Other: health implications.
66	Other: reasons general or unspecified.
67	Other: domestic reasons.
68	Other: transfer to educational establishment (not UK university)
69	Other: taking up employment.
70	Seconded to another university.
80	Transferred to another university.
90	Returning to own university.

(viii) UCCA:

This was a four character alphanumeric code which corresponded to the UCCA handbook listing of a degree course offered within the university. It was the course the student was admitted to study.

(ix) ENTRQUAL:

For the purposes of this study, this was one of the most vital codes to understand. Each form of entry qualification was given a code in the computer files. These were regrouped and redefined for the purposes of this study using the "RECODE" command procedure and the codes are defined as follows:

Table 13:

25	Linked Access from FE colleges.
26	SCOTVEC, BTEC and other NTE's combined.
30	A-levels
40	Highers: not entering direct from school.
41	Highers: 5th year entry.
42	Highers: 6th year entry.
43	Highers: 6th year (qualifications gained in 5th year)
51	Access: Stirling University in-house Access.
68/69	Access: other non-linked F.E.
70	Access: UK (non Scottish).
80	Open University.

(x) MATURE:

Under this code, mature students (those who are at least 21 years of age on commencement of their course) were listed with an M or a Y. All others had no entry.

(xi) DIRECTE:

This classification was to note those who had made a direct entry into the university on the basis of an HNC or HND qualification not necessarily starting at year 1. There were few of these listed in the data file.

(xii) A1 - A5:

Under these columns were listed the grades gained in English A level examinations.

(xiii) APOINT:

This is the common admissions policy statement of the point score gained for A levels achieved.

(xiv) H1 - H10:

These were grades achieved in up to 10 SCE Highers examinations.

(xv) HPOINT:

This was a numerical value equal to the points awarded for passes in SCE Highers.

(xvi) SESSION:

This was a six column numerical code equal to the university session. e.g.. 199192.

(xvii) SEMESTER:

The Semester code read either "A" or "S". This stood for autumn or spring and was all-inclusive since the University of Stirling operate a two-semester year.

(xviii) UNIT:

This was a four character alphanumeric code assigned to each unit taught in the university. e.g. C100. These were listed in the University Calendar: Old Regulations. And by means of this

publication it was possible to determine the codes for example for

every maths, science or technology unit taught in the university.

(xix) GRADE:

This code normally listed grades in letters A to E. A, B, and C were

passes. D and E were fails. There were also a small number listed

"H" which were non graded requirements of some honours courses.

There were also a number graded with an "X" which signified an

incomplete.

4.4.2   Institution B.

Later, on obtaining data from Institution B it was found that a wholly different

approach was required to analyse the data from that institution.

Using data supplied by an old University in the West of Scotland, it was possible to

check on the progress of five hundred and twenty six (526) former Scottish Wider

Access Programme (SWAP) students who had progressed to study at the university.

These students spanned 1989-94 in their Access year study and it was decided to

include all students as this would broaden the database and allow a rudimentary

statistical analysis.

There were a number of limitations on the quality of the data supplied. It contained

no information on grades attained in units of study. There was no information for

comparison purposes with other entry modes at the university, the data related only

to the former Access students.

The information on all of these students was entered into a database and the basic

tools in the database were used to carry out an analysis of the data which informed

the findings given in chapter six.

4.4.3 Variability in Quality of data available.

The chief difficulty was the wide variance in the quality of data made available

from institution to institution. The quality of data was so poor at one major

university after months of negotiation that virtually no analysis was possible at all.

Another institution could supply no information on grades whatsoever whilst it

could and did supply information on perseverance in courses if not performance. A

third university provided full information on grades achieved, the place where Access courses were studied, age, gender and it seemed almost any variable requested. This placed severe limitations on any comparative study from institution to institution.

Further, in the one institution where the most complete data was offered, it was unclear whether this fullest information and most detailed statistical analysis could shed any light on certain factors which affected student performance and perseverance. It was recognised that there were inherent limitations on what could be achieved by purely quantitative means only.

4.4.4   Anomalous Nature of Quantitative Findings.

Another anomaly on the limitation of the quantitative statistical approach was that the performance information did not seem to fit into any logical pattern, neither did it reflect anecdotal evidence, nor expected results. For example, students leaving Access programmes and entering into study in HN programmes in FE colleges might have been expected to perform better than the students entering degree study in a university. The reason for such expectation may be intuitively obvious:

1. Those in HN study often studying in same institution as Access study was carried out hence avoiding stress of change of institution.

2. Those in HN study often studying under same teaching staff.

3. They would be studying an academically less demanding course and study regime.

4. They seemed to receive greater levels of guidance and other forms of student support.

4.4.5   Former Access Students Pursuing HN level Study in FECs.

4.4.5.1 Preliminary Matters:

Initially a meeting with senior personnel at SCOTVEC was arranged to explore the possibility of carrying out research into the performance of former Access students who pursue further study in Higher National Certificates and Diplomas mainly within the Further Education sector.

The information on former SWAP students pursuing higher education within the FE sector was very diverse and records were not easily obtainable from the large

number of colleges to which they had been admitted. It was decided therefore to

pursue obtaining such information via the awarding body, SCOTVEC. With co-

operation from SCOTVEC, it was possible to obtain recent information on 650

former Access students through their records.

Information was gained by examining SCOTVEC data dumps on 650 former

Access students pursuing study at HN level in FE colleges. At the meeting with

senior personnel at SCOTVEC arranged as preliminary to carrying out research into

the performance of former Access students, agreement was secured. It was hoped

that information would be secured that allowed insight into former Access students

who pursue further study in Higher National Certificates and Diplomas mainly

within the Further Education sector.

The information was provided in the form of a hard copy of 650 paper records

tracing the performance of each student in the SCOTVEC system. These were

students who had pursued further study in the Further Education sector and did not,

at least initially articulate into Higher Education Institutions.

Hence a concentrated study was made on the records of 650 students who were

traced via SWAP and the SCOTVEC computer system. These students were

former Access students who entered Access over a period from 1989 to 1994. Though these dates are not exactly the same three cohorts as those pursued in the study in the university sector, it was decided that this should be viewed as a wholly different category of study and there was no need to restrict the search for information in this instance to the three cohorts only. Spreading this out over these 6 years maximised the quantity of data and made it possible to look more meaningfully for any overall trend. It was also useful in tracking students over a longer period since there were a considerable number of students who took several years in which to complete programmes of study. It would also more convincingly average out any variations from year to year amongst the cohorts. The information was provided in the form of a hard copy of 650 paper records tracing the performance of each student in the SCOTVEC system.

These were students who had pursued further study in the Further Education sector and did not, at least initially articulate into Higher Education Institutions.

Due to the large number of students who were recorded as remaining on course, it was decided to request from SCOTVEC another search for results of 338 of these students one year later than the date of the original results pulled from the SCOTVEC computers. This was supplied in the form of two boxes of print outs

with as many as six sheets of print outs for each of these students. These were

carefully studied for each student and the results of each student up-dated to form a

more accurate picture in the analysis. The database was further updated and

analysis repeated with updated information.

This had the merit of providing further information on the success, partial success

or failure of more advanced study via SCOTVEC Higher National Certificates,

Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas and provided information on some who had

articulated from these to degree study by a more circuitous route.

4.4.5.2   Categories of Study.

Information was gathered concerning each student under the following headings:-

1. Surname.
2. First Names.
3. Access No.
4. Access Course.
5. Group Award.
6. Partial Success Index.
7. College.
8. Year of Birth.
9. Access year.
10. Age achieved in the year that the Access year was completed.

All of this information was loaded into a database to allow for some degree of analysis.

It was found that a statistical examination of the performance of 650 former Access students studying HN level courses in the FE sector revealed that these students performed less well than students who had progressed for example to Institution A, a university, to study degree level courses. Why? There was nothing in the quantitative phase of this research that can answer the fundamental questions on causal links to performance and perseverance. It was noticeable that there were no discernible causal relationships which overarched the findings across syllabi, across institutions, across sectors. The results were interesting, to some degree informative but puzzling. Why should students attempting less rigorous courses of study in the FE sector seem to do worse than those attempting the more challenging? Why were the results so variable across all boundaries?

It was thus decided that a qualitative phase was required to investigate the factors affecting student learning.

Despite its limitations it should be stated that the results and outcomes of phase one of the research did produce novel data that delivered considerable insight into the

progress and performance of former Access students in the two HEIs studied and also with respect to former Access students pursuing HNC and HND studies in the growing HE provision in FECs. It should be remembered that this research began pre HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) and the data produced was novel and seldom available. The distinct lack of data when this research began justified the approaches used in this research, and the lack of an adequate means of tracking students from FE into HE means that the research has a lasting significance and value.

4.5 Qualitative Phase.

The Qualitative phase began with a desire to know at the outset whether choices for articulation were significant in determining performance. It was necessary therefore to ask Access students drawing to the conclusion of their Access course what made them choose various articulation routes. With a clearer picture of this, it would be possible to determine whether the student who chooses to pursue a HE course in an FEC was by definition a student who would perform less well in that course of study than a degree student in an HEI. It was felt that knowing what influenced the choice would help to clarify that issue.

The means decided upon to inform this was to conduct a focus group.

4.5.1   Focus Groups:

To inform this evolution from quantitative to qualitative methodology it was

decided to host some focus groups to investigate the links between student

experience and preparedness and their routes to HE.

Morgan (1998a, p1) refers to focus groups as group interviews. A moderator guides

the interview while a small group discusses the topics that the interviewer raises.

What the participants in the group say form the essential data in focus groups. The

number of participants can vary and Morgan says that typically it may involve six to

eight people. Fundamentally he says that focus groups are a way of listening to

people and learning from them (op cit p9). Their purpose is to create lines of

communication between, in this case, groups of adult learners principally those who

have come through an Access route into study in HE, and the researcher. After

much consideration of statistical data, focus groups were deemed to be an

appropriate way of interfacing with actual learners and learning something about

their experiences of leaving Access courses and engaging in HE. It was hoped that

such an approach would assist the researcher to refine research questions and

determine directions for a qualitative investigation. After some consideration of the quantitative data, I decided that focus groups should discuss certain issues, and facilitate a conversation between groups of former Access learners on these topics and would allow that conversation to determine a refined agenda for future research. Morgan (1998a p11) described focus groups as a qualitative research method, employing guided group discussions to generate a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs.

The case for focus groups as a methodology is governed by their aptness to the specifications of this research. Kreuger (1998) makes the point that it must be considered how focus groups compare with alternative means of gathering information. Why are focus groups peculiarly appropriate for the stage of research at which they are applied (Kreuger 1998 p130)?

In this case, focus groups were applied at a crucial developmental transition of the research. It had been determined that the quantitative phase was not addressing the research goals and it was necessary to refocus the research and carry it forward to a more qualitative phase. At that point, it was decided to use focus groups to inform the refining of research questions and designing of a way forward to address the

research concerns. It was decided that focus groups were the best method to access the group norms that determined choices of articulation from FE to HE.

It can be useful to understanding how focus groups work to compare them with survey questionnaires. Both are techniques for gathering information from people. In both cases, the researcher selects the interview topics, and the participants provide the data. Once the data are collected, it is up to the researcher to analyse this information and relate the results to the purposes of the research. The differences between the methods are useful to consider. In surveys there are well defined sampling procedures that rely on statistical processes to analyse. In focus groups, the researcher uses his judgement to select purposive samples of participants who meet the needs of the particular project. Surveys use a fixed set of questions and every respondent is asked the same questions and given the same set of response options. In focus groups however there is considerably greater scope for flexibility, in how questions are asked, and a much wider range of possible ways of answering are made possible. Indeed the means of response is left up to the discretion of the participants. This can lead to certain inherent dangers in the process. There is on the one hand the danger of silence and on the other that of such exuberance on the part of some that it is difficult to gain a balanced view of the group understanding or feeling. The analysis of the focus group involves then a

more subjective process of listening to and making sense of what has been said in the group.

It is clear then that focus groups are more open-ended and less predetermined than surveys. A crucial element of the focus group will be the nature of the form of questioning. "The plan for the focus group will of necessity include open-ended questions that spark the group's curiosity about the overall topic (Morgan 1998b p45)".

In reality, the focus groups would assist in the creation of an appropriate interview guide to be used in individual interviews with students. And this use of focus groups as part of a multi-disciplinary approach to a research project, is a common and useful means of investigation. Certainly focus groups can serve a useful role as a first stage in developing all kinds of projects (Morgan 1998a p51). Further we read:

> "However, focus groups have a much larger part to play as an ancillary
>
> method, alongside and complementing other methods. We can note the
>
> following ancillary roles for focus groups: first, their use in pre-pilot work,
>
> to provide a contextual basis for survey design; second, their use in a
>
> contemporary extension of survey and other methods to provide an

interpretative aid to survey findings; and third, their use as a method of communicating findings to research subjects.... As an ancillary method, therefore, focus groups may operate at the beginning, middle and end of projects" (Bloor et al 2001 pp8-9).

Further, they state that focus groups may be an ancillary method, used in pre-pilot work to provide a contextual basis for survey design (op cit p17). In this particular case, the focus groups formed a bridge between earlier and later phases of the research. They were used to provide a basis for the design of interview guides to inform the qualitative phase.

One crucial element of the use of focus groups is the need for high quality moderation of the group discussion process. The moderator has a major impact on the data that focus groups produce. As a result the quality of the results will be directly related to the talents, preparation and attentiveness of this person (Morgan 1998a p53). The moderator's goal is to "help the group explore the topic in a way that generates new insights" (Morgan 1998b p45). The key to the success of the group will be the moderator's ability to "create a comfortable, productive conversation..." (Morgan 1998b p58).

Another crucial element is stressed by Kreuger (1998) and that is the need to keep it
focussed. He calls this keeping it simple. There is the need to "limit the study to
one key theme or concept instead of branching into several areas of importance"
(Kreuger 1998 p98). He goes on to stress that the easiest way to bring simplicity
into the study is through clear questions.

Bloor et al (2001, p 91) stressed the need for care in the recruitment of focus group
participants. In this instance, it was deemed appropriate to attempt to recruit
participants from class groups of Access students nearing the end of their Access
experience in order to ascertain from them the actual reasons why they were
choosing certain exit routes and not others. It was deemed important to determine
the reasons why students made these choices to determine whether this might reveal
causal factors which affect student performance in HE. Since the main purpose of
focus groups is to access group norms and understandings, there are clear
advantages in recruiting participants from pre-existing social groups. This was seen
as an aid to attendance and the social cohesion of the group which may enhance free
discussion. In this case it was decided to draw on existing class groups from two
different institutions and this proved successful in gathering together a sufficient
number of participants.

4.5.1.1 Pilot Focus Group.

The method decided upon to investigate this is by means of a pilot focus group arranged with current evening Access students in the in-house Access programme at Institution A. This writer was at that time engaged in teaching on the in-house Access programme and had ready access to these students.

A one hour appointment was sought with a number of these Access students on a regular evening for the Access group to meet. This focus group was organised in the following way:

The students represented several different strands of the Access programme and hence were not restricted to a single curricular area. Most of the students present would have the option of articulating onto full time programmes at Institution A or in certain instances to part time degree provision within that institution. However they were not restricted to that and some would have the opportunity to access other HEIs to pursue degree level study there.

The group were asked to identify articulation routes and write them down on post-it notes. These were then categorized into main groupings such as FE, HE, HN level study, employment, other vocational study, other, and no study plans.

The limitations of this pilot became evident when it was clear that few would select HN study since their experience was with HEIs. They had completed their Access study in an HEI environment and there was a comfort level there. They had met and knew some tutors in the Institution and for them there would be an enhanced pathway there due to higher levels of comfort and familiarity with that university. Clearly wider Access experience in the FE sector could well have the opposite effect.

The students were then asked to identify any factors that would affect their decision. This was an informative discussion but was limited by time constraints.

Reflecting on the pilot focus group brought the following observations and recommendations to the fore:

1. That it would be more relevant to conduct a focus group with an Access group in an FEC.

2. That it would be more relevant to conduct a focus group with a
   full time Access group as those in the evening Access expressed
   interest in certain very limited choices such as part time degree
   study which was by no means a common or very generalisable
   group.

3. That an FE based Access group may more reliably inform the
   research on reasons why 650 former Access students who came
   from the FE sector and articulated into HN study in the FE sector
   had chosen to do so.

4. That more time should be allowed to pursue a discussion of
   actual choices made and pursuing the factors which governed
   these choices.

4.5.1.2   FE Sector Focus Group.

An appointment was arranged with a current Access group in an FE institution.

Agreement was reached with Cumbernauld College. This group of Access students

was an amalgum of two classes and reflected different curricular groups, one of

them being an Access to Science and Technology Group and the other being an

Access to Languages and Social Sciences. The group was asked to examine the
following questions:-

1. Group was asked to identify articulation routes that they were considering.
   These should be written on "post-it" stationery. They were then taken and
   classified into groups such as: Further Education, Higher National Study,
   Degree Study, Employment, Other Vocational Study, No further study or
   educational plans, etc.

2. Next these various options were attached to a section of wall, others were
   gathered together on tables within the lecture room.

3. At these locations, students were asked to fill in other "post-it's" which
   would delineate reasons why these options would be chosen by that
   student. What would the chief factors be which would lead to their
   choosing such an option.

4. Students were then asked that since they are currently near the end of their
   Access course to identify which option they have currently decided upon,
   and state the chief reason or reasons why they have chosen that option.

A full discussion of the findings will be given in chapter eight.

4.5.2   Questionnaire and Interview Phase.

The difference in approach may be viewed as analogous to the difference between the Experimental and the Theoretical Physicist. The Experimentalist may pursue the laws of Physics by repeated observation in the hope that some law will emerge with some small amount of deductive reasoning from the masses of data collected. On the other hand the Theoretical Physicist will postulate a theory with minimal experimentation that is the result of creative thinking based on experience, lateral thinking and the genius of the theoreticist. This theory will then need to be tested and an approximation to the truth advanced which may be further tested leading to another approximation. Thus will be propagated a gradual process of shuffling towards the truth and the law of Physics. In this instance we have moved to a position more akin to the theoreticist and advanced a theory, a theory based on experience, on observation and lateral thinking which postulates that the major causal relationship between the learner and the process of successful learning is to do with supportive relationships in the learning environment. This then required to be tested. No large scale statistical method was found to be appropriate to this

testing. And free or semi-structured interview was used in order to test out the hypothesis.

Hitchcock & Hughes (1989 quoted in Cohen et al, p 13):

"Theory is seen as being concerned with the development of systematic construction of knowledge of the social world. In doing this theory employs the use of concepts, systems, models, structures, beliefs and ideas, hypotheses (theories) in order to make statements about particular types of actions, events or activities, so as to make analyses of their causes, consequences and process. That is, to explain events in ways which are consistent with a particular philosophical rationale or, for example, a particular sociological or psychological perspective. Theories therefore aim to both propose and analyse sets of relations existing between a number of variables when certain regularities and continuities can be demonstrated via empirical enquiry".

Thus a theoretical construct is now being advanced which is in effect a model of adult education perseverance and performance which draws upon the concepts of learner identity and how that learner identity is affected by the positive and negative

influences of relationships which interface with the learner in the midst of their
learning zone.

The following is a quote from Medawar (1981 in Cohen et al p15)

> "….Once he has a hypothesis to work on, the scientist is in business; the
> hypothesis will guide him to make some observations rather than others and
> will suggest experiments which might not otherwise have been performed.
> … A large part of the art of the soluble is the art of devising hypotheses
> that can be tested by practicable experiments".

As stated in Wiersma (1986), in a general sense, all research in Education is
directed to one or both of two ends: (1) the extension of knowledge and (2) the
solution of a problem.

Both of these may be seen in this research. As an educationalist involved for more
than 10 years in the presentation of Access courses to mature students, I became
interested in what factors affected the ability of these former Access students to
progress successfully in HE. Early indications were that they seemed to perform At
Least As Well (the ALAW principle) as many other students and this was borne out
by some research. (Osborne et al 1997, Ferrie 1994). However there were
indications that former Access students had a higher than expected attrition rate in

terms of those not completing studies. Hence the research questions addressed in this research were; what were the factors affecting the learning experience of former Access students? Why were these rates of progression variable? What was it about these mature entry students that made some successful and some not?

Burgess (1985) stated that educational research is oftentimes thought of as being confined to professional researchers located in higher education who might well conduct that research from a sociological, psychological, philosophical or historical perspective, or it may be conducted by professional researchers employed by central or local government seeking to collect statistical data which would in its turn influence educational policy and planning. However in recent years another strand of educational research has emerged which does not belong to either of the above two categories. This may be referred to as Action Research by educational practitioners, by teachers engaged in the educational process. This has been perhaps influenced by the need of those at the chalk face to better understand, or better influence the processes of education and learning.

Some might refer to these as pure research and applied research. However such simple dichotomies are never satisfying in the long run since the complexities of educational research are not easily confined to such a simple taxonomy. This

implies an artificial division which is not workable in practice. All educational research might equally contribute to theory, policy and practice.

Martin Bulmer (1978 quoted in Burgess 1985a, pp2-3) proposed a five-fold classification of social research which may be thought of as having application to educational research. These are:

1. Basic educational research: wherein we are principally concerned with advancing knowledge through testing. Generating and developing theories of education and learning.

2. Strategic educational research: wherein an educational problem is examined in the context of a specific academic discipline. In this approach the concern is to establish a strategy for dealing with a specific educational challenge by examining it in situ within the confines of a discipline or context.

3. Specific Problem-oriented research: which is designed to deal with a practical problem. For example this might look at the levels of reading of children at a certain age or ages in education.

4. Action Research: this involves research in a programme of planned change and may study the effects of such a change. This term is also applied to small scale research carried out by teachers.

5. Intelligence and Monitoring: this involves the collection of statistical data by government bodies or others for the sake of monitoring social trends or other factors affecting national life.

This current research belongs in more than one category. This was a piece of basic educational research involving some quantitative work, which led to some modelling to try to understand more about education and adult learning. It attempted to address a problem, the non-progression of certain groups of former Access students. Later it passed through a phase akin to category (5) where large scale statistics were gathered with the object of monitoring the situation. And lastly the research has moved to category (1) as an attempt has been made to reflect on a theory of adult learning which will bring about some benefit in the policy, practice and understanding of the learning processes within the learning environment of the adult learner.

In phase one, the performance of former Access students was examined across two universities and also former Access students pursuing HN level studies across a wide selection of FE institutions. The research in the two universities was pursued using the SPSSx analysis tool and the results are indicated in the relevant section of the thesis (chapters five and six). Further, the analysis of some 650 former Access students in pursuit of HN qualifications was entered into with the results obtained

from the computer system of what at that time was called SCOTVEC and subsequently SQA. These results were entered into a database for ease of analysis and the results of this research are summarised in the appropriate section of the thesis (chapter seven).

Another dichotomy often advanced is the contrast between quantitative and qualitative methods. Although large-scale quantitative methods may be thought of as producing results that are more valid, or at least more generalisable, it is clear that such large scale survey methods often do have limitations. This is seen clearly in this research. Large-scale quantitative methods may present a picture of the progression or success of former Access students but certainly do not reveal a full understanding of why these figures should be so. And if the figures for progression or success differ across institutions or disciplines, we are not assisted to understand what principles or factors are at work that produce such variable rates. Some have traditionally felt that qualitative methods may lack rigour and may present problems in reliability, generalisablity or validity. Some on the other hand have shown a preference for qualitative methods suggesting that it is not a question of superiority of one method over another but the appropriateness of a method of investigation for a particular research problem.

Boylan (2004) described the movement in USA towards more qualitative methods of research. He suggested that for much of the 1980s and 1990s, debate over these two research methodologies flourished at conferences, in the academic literature, and even in the popular media. However eventually, a compromise was arrived at which suggested that both quantitative and qualitative methods were necessary to provide a complete understanding of any issue under exploration. Quantitative methodologies are profitably used to define and describe phenomena whilst qualitative methodologies were equally profitable to assign meaning and enhance understanding of these phenomena. Boylan (2004) finally concluded, "Furthermore, researchers often collaborate to apply both methods in exploring issues in higher education".

There are issues involved with theory and theorizing. Wiersma (1986, p 17) defined a theory as "a generalization or series of generalizations by which we attempt to explain some phenomena in a systematic manner". (Hence in this case, this research has been in search of a theory of adult learning which has special application to mature learners and their experiences of learning). Wiersma further stated that a theory provides a framework for conducting research, and it can be used for synthesizing and explaining (through generalizations) research results. Hence in this case a theory is postulated then examined in the light of research

findings to cast light on the experiences of adult learning and on the theoretical construct itself.

4.5.3   Learning World Map:

One device employed in this research is the use of the Learning World Map. The results, analyses, and basic taxonomies of differing approaches of learners are discussed in full in chapter eight. However the device was developed for this research to be used in conjunction with the interview phase.

Kvale (1996) discussed the need to take into account the "life-world" of the interviewee (p54-55). Goodson (in Burgess 1985) talks of establishing the "life-story" of the interviewee in a similar vein. It is necessary to try to view the world of the interviewees from their frame of reference. It is the goal of the interview to gain insight into the experience of the learner, into their world. This view is contextually important to understanding the views and experiences of the learner and hence is at the heart of the goal of the research interview.

It is necessary to try to develop some means of understanding the personal construct of the learner (Cohen et al 2000, p 337ff). Since the stuff of interviews is verbal

narrative it is difficult to get a view of the learner's personal construct and this can

be greatly enhanced if there is some visual way of representing it. This discussion

developed a method of displaying the interviewee's experience of others by means

of a table... displaying a scaled response of individual's experience of others in

their world (Cohen et al 2000, p338). The benefit of this device is that it gives a

clear visual representation of the effect of others on the interviewee.

In this research it was desirable to identify the effect of others on the learner and the

impact of others on the learning world experience. Hence this concept was

developed further into the Learning World Map. In this approach it was decided to

use a map format instead of a table. The learner was placed in the middle of a blank

sheet of paper to represent the learner in the centre of the learning world. They

were then asked to identify other people who had an effect on their learning, either

positive or negative. In this manner we were asking the learner to think about their

learning world and who the major players were. They were invited to place those

who had a major effect close to the centre of the diagram and those who had a more

peripheral influence further away to the periphery of the diagram. Care was taken

not to try to influence the outcome and hence allow the learner to have a stronger

influence on the course of the interview. If for example, a student does not identify

any member of staff in the learning institution, it was not suggested to them that

they needed to include such. Perhaps these people were not seen to be instrumental in the learning world of that member. By this means it was hoped to raise the level of democracy of the interview. It also provided great insight into the learning world of that particular student.

These graphical representations further allowed us to make an analysis of the various learners in the study, and even classify these into some taxonomy of learners. Some learners were more oriented towards institutional context and some more towards the home context. Some were more isolationist in their approach and some were more socially embedded. This is discussed more fully in chapter eight.

4.6   Validity.

Since the basis of this research is to examine or postulate a theory of adult learning, care has to be taken on the extent to which a predetermined theory may unduly influence the research process. In other fields we would describe this as the concern over destructive or non-destructive testing. Clearly if a rigidly structured interview is used then there is a greater risk that the researcher, and the interview itself will determine the course of the results. i.e. if the only questions asked are to seek to justify or support a predetermined theory. Thus it is required to justify the role of theory in this research.

In the light of this danger, it was decided to change the semi-structured interview or interview guide at the pilot stage to reduce the prospect of being too directive. This would allow the interviewee a greater influence on the agenda of the interview. The learner was allowed to determine the areas in which the greater influence was felt to have existed.

It was decided to pursue an explanation for such variations in success and performance in terms of variations in the affective domain. If such variations were to be explained in terms of factors such as:

- The level of confidence experienced by the learner

- The sense of learner identity as a major factor in determining the level of confidence

- The support for learning that was experienced by the learner

- The supportive relationships that the learner had which underpinned their quality of learning and learning experience overall

- The kind of formal or informal support mechanisms that learners were offered or took their own initiative to put in place

- The kind of relationships established between the learner and key

  individuals in the learning environment such as teaching staff, guidance

  staff, and indeed the institutional learning environment

- The kind of support relationships from significant others in the background

  of the individual students

If these are the key factors which govern the learning environment then these can

only be investigated through some smaller scale qualitative method.

Cohen et al state:

"...the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the

individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated. .. In

rejecting the viewpoint of the detached, objective observer- a mandatory

feature of traditional research- anti positivists would argue that individuals'

behaviour can only be understood by the researcher sharing their frame of

reference; understanding of individuals' interpretations of the world around

them has to come from the inside, not the outside. Social Science is thus

seen as a subjective rather than objective undertaking, as a means of dealing

with the direct experience of people in specific contexts" (pp 19-20).

4.7   Principles of Research: Core Conditions.

Thus the role of the researcher is to be governed by the principles which Carl Rogers defined as core conditions for counselling. The goal is to see the world as the learner sees the world. It is to occupy the learner's shoes and see through his/her eyes. Rogers called this quality Empathy, and only by being empathic can one create the therapeutic relationship by which counselling occurs. Similarly Roger's views have been imported into the educational field. Clearly, it should be stated that in the quality of learning and teaching terms, that the facilitator or teacher is one who must see his field and area of expertise through the eyes of the student and hence create a therapeutic-learning relationship with the learner in order to support the learning experience of the learner. In terms of the research exercise, the researcher has to learn to view the world through the learner's eyes. Objective reality is an ideal which cannot be reached. But subjective reality is achievable and we learn from comparisons between the subjective reality of the learner, the subjective reality of the educator, and the subjective reality of the learning institution. In this research it is a goal to perceive the effect of vital relationships on the learning experience of the learner and thus the semi-structured interview is engaged in a voyage of discovery to learn about the perceptions of the learner.

In an older work Merton & Kendall (1946), quoted in Cohen et al (2000, p45) state...

> "Social Scientists have come to abandon the spurious choice between qualitative and quantitative data: they are concerned rather with the combination of both which makes use of the most valuable features of each. The problem becomes one of determining at which points they should adopt the one, and which the other, approach".

4.7.1   Principles of Research: Ethics Statement.

In keeping with the comments in Cohen et al, it was necessary to determine an ethical code that would govern the research and in particular the interviewing phase of the research. Based on the ethical code in Cohen et al the following adaptation was adopted as a personal ethical guide for the research.

1. I as researcher revealed my identity and background to those interviewed.

2. The interviewees were given not only my name but were informed that the research was being carried out as part of my doctoral thesis at the University

of Stirling and were provided with an email address for contacting me concerning any matter arising out of the research interview.

3. The purpose and the procedures of the interview were explained at the outset of the interview and the interviewee was informed that they could refuse to answer any question should they feel uncomfortable about it.

4. Consent for the interview was sought through the questionnaire prior to the interview.

5. An assurance of confidentiality was given to the student at the beginning of each interview which assured the interviewee that it would not be possible to identify in any research publication the individual source of any comments offered.

6. Courtesy towards the interviewee and a respect for the interviewees' autonomy and dignity were observed at all times.

4.7.2 Reliability vs Validity:

One key issue examined by Cohen et al was that of validity and or reliability in research. It is axiomatic that we require research to have validity and reliability or it is useless as a piece of research. They comment.....

"...in qualitative data validity might be addressed through the honesty,
depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached,
the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity or the
researcher. In quantitative data validity might be improved through careful
sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatments
of the data. It is impossible for research to be one hundred per cent valid;
that is the optimism of perfection. Hence at best we strive to minimise
invalidity and maximise validity". (op cit p105)

Cohen quotes from Maxwell (1992 p106) arguing that qualitative researchers need
to be cautious not to be working within the agenda of the positivists in arguing for
the need for research to demonstrate concurrent, predictive, convergent, criterion-
related, internal and external validity. He argues for the need to replace positivist
notions of validity in qualitative research with the notion of authenticity. Maxwell
(echoing Mishler –1990) suggests that "understanding" is a better term than validity
in qualitative research.

"We, as researchers, are part of the world that we are researching, and we
cannot be completely objective about that, hence other people's perceptions
are equally as valid as our own, and the task of research is to uncover
these".

One method of approaching the question of validity in qualitative research is by use of triangulation. Cohen et al list several means of triangulation including: time triangulation, space triangulation, combined levels of triangulation, theoretical triangulation, investigator triangulation, methodological triangulation. In this research a number of these have been applied. The work is based on an ongoing research throughout the period since 1994 and hence has an element of time triangulation inherent within it. The research planning incorporates the intention to carry out triangulation within the institutions covered by interviewing a number of students chosen at random of either gender, different ages, different institutions providing Access courses, and ultimately since different HE institutions were involved to demonstrate whether institutional matters were an inherent factor or not. Teachers from different institutions were also conversed with and opportunity given for them to make comment on the research. The literature search section of this work indicates that a substantial amount of theoretical triangulation was engaged in and in that three institutions were examined using the same methodology in the qualitative phase this would hence employ methodological triangulation.

4.8   Interview Regime.

It was decided to pursue a semi structured interview technique with a number of former Access students currently studying in HE. Two universities and one FE College were chosen and in the first instance it was decided to interview six students from each institution.

Two main instruments were used in the second qualitative phase of the research:

- One page questionnaire

- Semi structured interview.

4.8.1   Questionnaire Design.

The questionnaire used was a very simple one-page questionnaire whose chief purpose was to identify students who would consent to be involved in interview. It was hence not a very significant part of the process but is mentioned here in the interest of completeness.

Cohen et al make it clear that in planning a questionnaire you have to consider in terms of a simple logical flow chart what information is sought, what the purpose of the questionnaire was. In this case the purpose was a very simple one. The

questionnaire was simply to be used to identify those who would consent to take part in the interview process and record some simple means of contact. Hence on examining the questionnaire it is noticeable that it is a one-page document making it very simple to fill in and take the absolute minimum of time and effort to complete. The questionnaire also gave a simple email means of contacting the researcher if corollary questions arose in the mind of the student. No one contacted the researcher and approximately 25% of the questionnaires were returned. This made for a very efficient and effective questionnaire. See the appendices for a copy of the questionnaire.

In keeping with recommendations in Cohen et al, each questionnaire was coded with an unique alphanumeric code which identified the institution and number of the questionnaire within that institution and this was placed in an identically labelled envelope. Each institution then applied an address label to that envelope with the address of former Access students within their institution and inserted a cover letter of their own. A prepaid reply envelope was enclosed with each letter going out. The following numbers of questionnaires were then sent out with the aid of each individual institution.

- Institution 1: a university sent out 120 of the questionnaires.
- Institution 2: a university sent out 100 of the questionnaires.

- Institution 4: a Further Education College distributed 100 of the questionnaires.

- Thus a total of 320 questionnaires were sent out.

4.8.2   Inclusion of Likert Scaling Questions.

Cohen et al also deal with questions which call for the respondent to rate their response according to some scale. This was decided to be included at the end of the semi-structured interview to gauge the effect of relationships from various sources on the learning experience. This was not considered appropriate for the questionnaire for a number of reasons:

- That it would increase the complexity of the questionnaire

- That it would increase the length of the questionnaire

- That this information collected in this way would not give opportunity for free expression by the respondent and perhaps cut down on the reliability and validity of the responses.

4.8.3   Interviews.

It was decided to include these Likert Scaling Questions at the close of the semi-structured interview to allow the possibility of the creation of an affective domain coefficient over the range of the learners engaged in the interview process. Thus the data collected would involve a free discussion, a collection of notable and significant direct quotes from learners about their experiences in the learning domain, and some crude quantitative measure about the perceived strength of the effect of relationships on the learning experience. It will also allow elimination from the range of significant influences on learning any of the postulated significant relationships which turn out to have little or no effect. As Cohen and Manion point out, an approach which consisted solely of open-ended questions would make it difficult for the researcher to make comparisons between respondents as there may be little in common to compare.

Cohen et al deal with the subject of interviews as a research technique. They are to be regarded as a means to enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. As such research interviews are a rich source of data drawn directly from the learner perspective.

The research interview may serve three purposes. First it may be used as the principal means of gathering information having direct bearing on the research objectives. As Tuckman describes it,

> "By providing access to what is inside a person's head (it) makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)". (Tuckman 1972 quoted in Cohen et al)

Second, it may be used to test a hypothesis or suggest new ones; or as an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships. And third, the interview may be used in conjunction with other methods in a research undertaking. In this connection, Kerlinger (1970) suggests that it might be used to follow up unexpected results, for example, or to validate other methods, or to go deeper into the motivations or respondents and their reasons for responding as they do (Cohen et al 2000 p 268).

4.8.4   The Therapeutic Interview.

The topic of the qualitative research interview is the living world of the subjects and their relation to it. The interview seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject. The interviewer registers and interprets the meaning of what is said as well as how it is said. The interview is focussed on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured with standardised questions, nor entirely non-directive. However it must be accepted that the interview process itself may affect a change in the perceptions of the interviewee. Having to vocalise one's experiences often leads to new insights and understandings. Indeed this is at the heart of the counselling process as evidenced by Gerard Egan's (1986) three stages of counselling, "Explore, Understand, Act". This suggests that having to vocalise and explain something to the counsellor leads to new insights and is in itself therapeutic. Hence the interview process, no matter how much there is an attempt to make it non-directive may effect changes in perception, belief and emotional response to the learning experience. Rogers (1945) identified a number of qualities in the interviewer which he deemed essential and formed part of his approach to non-directive counselling. Attitudes of acceptance, of being non-judgemental, empathic... qualities which provide a therapeutic environment in which the respondent feels free to express in an unreserved way true feelings and opinions

about their world. This has been referred to as the therapeutic interview and although in this instance these are research interviews it is thought that the effective research interview would be enhanced by being therapeutic in nature. Kvale (1996) comments that a well carried-out research interview can be a rare and enriching experience for the interviewee, who may obtain new insights into his or her life situation. These things are part of the dynamic of interpersonal exchange which makes up the backdrop of the research interview and are to be recognized, and even welcomed rather than seen as something to be avoided at all cost.

Lynda Measor (1985 in Burgess, p57) stated that the quality of the data is dependent on the quality of the relationships you build with the people being interviewed. And this raises questions over the validity of data, especially with those who would approach from a more positivist standpoint. Positivists in earlier works (Goode and Hatt –1952, Moser – 1958 in Burgess 1985a) abound with warnings of over-rapport with interviewees and recommends maintaining a proper distance to avoid bias. Qualitative research has taken a different view. The interview is seen as a socially dynamic interchange between researcher and interviewee. The interview itself is the product of an encounter. The story unfolds as a narrative which is born out of the social exchange which Catani (1981) calls "an intense affective relationship".

Measor said that,

> "the best strategy is to build good relationships in the first place, so people feel free to talk to the interviewer. Sometimes just waiting is the best strategy, people may choose to tell a researcher things, when they feel they know them better". (op cit p 72)

In research where a single interview is anticipated then the quality of the initial relationship established, putting interviewees at their ease, establishing a genuine interest in the responses of the interviewee (what Rogers called congruence where the interviewer is honestly interested in what the respondent has to say and this is communicated to the respondent by verbal and non verbal signals), being truly empathic (making the transference of being able to see the learning process through the learner's eyes), all of these are the crucial issues that create the relationship which will allow the effective research interview.

The need to introduce rather more interviewer control into the non-directive situation led to the development of the focussed interview. The distinctive feature of this type is that it focuses on a respondent's subjective responses to a known situation in which he/she has been involved and which has been analysed by the

interviewer prior to the interview. The researcher is then able to use the data from the interview to substantiate or reject previously formulated hypotheses. In this instance the interviewer can when expedient, play a more active role; he can introduce more explicit verbal cues to the stimulus pattern or even represent it.

In this case the basic tool then becomes not a structured interview programme, but an interview guide which may be utilised in a reflective way, attempting to elicit responses which will give insight into the respondents' views on their learning experience and the effect of relationships upon it. Measor (1985) commented that the central issue in interviewing is probably that of keeping critical alertness about the interview, and also about yourself and your own performance.

In designing the interview guide or schedule it was decided to start with the research variables. The first step in constructing an interview guide is determining and specifying your variables by name (Cohen et al 2000). These variables are what must be measured in some way. The interview guide was written in a flexible way containing a range of ways of asking essentially the same question. The actual wording would depend on the dynamics of that interview and the rapport or relationship established with the interviewee.

The final questions to be addressed in the interview schedule were designed using a Likert scale or index. These were to be used as a means of scoring the positive or negative influences of relationships in the learner's world. This would also identify any relationships whose importance had been misplaced. The final question would ask the learner if any other important factors had been missed or any relationships had been missed. Reference would then be made back to the Learner's World diagram constructed by the interviewee at the beginning of the interview.

4.8.5   Interview Recording:

It was decided that the interviews should be taped on an audio tape only as the presence of video often leads to such a high level of inhibition in the interviewee that it may lead to the quality of the interview itself being compromised. The researcher had the experience of some respondents being unwilling to pursue a video taped interview. However in this case there were no objections raised to the interview being taped to ease the drawing out of responses later for inclusion in research documents.

4.8.6   Analysis of Interviews:

The question of whether to make transcripts was seen to be a relevant matter for close consideration.

It was noted that several writing in the area of research methodology and quoted in Cohen et al (quoting from Scheurich 1995, Mishler 1991 and others) suggested that transcripts are not necessarily as solid as they might be assumed to be as they were in the social setting of the interview. Transcripts are decontextualized records of a social event, abstracted from time and space and from the dynamics of the situation. Thus transcripts do not necessarily tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It was felt that a more reliable record might be a summary and rehearsal of the interview and its conclusions written shortly after the close of the interview. This may take into account not only the words used but also the demeanour of the interviewee, the tone used, whether a speaker was speaking continuously, emphases placed by the speaker, and the non-verbal messages conveyed during the actual interview. If descriptions written as immediately following the interview as possible were to be used as the main method of analysis, reflecting on the experience of the interview as a human transaction then the quasi-quantitative

methodologies of Bliss et al (1983) and others which formed methods of analysis of

transcripts were seen to be less necessary in this instance.

The one page questionnaire was drawn up and each institution agreed to send these

questionnaires out to former Access students within their institution. In the

questionnaire the students were asked if they were prepared to assist this research

by agreeing to an in depth interview. A copy of this one page questionnaire follows

in Appendix One.

Two institutions accepted one hundred of these questionnaires for distribution to

former Access students within their institution. One further university requested one

hundred and twenty.

Return rates were most encouraging at around 25% of questionnaires being returned

and about two thirds of these expressing willingness to participate in interview.

A short series of pilot interviews were then arranged to pilot a semi-structured

interview drawn up for the purpose of investigating the effect of relationships in the

learning environment. A copy of this is recorded as Appendix Two at the end of the

thesis.

4.9   Pilot Interviews.

This was piloted with former Access students currently studying in the third year of a degree programme at a university in the West of Scotland.

Although pilots were useful and determined some interesting quotes from current students about the effect of certain relationships in the learning environment, some possible areas of shortfall were identified in the course of the pilots which suggested the following changes which might be effected:

4.9.1   It was noted that during the collection of demographic details at the beginning of the interview that no information was elicited as to the existence or otherwise of a learning history in the immediate family of the student. It was decided to insert a question as to whether this student was the first person in their family to engage in learning in HE.

4.9.2   Secondly it was decided that in the interest of non-destructive testing, to first elicit responses from the learner as to who might be regarded as significant influences in the learning

process. With this in mind it was decided that each interview should begin with the learner being presented with a blank piece of A3 paper and a sticker to put in the centre of this. The central sticker would be marked "ME" and indicate the learner at the heart of the learning experience. The student was then informed that the blank sheet represented the learning world of the student. The student was then to be offered a number of other blank stickers, which could be placed in the learning environment. Each was to be identified by writing on the sticker. This would identify the person who was seen to be influential, either positive or negative influences were allowed and the scale of the level of influence would be recorded by the proximity to the "ME" sticker in the centre of the learning environment. This would then allow the learner to identify more clearly without influence from the interviewer, which were the defining influences in the learning experience of the learner. The rest of the interview could then be tailored to suit the responses coming from the learner. If influences not anticipated by this researcher were indicated then account could be taken of this

rather than allow simply the postulates of the researcher to define the interview entirely. Hence the refined structure for the interview was as follows:

4.10   Final Form of Interview Guide.

The modified final form of the interview guide is recorded in Appendix three at the end of this work. It embodied the increased level of flexibility in allowing the student to share in the agenda of the interview and included the Learning World Map which contributed to the democracy of the interview process.

A further short series of pilot interviews were arranged using this new structure to test out the effectiveness of this as a research tool. At the end of the pilot stage of the interview process observations were drawn from the interviews carried out at the university known as Institution C in the interview phase of this research.

This was then followed by the interviews at Institutions A (a university in the

Central Belt of Scotland) and Institution D, a further education college in a nearby

town. See chapter eight for the results of this qualitative interview phase.

Chapter 5.

Large Scale Quantitative Research.

Institution A.

The aims of this research were to examine the ideas of progression and

performance. This would involve looking carefully at the performance in terms of

grades achieved in University study. These would be examined in conjunction with

the modes of entry of these students into the university. It was hoped by these

means to establish whether the student entry mode is a factor in determining

performance. Also it was hoped that by examining the incomplete ('X" grades) and

the reasons for leaving to establish whether or not entry mode affects the likelihood that a student will in fact leave university without completing studies.

Because of the large numbers of student records which were recorded on the mainframe computer, it was decided that these could be analysed most readily using the SPSSx computer package.

5.1 Introduction to Examination of the 1992 Cohort and Comparisons with the 1993 and 1994 cohorts.

It should be noted that there were alterations as to coding which took place during the 1993 academic session which had a minor affect on the 1993 entries and a major affect on the 1994 listings. These were caused by the introduction of HESA codes and hence comparison has been achieved only at the cost of a degree of regrouping of HESA entries into the pre-HESA format as much as feasible.

5.2   First Crosstabs Operation: Grade By Entry Qualifications.

This permitted an examination of any trends in grade attained looking at the entry qualifications of the students. The various entry qualification codes have previously

been listed. An examination of the print-outs for the general population of students

brought forth the following results.

General Population.

By general population is meant the entire population of all students who entered in

the 1992 cohort. It was noted that in the general population results there were a

grand total of 12,698 cases examined in the statistical sample. It would be

reasonable to comment that this gives a large sample for statistical purposes which

should result in valid observations of statistical trends. Of these, 1326 (10.4%)

were recorded as A passes, 7667 (60.4%) were recorded as B passes, 3052 (24.0%)

were C passes, 295 (2.3%) were D grades, and 95 (0.7%) were E grades. There

were also a further 262 (2.1%) which were recorded as "X" (or incomplete units).

It is noted in passing that this represents an overall pass rate of 94.8%.

These were the overall total figures but it is appropriate to look for trends across

various modes of entry into the courses. It should be noted that in the population

there were 599 with entry code 25. (i.e. linked Access) This represented 4.7% of

the total population. There were 1399 cases with entry code 26 which was an

amalgam of various non traditional entrants (NTE's) including SCOTVEC and

BTEC. This represented 11.0% of the total population. There were 3,333 with code

30 (i.e. A-levels). This represented 26.2% of the population. There were 879 with

entry code 40 who entered with Highers but not direct from school.(6.9% of total).

580 entered with code 41 (Highers 5th year entry) which represented only 4.6% of

total. The largest group were 4093 who entered on code 42 (SCE Highers 6th year

entry). Indeed this represented 32.2% of all cases. 1145 entered from 6th year with

qualifications gained in 5th year. (Code 43: 9.0% of total number of cases.)   190

cases were in-house Access (Code 51) which represented a tiny 1.5% of all cases.

Code 68 and 69 represented Access- other Scottish FE institutions which were non-

linked. Together they accounted for 126 cases, some 1.0% of the population.

Code 70 (non-Scottish Access) was represented by 182 cases (1.4%). The Open

University (Code 80) represented only 1.4% of cases.

These figures were given to indicate that the sample is very heavily weighted by

two major sources of students, A-levels (26.2%) and SCE Highers (when the

various codes are added together, this equals 52.7%) Hence more than three-

quarters of all cases were accounted for by these two means. Access accounted

collectively for about 7.2% of all cases.

It was instructive to compare the share of the grades attained by each entry mode compared with the share of the total sample represented by each entry mode. Firstly the figures for A grades was processed.

Table 14: 1992 A Grade Performance.

Entry Mode	Share of Population	Share of A's
Access	4.7%	3.2%
NTE	11.0%	10.9%
A-level	26.2%	42.5%
SCE (not direct)	6.9%	6.9%
SCE (5 yr entry)	4.6%	3.1%
SCE (6 yr entry)	32.2%	16.4%
SCE (5 yr qual)	9.0%	9.1%
Access non linked	1.0%	0.5%
OU	1.4|%	4.1%

Table 15: 1993 A Grade Performance.

Entry Mode	Share of Population	Share of A's
Access	6.8%	5.8%
NTE	14.6%	9.6%
A-level	26.7%	46.0%
SCE not direct	7.4%	5.5%
SCE (5 yr entry)	3.3%	3.1%
SCE (6 yr entry)	22.4%	13.0%
SCE (5 yr qual)	9.8%	10.2%
Access non linked	1.1%	1.0%

In preparation of the table of results for the 1994 cohort using HESA based data, it was found that it was no longer possible to differentiate clearly between 40,41,42,43 because the codings would no longer permit it. Thus it was necessary to group all of these and they appear under the HESA codes 32 & 33 which delineate SCE Highers or combinations of such and Certificate of Sixth Year Studies. Codes 44 & 45 represent accredited and unaccredited Access programmes and these were grouped together. (Though in practice it was found that under close scrutiny there were no unaccredited Access programme students present in this cohort.) Further the group represented previously by entrance codes 68 and 69 were no longer differentiable and this is dropped from the table. The Open university students were still identifiable and are now referred to as code 21. The remaining category was listed previously as code 26 and was a catch-all category for a number of students

with SCOTVEC and BTEC qualifications. It was necessary to group together the

HESA categories 37,38, 51, 52, 53, & 54 to represent this group under HESA

arrangements. This led to the following table of results:

Table 16: 1994 A Grade Performance.

Entry Code	Share of Population	Share of A's
Access	6.9%	6.5%
NTE	5.8%	7.5%
A level	23.1%	28.3%
SCE	42.1%	33.0%
OU	1.2%	2.1%

Figure 9:   1992 Share of Population and Share of A Passes By
Entry Code:
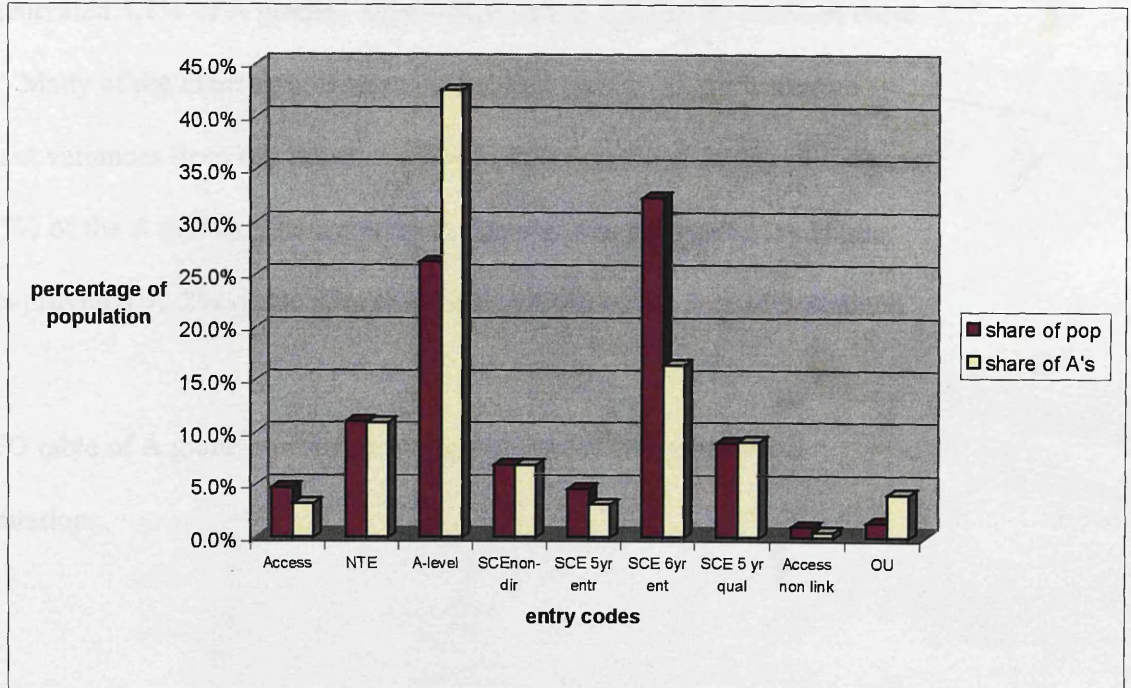
In the above chart the red bar represents the share of the population of each entry

code and the yellow bar represents the share of A passes achieved in university unit

study.

It may be expected that if any particular entry mode supplied 10% of the cases, then

if all other things are equal, they should supply 10% of the A grades, etc. If there

was a noticeable deviation from this then it was suggestive of a trend which may be

considered significant.

It was noted for example that linked Access programmes provided 4.7% of cases and it generated 3.2% of A grades. Hence there was a near parity between these figures. Many of the other figures were indeed near parity. There were two significant variances from this norm. A-level students provided 26.2% of the cases but 42.5% of the A grades. The converse to this was that 6th year entry Higher students provided 32.2% of the sample but only 16.4% of the A grades attained.

The 1993 table of A grade performances yielded the following graphical representation:

**Figure 10:1993 Share of Population and Share of A Passes By Entry
Code:**
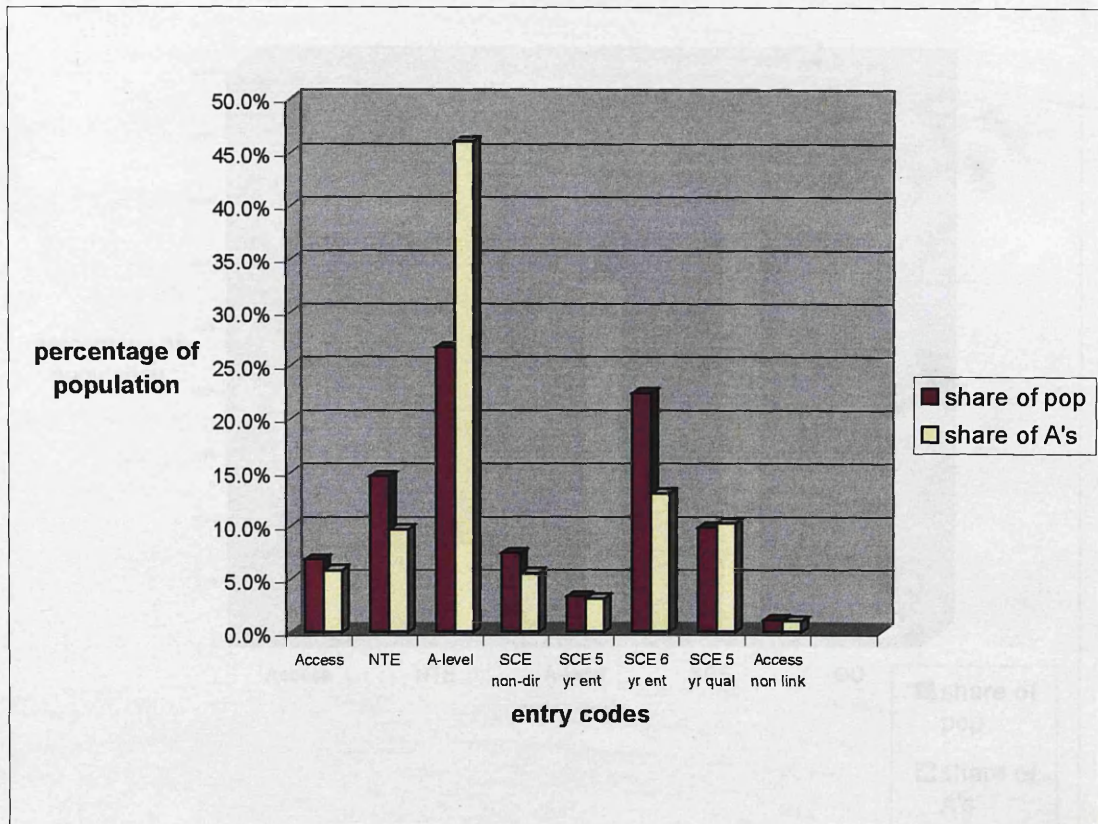
Figure 11:   1994 Share of Population and Share of A Passes By Entry Code:
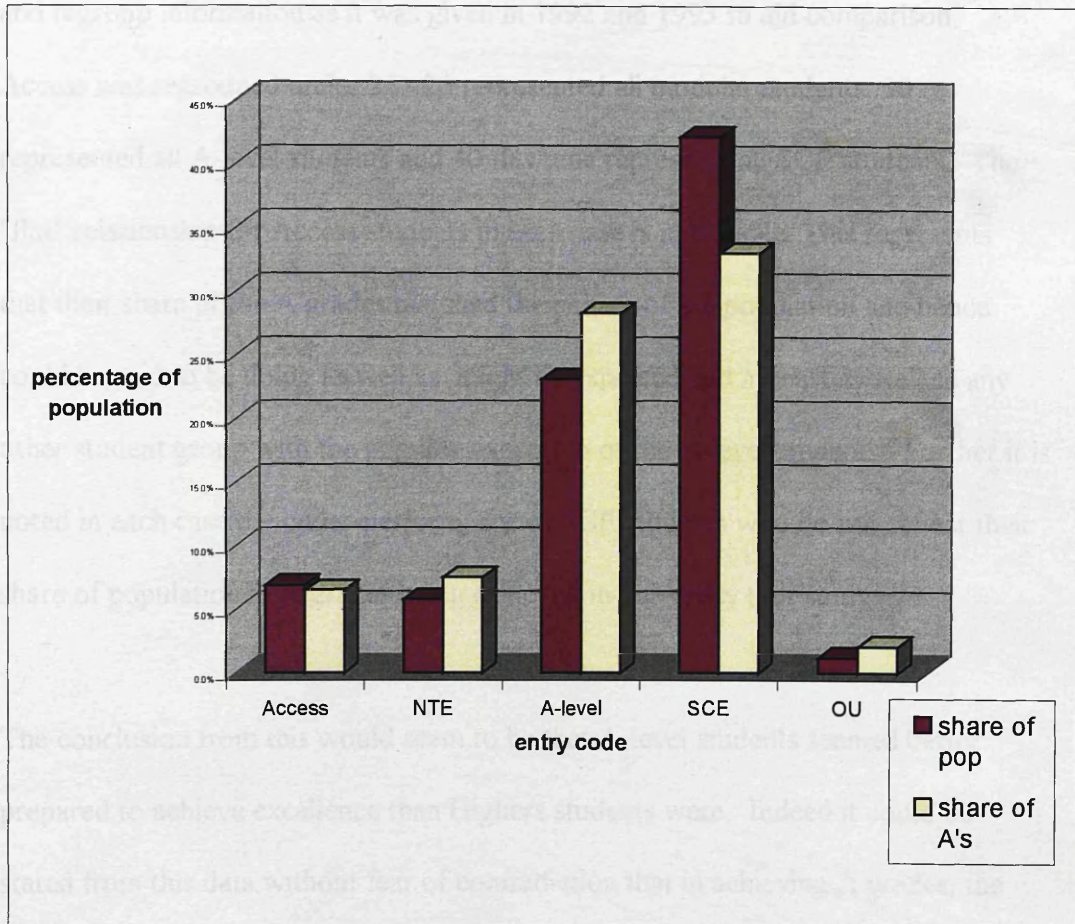
Between 1993 and 1994 results there was a change made to how statistical

information was gathered by HEIs. This began to be gathered in a homogenous

way and turned into the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). This meant

for the majority of institutions that the level of data gathered was increased.

However for Institution A it meant a diminution in the quality and extensiveness of

data previously available. In the interests of of homgeneity, it was decided to gather

and regroup information as it was given in 1992 and 1993 to aid comparison.

Access was regrouped under 25. 26 represented all modular students. 30

represented all A-level students and 40 this time represents all SCE students. The

"flat" relationship for Access students in each case is noticeable. This represents

that their share of the A grades matched their share of the population and hence

could be said to be doing as well as might be expected and at least as well as any

other student group with the possible exception of the A-level students. Further it is

noted in each case the under-performance of SCE students who do not reflect their

share of population in A grades being achieved in university unit study.

The conclusion from this would seem to be that A-level students seemed better

prepared to achieve excellence than Highers students were. Indeed it could be

stated from this data without fear of contradiction that in achieving A grades, the

performance of Scottish Highers students was lower than expected and that A-levels

students out-performed expectations.

It is interesting now to examine **B-grade performances** in a similar way.

Table 17: 1992 B Grade Performance.

Entry Code	Share of Population	Share of B's
Access	4.7%	4.0%
NTE	11.0%	10.7%
A-level	26.2%	28.3%
SCE not direct	6.9%	7.3%
SCE (5 yr entry)	4.6%	4.6%
SCE (6 yr entry)	32.2%	30.5%
SCE (5 yr qual)	9.0%	9.1%
Access (non link)	1.0%	1.0%
OU	1.4%	1.2%

Table 18: 1993 B Grade Performance.

Entry Code	Share of Population	Share of B's
Access	6.8%	6.0%
NTE	14.6%	14.5%
A-level	26.7%	28.9%
SCE not direct	7.4%	7.5%
SCE (5 yr entry)	3.3%	3.2%
SCE (6 yr entry)	22.4%	21.6%
SCE (5 yr qual)	9.8%	10.0%
Access non link	1.1%	1.0%
OU	0.9%	0.9%

Table 19: 1994 B Grade Performance.

HESA entry code	Share of Population	Share of B's
Access	6.9%	5.0%
NTE	5.8%	4.9%
A-level	23.1%	25.1%
SCE	42.1%	44.0%
OU	1.2%	1.0%

The above groupings and simplifications are the same as those computed previously

under the analysis for A grades.

Again the data has to be examined for any anomalous results. This means that if

there is any major divergence between the share of population and the share of all B

grades gained in units attempted by the various populations. The easiest way to

examine this is graphically.

Figure 12: 1992 Share of B Passes Compared with Share of
Population:
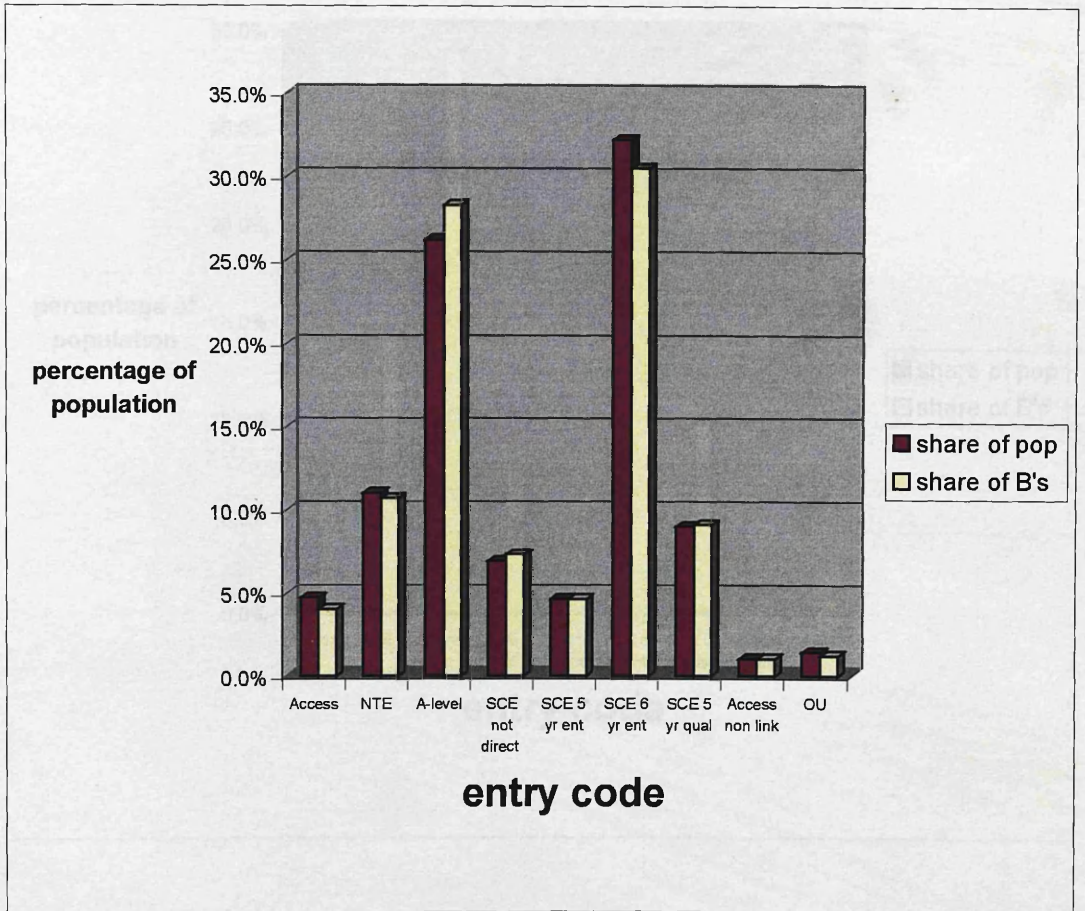
Figure 13: 1993 Share of B Passes Compared with Share of
Population:

Figure 14: 1994 Share of B Passes Compared with Share of
Population:
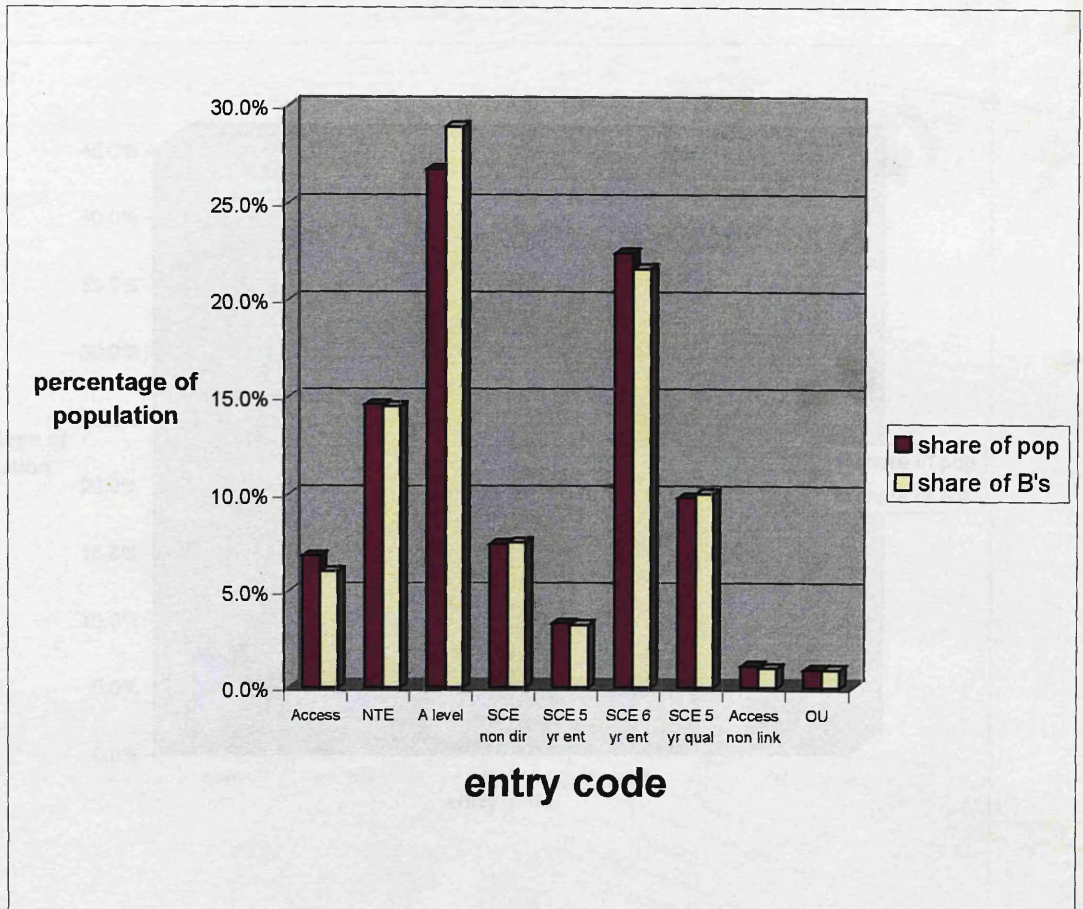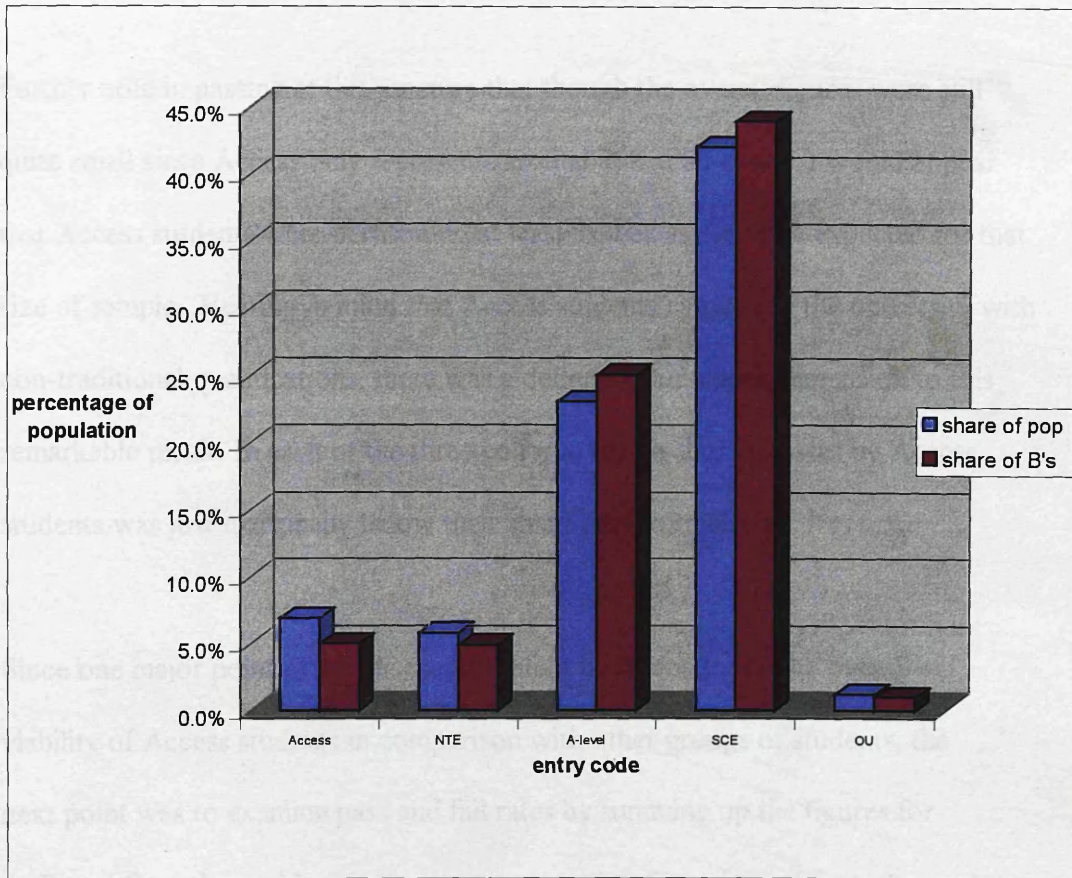
It was now seen that the situation had returned to that which might be predicted. As

far as B grades were concerned all entry modes performed more or less as predicted

by their share of the population. The chief feature of all three graphs representing

the three cohorts is their "flat" appearance. That is, when we compare the share of

population bar with the share of B-passes bar they are very similar or close to flat or even. There were no notable anomalies.

Further note in passing at this juncture that though the overall figures were still quite small since Access only represents around 7% of all cases, it would appear that Access students were performing at least as well as could be expected for that size of sample. Bearing in mind that Access students came in to the university with non-traditional qualifications, there was a definite value-added dimension to this remarkable result. In each of the three cohorts, the level of B passes by Access students was just marginally below their share of the population.

Since one major point of our discussion might be to determine the overall viability of Access students in comparison with other groups of students, the next point was to examine pass and fail rates by summing up the figures for A, B and C grades and looking at progression rates from the various entry modes.

Table 20: 1992 Pass and Fail by Entry Mode.

Entry Mode	Share of Population	Share of Passes
Access	**4.7%**	**4.5%**
NTE	**11.0%**	**10.9%**
A-level	**26.2%**	**26.8%**
SCE non direct	**6.9%**	**6.8%**
SCE (5 yr entry)	**4.6%**	**4.6%**
SCE (6 yr entry)	**32.2%**	**32.1%**
SCE (5 yr qual)	**9.0%**	**9.1%**
Access non link	**1.0%**	**1.0%**
OU	**1.4%**	**1.4%**

Table 21: 1993 Pass and Fail by Entry Mode.

Entry Mode	**Share of Population**	**Share of Passes**
Access	6.8%	6.3%
NTE	14.6%	14.3%
A level	26.7%	27.5%
SCE non direct	7.4%	7.2%
SCE (5 yr entry)	3.3%	3.4%
SCE (6 yr entry)	22.4%	22.4%
SCE (5 yr qual)	9.8%	10.0%
Access non link	1.1%	1.0%
OU	0.9%	1.0%

Table 22: 1994 Pass and Fail by Entry Mode.

HESA entry code	Share of Population	Share of Passes
Access	6.9%	6.3%
NTE	5.8%	5.4%
A level	23.1%	23.9%
SCE	42.2%	41.8%
OU	1.2%	1.2%

**Figure 15: 1992 Share of Population Compared with Share of
Passes by Entry Mode:**

235
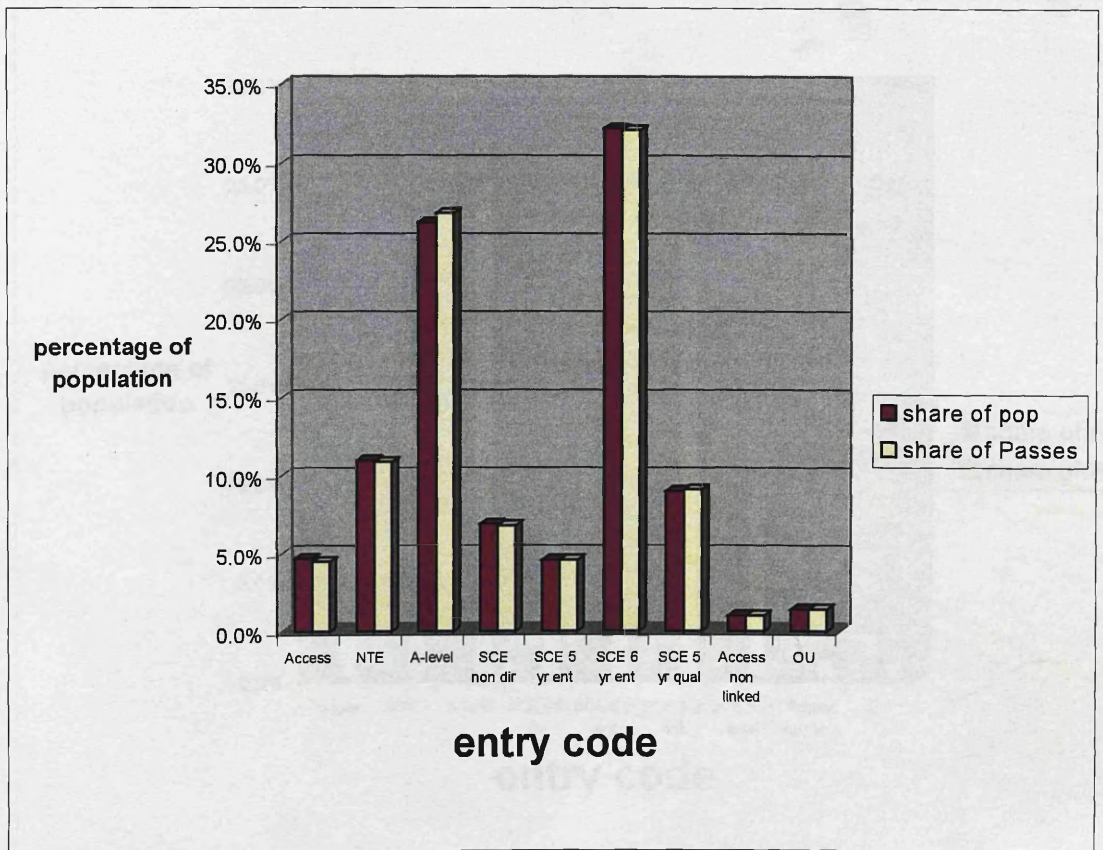
Again above we note the very "flat" profiles. As far as passing university units of study were concerned in the 1992 cohort each sub group within the population performed as well as any other. If they had 10% of the overall student population they also attained 10% of the passes.

Figure 16: 1993 Share of Population Compared with Share of Passes by Entry Mode:
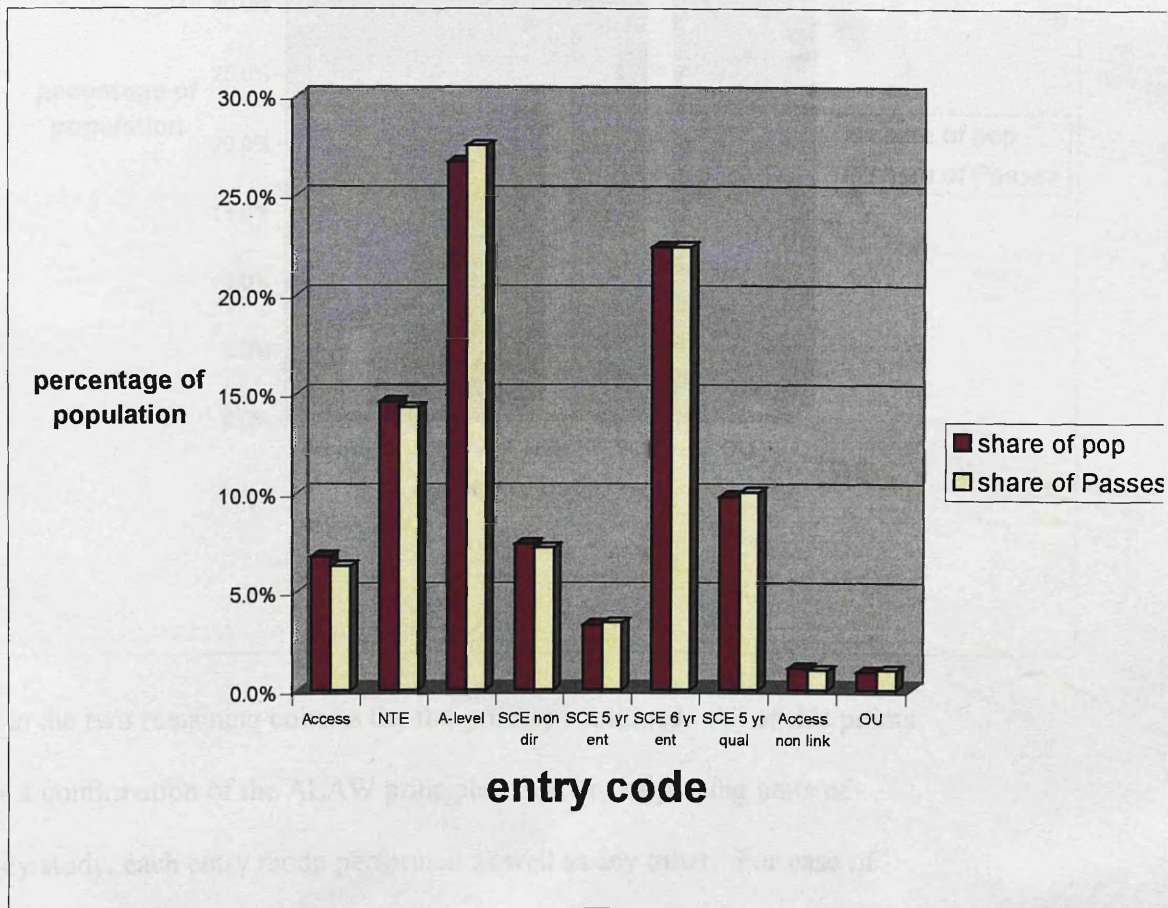
Figure 17: 1994 Share of Population Compared with Share of Passes by
Entry Mode:
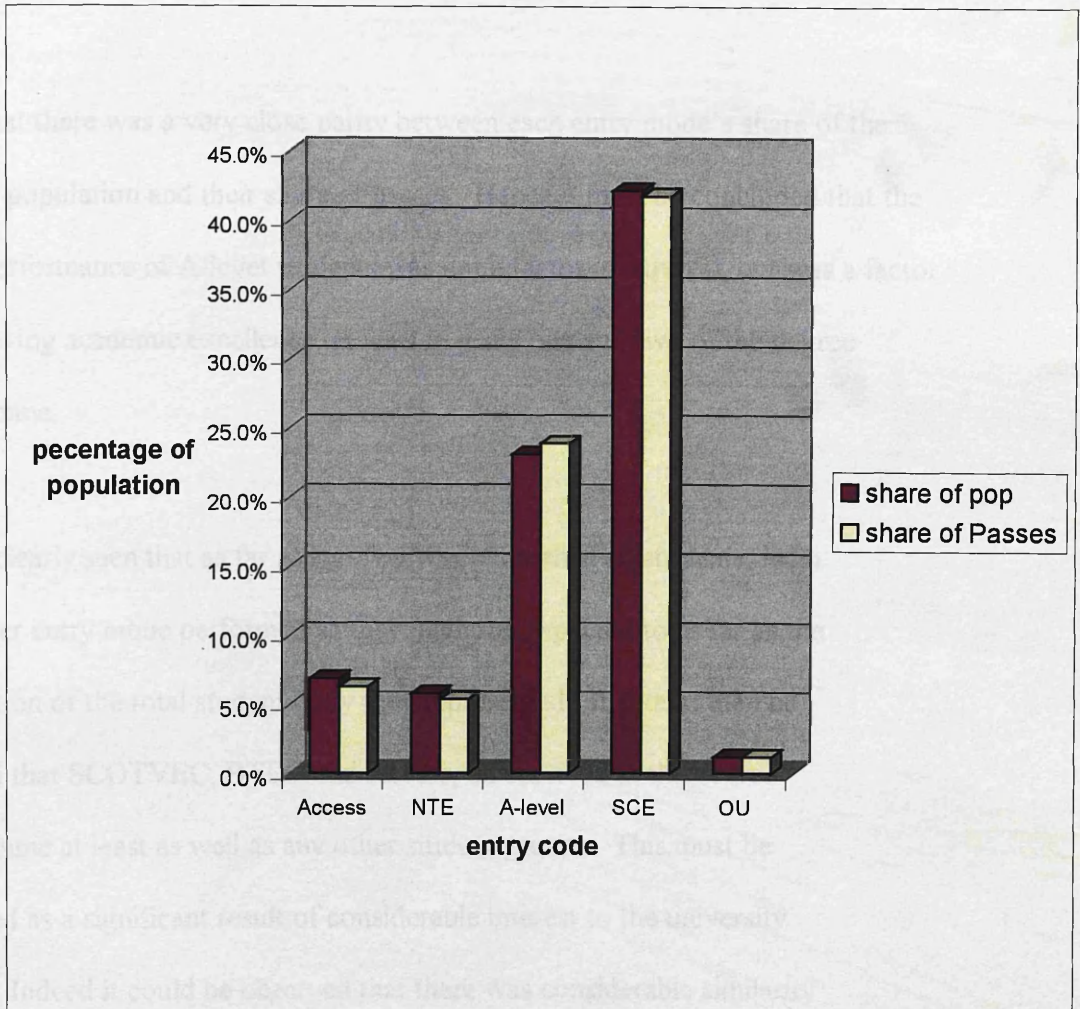
Clearly in the two remaining cohorts the flat profiles continued. All of this points

towards a confirmation of the ALAW principle. In terms of passing units of

university study, each entry mode performed as well as any other. For ease of

comparison, the HESA codes have been converted into their University A pre-HESA equivalents in order that all three graphs can be looked at together.

Note that there was a very close parity between each entry mode's share of the general population and their share of passes. Hence it must be concluded that the extra performance of A-level students was not a factor in survival, but was a factor in achieving academic excellence, at least in years one and two of the degree programme.

It was clearly seen that as far as survival was concerned all students, from whatever entry mode performed as they might be expected to as far as the proportion of the total student body they represented. It should then be realised that SCOTVEC, BTEC and Access, all survived in the degree programme at least as well as any other student groups. This must be regarded as a significant result of considerable interest to the university sector. Indeed it could be observed that there was considerable similarity between the performance and survival profiles of Access and SCE students. A-level students achieved more A grades but even they did not survive university study any more than Access.

5.3   Gender Issues.

A further crosstabs operation using SPSSx permitted an examination of the grade profiles by gender. It was found that in the 1992 cohort there were a total of 14,521 cases that could be examined where the gender of the candidate had been registered. (There were 95 cases where no gender was recorded.) It was found that the student results suggested that 54.8% of the population were female and 45.2% were male. On examination it was found that the grade profile of males and females was remarkably similar. The results may be summarised by the following table:

Table 23: 1992 Performance by gender.

Gender	A	B	C	Overall Pass
Male	10.3%	61.4%	24.0%	95.7%
Female	11.3%	59.6%	22.7%	93.6%

Figure 18: 1992 Performance by Gender.
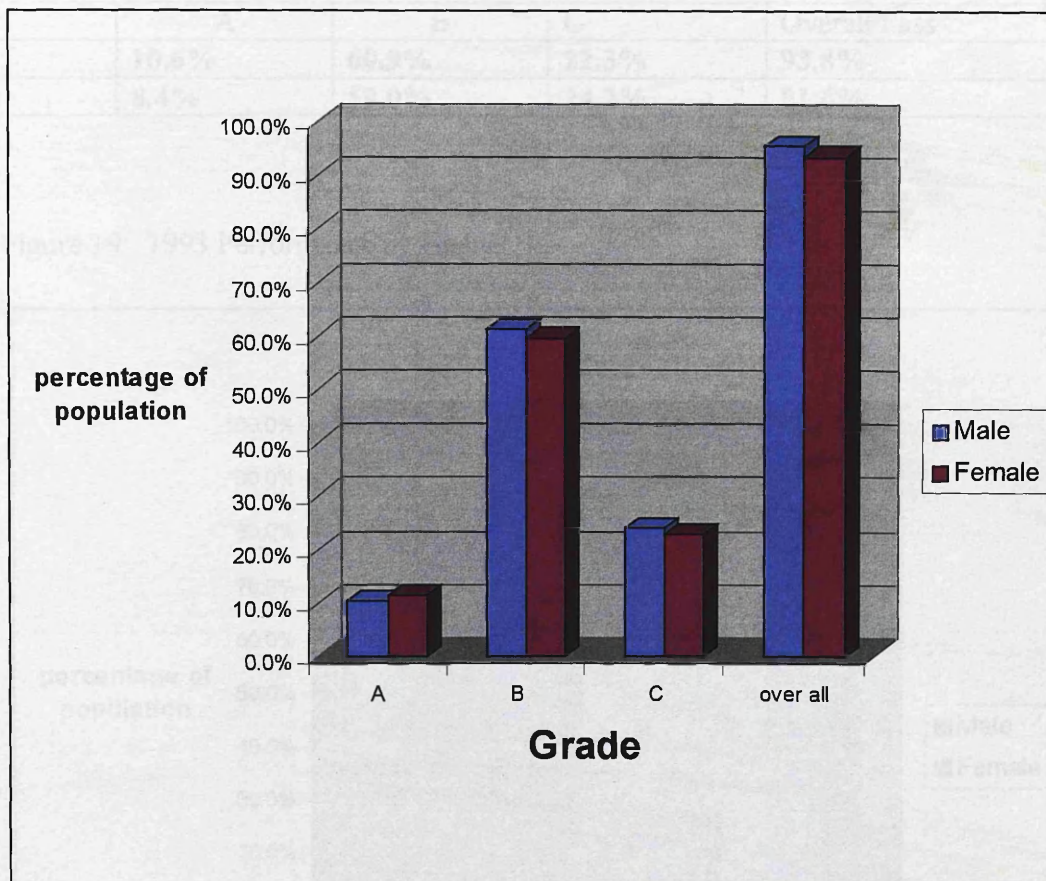
Table 24: 1993 Performance by Gender.

Gender	A	B	C	Overall Pass
Male	10.6%	60.9%	22.3%	93.8%
Female	8.4%	59.0%	24.2%	91.6%

Figure 19: 1993 Performance by Gender.
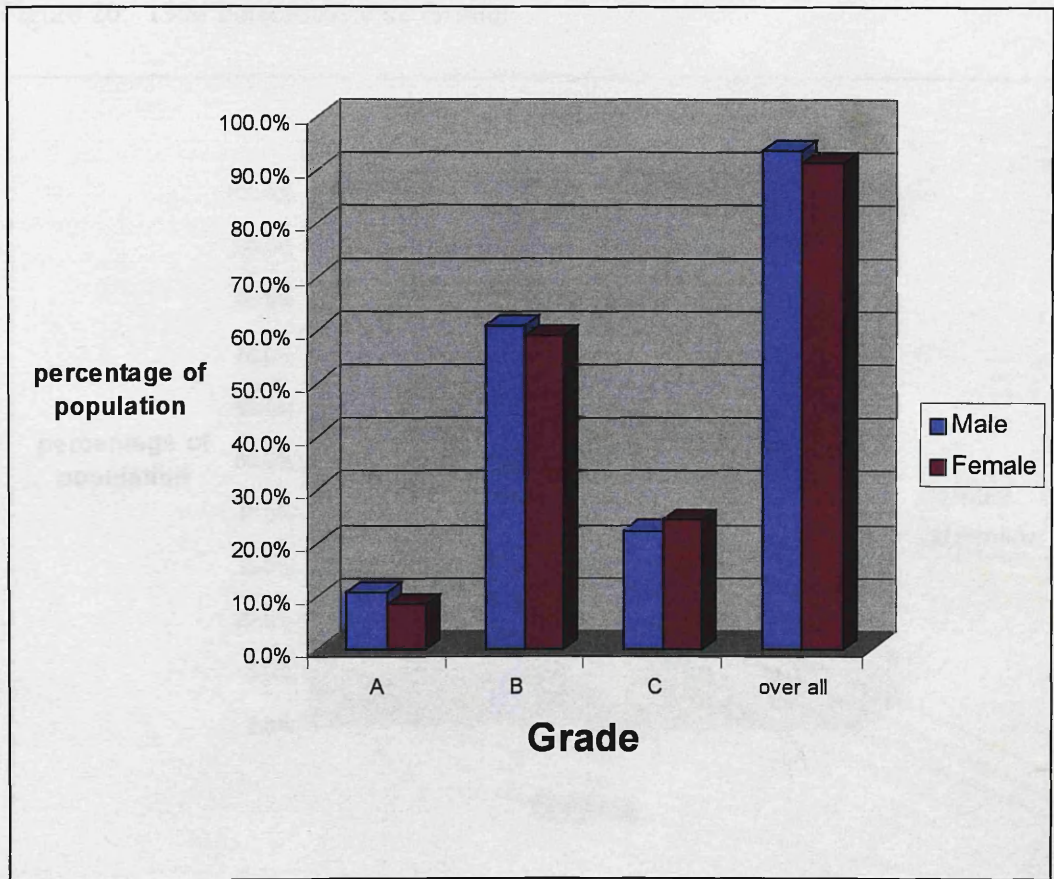
Table 25: 1994 Performance by Gender.

Gender	A	B	C	Overall Pass
Male	8.6%	63.5%	22.3%	93.3%
Female	9.8%	61.0%	19.4%	90.7%

Figure 20: 1994 Performance by Gender.
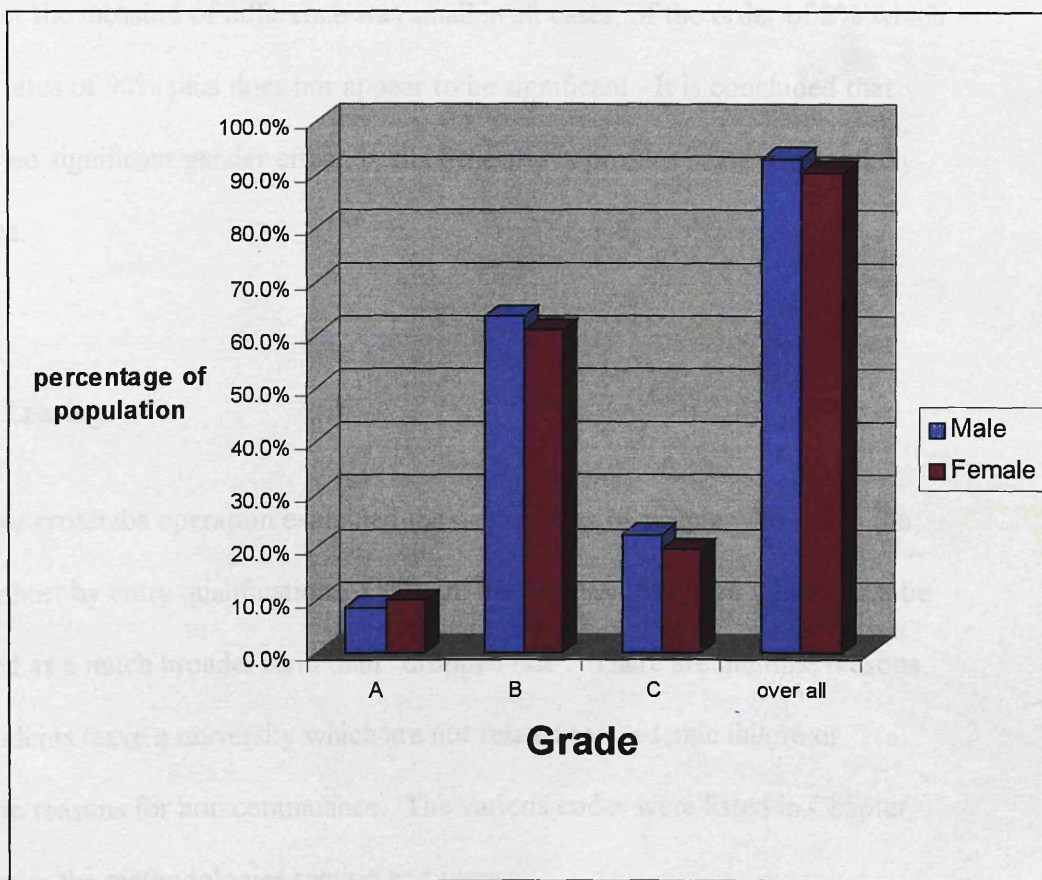
When the performance by gender was examined, in achieving A grades it was
found that in the first cohort the performance of the males outstripped the females
by a very small marginal amount. This was however reversed in the middle cohort
and reversed again in the final cohort examined. The overall shape of the grade
profile is substantially the same for both males and females. The percentage of
females passing was marginally higher than that for males in all three cohorts.
However the measure of difference was small in all cases, of the order of 2% which
in pass rates of 90% plus does not appear to be significant. It is concluded that
there is no significant gender effect, both of the above profiles being substantially
the same.

5.4   Leaving.

A further crosstabs operation examined the percentages of people who left in the
1992 cohort by entry qualification. The term leaving has been used which must be
regarded as a much broader term than "dropped out". There are multiple reasons
why students leave a university which are not related to academic failure or
domestic reasons for non continuance. The various codes were listed in Chapter
Four under the methodologies section and were:

10	successful completion of course.
20	academic failure.
40	health reasons.
50	death.
60	other reasons prior to subdivision of this category.
61	other: deemed to have withdrawn.
62	other: lack of academic progress.
63	other: financial reasons.
64	other: health implications.
66	other: reasons general or unspecified.
67	other: domestic reasons.
68	other: transfer to educational establishment (not UK university)
69	other: taking up employment.
70	seconded to another university.
80	transferred to another university.
90	returning to own university.

At least six of these must be considered as positive outcomes such as switching to other universities, taking up employment, or successfully completing the course.

A total of 2151 cases were examined. It is interesting to note the percentages of that total which come from each of the prominent entry qualification groupings. Again the method of analysis will be to examine the percentage of leavers for each entry group and compare this with the percentage of the whole population who come from that entry qualification group. The following table summarises the findings:-

Table 26: 1992 Leavers by Entry Qualification:

Entry Mode	%age population	%age leavers
Access	4.7%	7.5%
NTE	11.0%	24.9%
A-level	26.2%	12.6%
SCE non direct	6.9%	9.4%
SCE (5 yr entry)	4.6%	3.1%
SCE (6 yr entry)	32.2%	30.5%
SCE (5 yr qual)	9.0%	7.6%
In House Access	1.5%	2.0%
Access non link	0.8%	0.8%
Access non Scottish	1.4%	1.2%
OU	1.4%	0.5%

Figure 21: 1992 Comparison of the Share of Population with the Share of
Leavers:
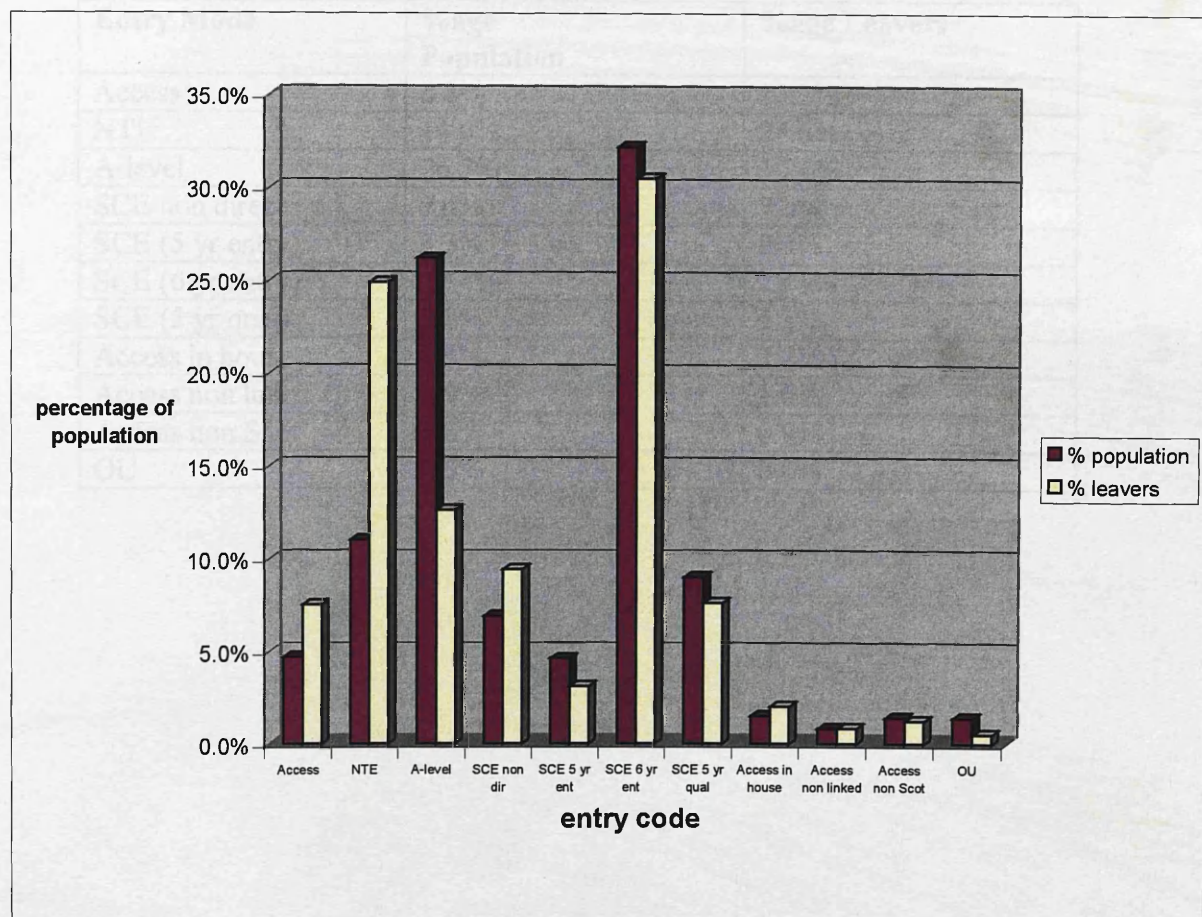
The red bar represents the share of percentage population from each entry

qualification group and the green bar represents the percentage share of those who

left the university from that entry qualification grouping.

Table 27: 1993 Leavers by Entry Qualification:

Entry Mode	%age Population	%age Leavers
Access	6.8%	13.3%
NTE	14.6%	27.6%
A-level	26.7%	13.4%
SCE non direct	7.4%	7.0%
SCE (5 yr entry)	3.3%	4.3%
SCE (6 yr entry)	22.4%	23.1%
SCE (5 yr qual)	9.8%	5.1%
Access in house	5.5%	3.75%
Access non link	0.9%	1.6%
Access non Scot	1.6%	0.9%
OU	0.9%	0.0%

Figure 22: 1993 Comparison of the Share of Population with the Share of Leavers:
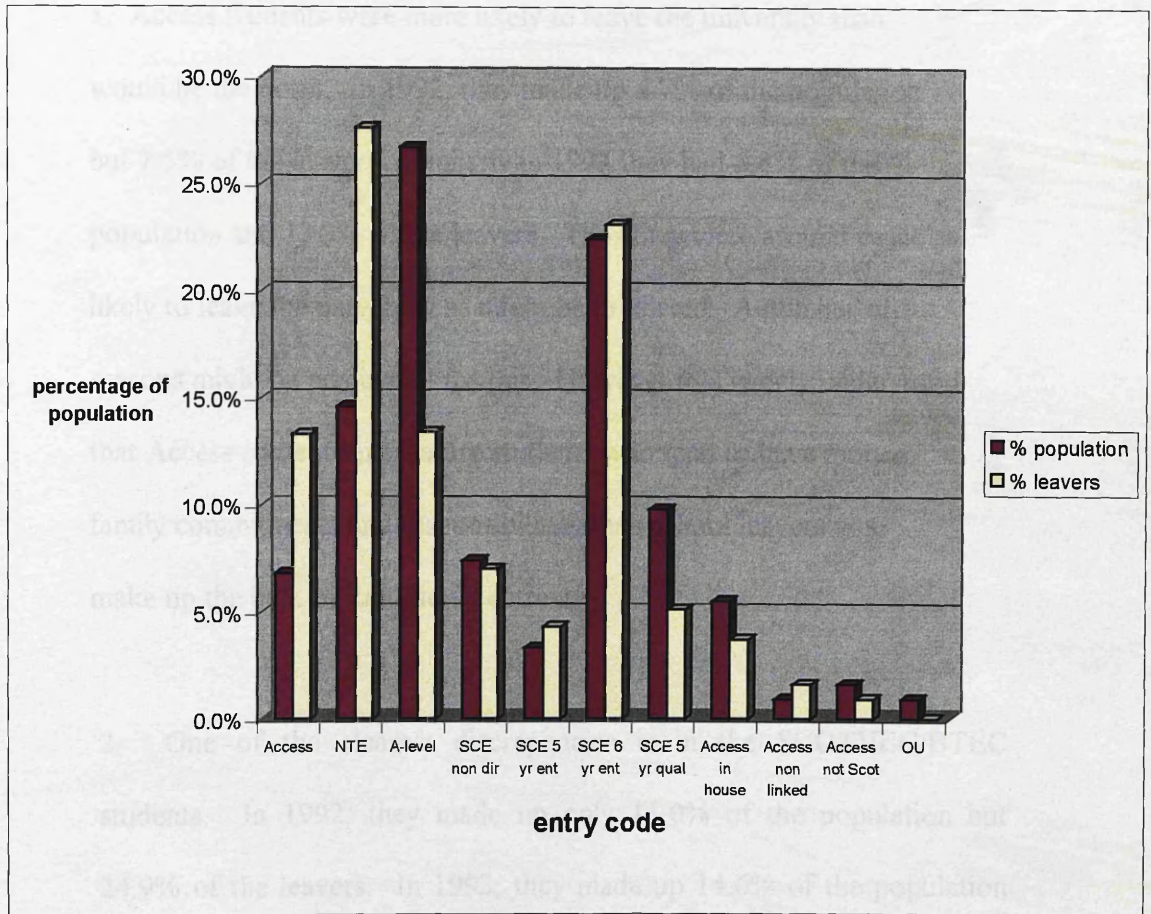
The information on the 1994 cohort would not permit an analysis of those leaving

the university.

The following trends are evident:-

1. Access students were more likely to leave the university than
would be the norm. In 1992, they made up 4.7% of the population
but 7.5% of the leavers. Similarly in 1993 they had 6.8% of the
population and 13.3% of the leavers. Thus they were around twice as
likely to leave the university as might be predicted. A number of
reasons might be postulated for this. However it is widely understood
that Access students are mature students who tend to have more
family commitments and responsibilities than school leavers who
make up the bulk of traditional entrants.

2. One of the clearest discrepancies is in the SCOTVEC/BTEC
students. In 1992, they made up only 11.0% of the population but
24.9% of the leavers. In 1993, they made up 14.6% of the population
but 27.6% of the leavers. They were more than twice as likely to leave
as other members of the student body.

3. Another clear result is that concerning A-level entrants. In 1992,
they made up 26.2% of the population but only 12.6% of the leavers.
Similarly in 1993, they made up 26.7% of the population but only

13.4% of the leavers. It might be said that they are only half as likely to leave as other students. Again it might be postulated that their greater preparedness with reference to subject matter may make them significantly less likely to encounter difficulties with the curriculum or other academic difficulties.

4. Groups 40-43 made up those students entering university on the basis of SCE Highers. Of these students only those with entry qualification 40 (i.e. those who did not come direct from school) suffered a higher drop out rate in 1992 than might be predicted, and this was reversed with the 1993 cohort. All of the other SCE entrants had drop out percentages a little less than their percentages in the general population in 1992. In 1993, the picture was not much different with the most marked drop being with the group 43 entrants. Those were students who entered after having a sixth year in school though their entry was based on qualifications achieved in fifth year. Those students who entered with Highers but not direct from school had a drop out rate one and a half times their general population percentage in 1992. It may be that these students lacked current experience of study skills which affected their readiness to pursue

degree study. However since the effect disappeared with the 1993

cohort it would seem fruitless to speculate on an effect in one cohort

only.

5. Other minor groups suffered a drop out percentage rate approximately

equal to their share of the general population.

5.5   The Performance of Students by APOINT Scores.

Another crosstabs operation examined the performance of A-level students

by referencing the performance by the A-POINT score they entered the

university with. In 1992, there were 3252 cases which dealt with students

ranging in A-POINT score from 8 up to 30. The modal A-POINT score was

20 which had 648 cases.

The overall performance profile for A-level students was as follows:

Table 28: 1992 A-level Students Performance.

A	B	C	D	E	X
16.7%	65.2%	14.9%	1.3%	0.5%	1.4%

Figure 23: 1992 A-level Students Performance.
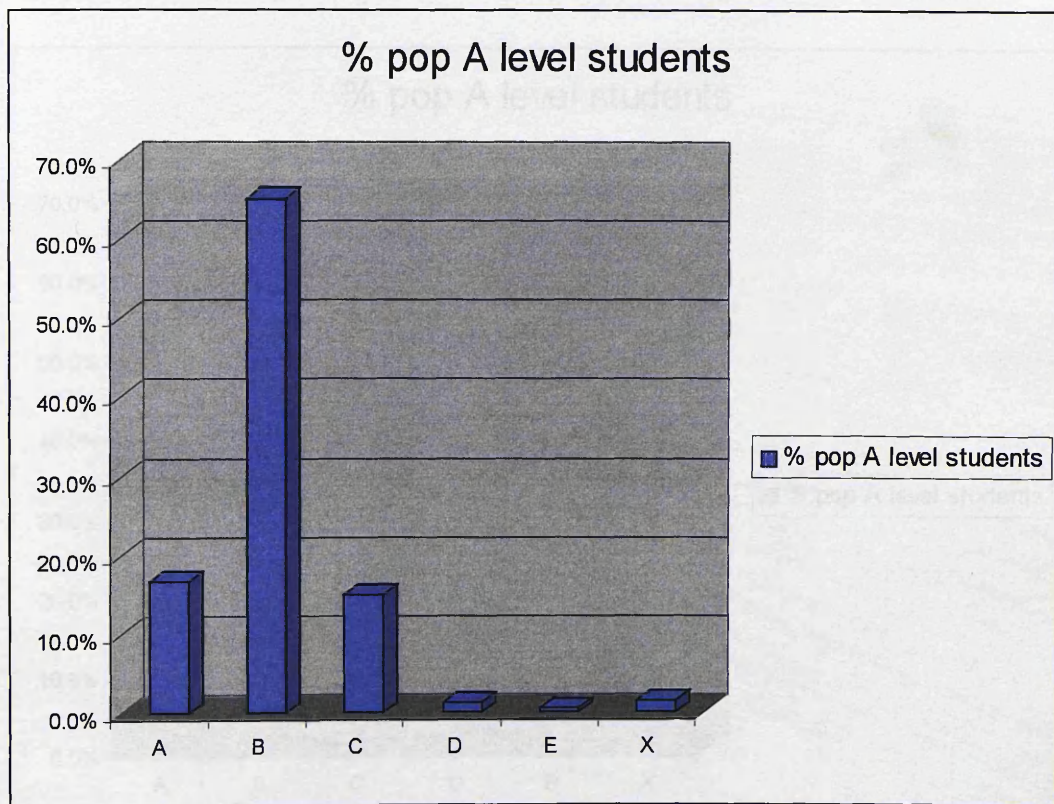
Table 29: 1993 A-level Students Performance.

A	B	C	D	E	X
14.6%	65.5%	16.0%	1.1%	0.3%	1.5%

Figure 24: 1993   A-level Students Performance.
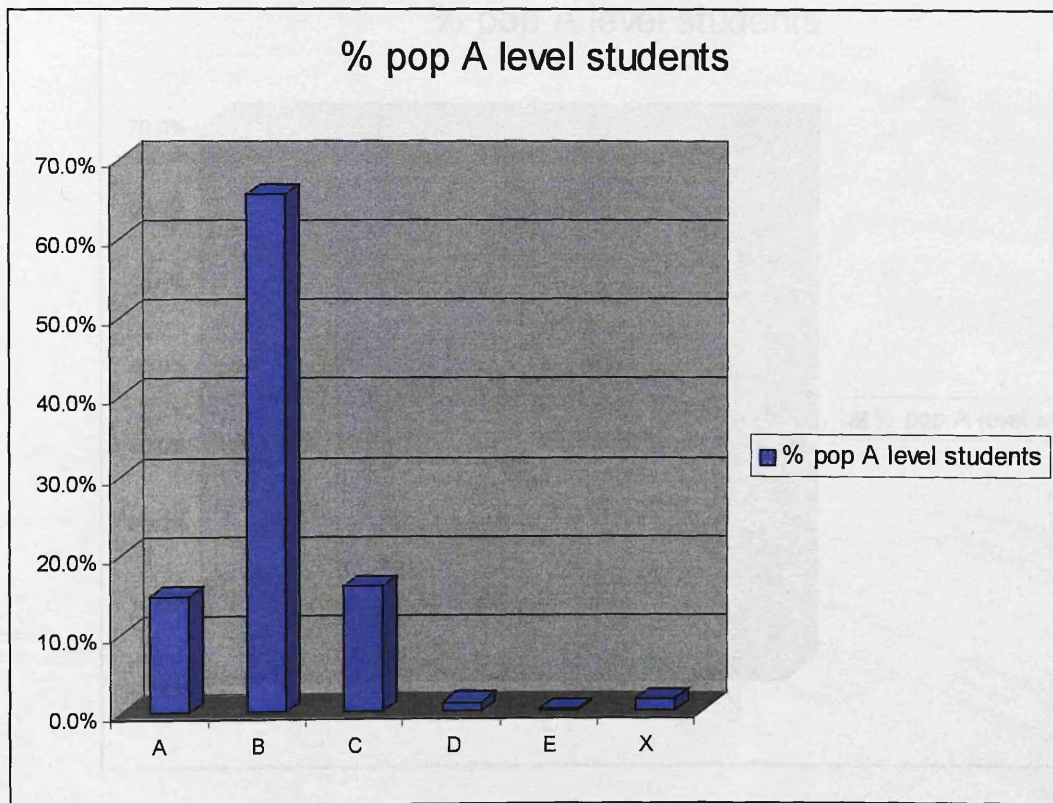
Table 30: 1994 A-level Students Performance.

A	B	C	D	E	X
10.4%	69.2%	15.0%	1.1%	0.4%	1.7%

Figure 25: 1994 A-level Students Performance.
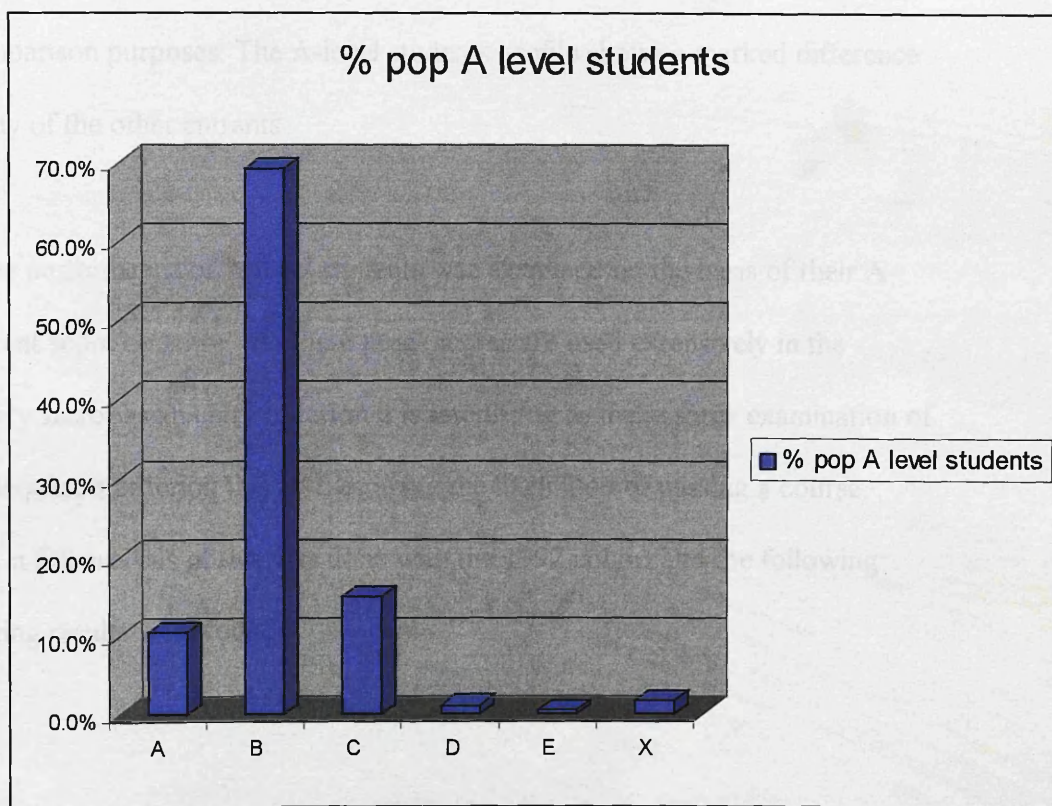
There was a very high success rate amongst these students with only 3.2% failing to

achieve a pass in 1992, 2.9% in 1993 and 3.2% in 1994. It is noted that the

percentage achieving A grades fell throughout the three year period beginning with

16.7% in 1992, to 14.6% in 1993 and ending with only 10.4% in 1994. However

the total percentage for 1994 does not add up to 100% and this is accounted for by

missing values in the computer record. Hence the effect may not be as pronounced

as first impressions might suggest.

Later profiles for A-level, SCE Highers, and Access students shall be constructed

for comparison purposes. The A-level students profile shows a marked difference

from any of the other entrants.

Next the performance of A-level students was examined on the basis of their A-

level point score on entry. As these point scores are used extensively in the

university sector as an entry criterion it is interesting to make some examination of

how adequate a criterion this is to estimate the likelihood of passing a course.

Initially a full analysis of this was done with the 1992 cohort and the following

interesting results were found.

Table 31: 1992 A-level students Performance (Percentages) by A-POINT score.

A Pt	A	B	C	D	E	X
8	18.2	63.6	18.2			
11	16.7	33.3	50.0			
12	5.8	65.4	25.0	1.9	1.9	
14	11.8	58.8	22.5	3.4	0.5	2.9
16	10.7	63.1	19.8	2.8	2.0	1.6
18	12.0	64.1	20.3	1.7	0.4	1.4
20	12.8	66.2	17.4	1.7	0.2	1.7
21	27.3	72.7				
22	20.4	63.9	14.2	0.9		0.7
24	15.5	72.9	10.6	0.2		0.8
26	21.6	67.1	7.3	0.9	0.9	2.1
28	28.8	63.8	3.1		1.3	3.1
30	55.6	42.2	2.2			

There is an overall tendency for those with the highest A-POINT scores to achieve

more A grades than those with lower scores. However the students with the lowest

of all scores nevertheless did extremely well. It should however be pointed out that

some of these categories consisted of very small levels of occupancy. In particular

the A-POINT scores of 8 (11 cases), 11 (12 cases), 21 (11 cases).

It should be noted that the above data does not provide a steady sliding scale from 8

points up to 30 points with the percentage of A grades achieved increasing steadily.

There are anomalies. It might be said that in general those with higher scores

tended to perform better than those with much lower scales. However those with

point score 22 actually outperformed those with point score 24. Hence, as a means

of prediction, it is clearly not an exact science.

It is desirable to examine the likelihood of these students passing their university

unit (regardless of grade of pass) to see if the A-POINT score has any bearing as a

predictor of progression if not performance. It might be predicted in view of

entrance arrangements that one ought to see a steady improvement in the overall

pass rates as the A-point score on entry is increased. An analysis was conducted

over all three cohorts and all of the information included in one table for illustration

purposes.

Table 32: A-level students passing over the three cohorts with reference to A-POINT score.

APOINT	1992 % pass	1993 % pass	1994 % pass
8	100	-	-
10	100	-	93.3
12	96.2	75.0	90.8
14	93.1	97.1	96.3
16	93.6	92.9	88.9
18	96.4	95.1	95.3
20	96.4	95.4	95.9
22	98.5	97.1	96.0
24	99.0	96.3	98.6
26	96.0	96.3	92.9
28	95.7	99.1	96.9
30	100	98.3	94.9

Figure 26: : A-level students passing over the three cohorts with reference to A-POINT score.
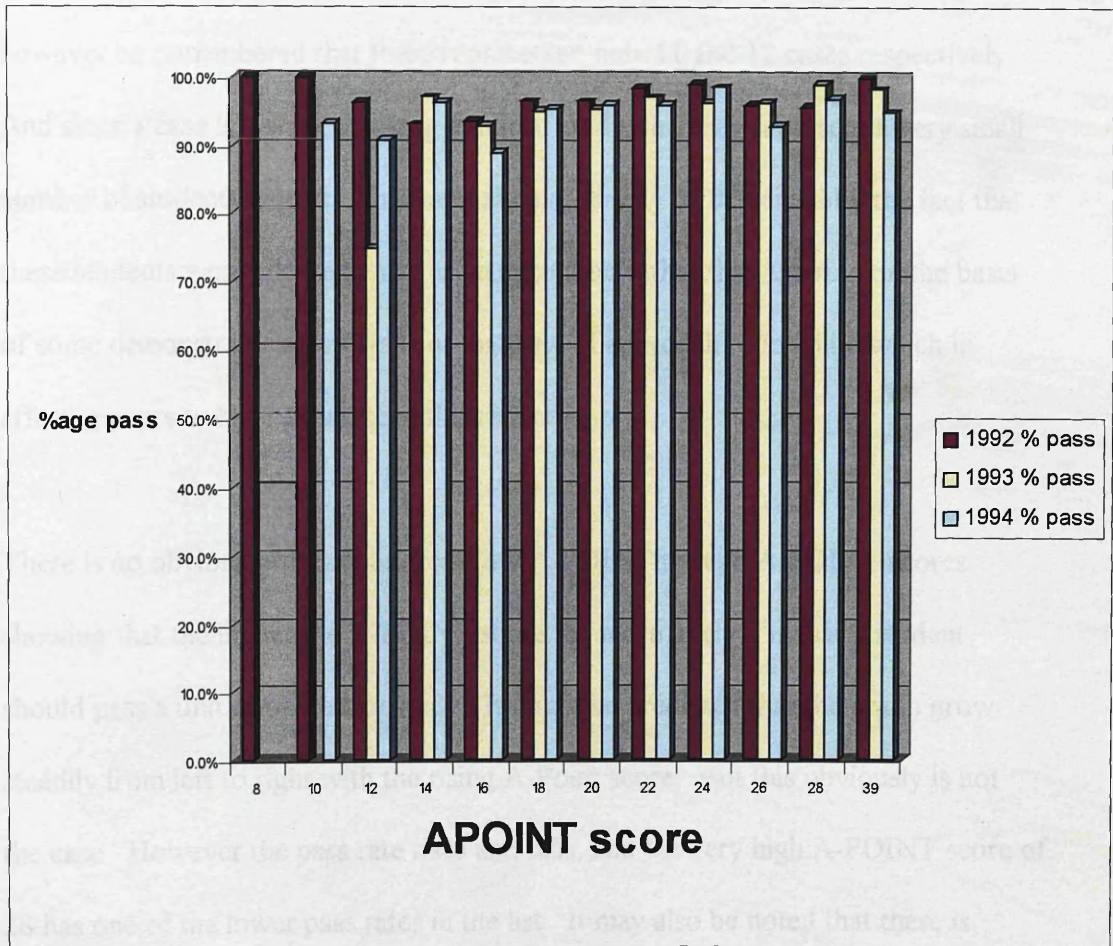
It may have been an easy matter to predict the effect of 100% pass rate for those on

an A-POINT score of 30 in 1992 but that was not consistent across the three

cohorts. It is also interesting to note a 100% pass rate for those on the lowest A-

POINT scores in 1992. Those entry levels were not represented at all in 1993, and

in 1994, those with 10 A level points managed a 93.3% success rate which compared favourably with students on a much higher A-point score. It should however be remembered that these represented only 11 and 12 cases respectively. And since a case is a student taking a unit of study, this may represent a very small number of students indeed. This anomaly may simply be explained by the fact that these students were allowed entry as an exception rather than the rule on the basis of some demonstrable study skills or maturity of approach to learning which in effect appears to have guaranteed their success.

There is no obvious progression from low A-POINT to high A-POINT scores showing that the higher the A-POINT score the more likely it is that a student should pass a unit of university study. It might be predicted that the graph grow steadily from left to right with the rising A-Point score. But this obviously is not the case. However the pass rate rises and falls, and the very high A-POINT score of 28 has one of the lower pass rates in the list. It may also be noted that there is variation from cohort to cohort. It is concluded that A-POINT score is not a particularly reliable method of estimating the likelihood of a student passing a unit of university study.

5.6   The Performance of Students by HPOINT Scores.

A similar analysis was done for SCE students regarding their performance

by H-POINT score. The H-Point system is not correlated with the A-point

system and it is not possible to draw comparisons between A-Point scores

and H-Point scores. However the analysis of H-Point scores on their own is

interesting enough.

Table 33: SCE students performance over the three cohorts.

Cohort	A	B	C	D	E	X
92	7.0%	58.7%	29.0%	2.6%	0.8%	2.0%
93	6.4%	58.5%	28.1%	2.1%	0.9%	2.3%
94	7.3%	62.3%	21.5%	1.8%	1.0%	3.7%

Figure 27:   SCE students performance over the three cohorts.
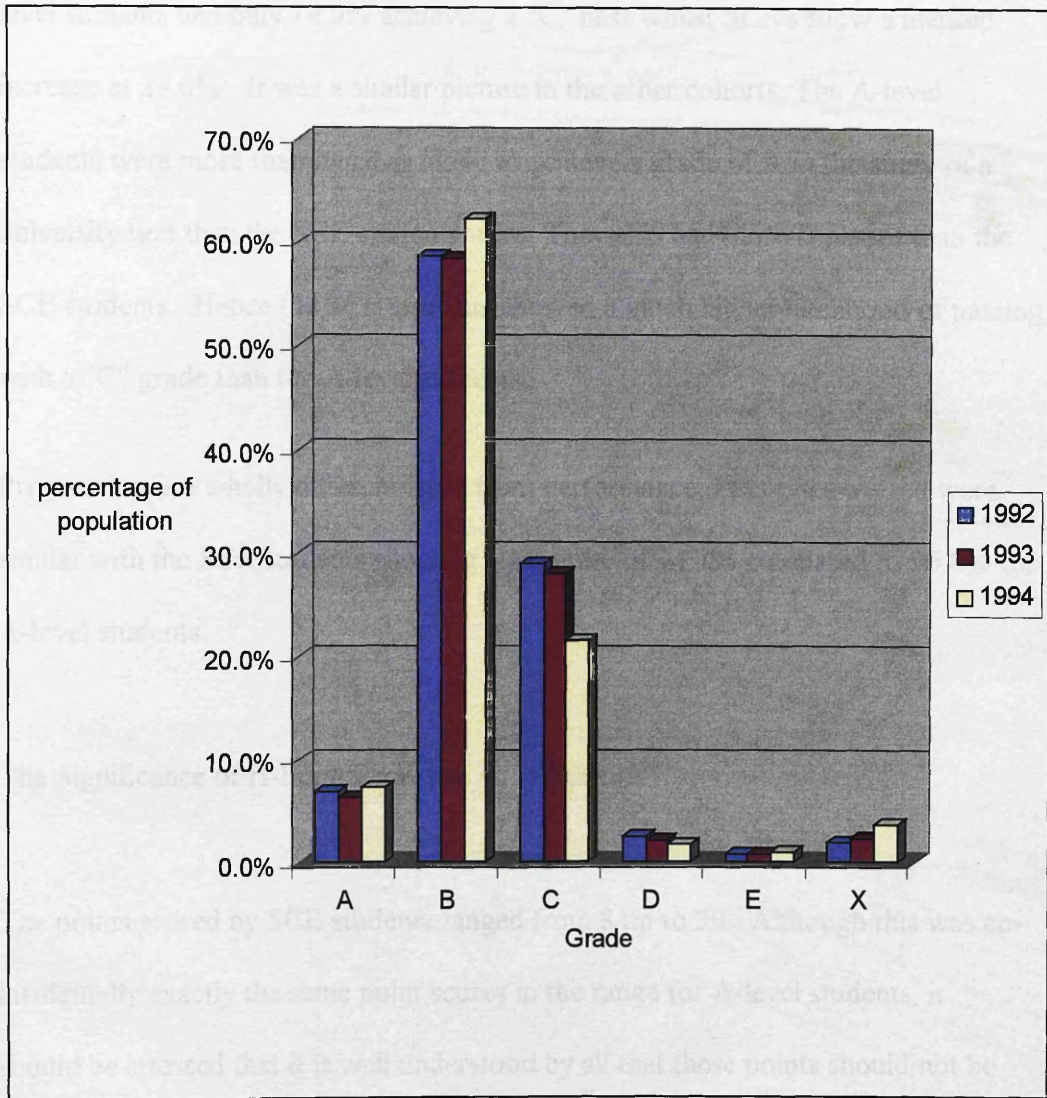
There is a marked difference from the A-level students' profile. In 1992, A-level

students had 16.7% achieving A passes where SCE's only 7%. Again the A-level

students had 65.2% achieving B passes whereas the SCE's had only 58.7%. The A-level students had only 14.9% achieving a "C" pass whilst SCE's show a marked increase at 29.0%. It was a similar picture in the other cohorts. The A-level students were more than twice as likely to achieve a grade of A in the study of a university unit than the SCE students were. They also had more B passes than the SCE students. Hence the SCE students showed a much higher likelihood of passing with a "C" grade than the A-level students.

Progression is a wholly different issue from performance. Pass rates overall were similar with the SCE students showing a pass rate of 94.7% compared to 96.8% for A-level students.

The Significance of H-Point Scores as an Indicator.

The points scored by SCE students ranged from 8 up to 30. Although this was co-incidentally exactly the same point scores in the range for A-level students, it should be stressed that it is well understood by all that these points should not be equated, that there is no correlation between a 20 point score in A-levels and a 20 point score in SCE Highers.

Table 34: 1992 SCE Performance (Percentages) by H-POINT score:

H Pt	A	B	C	D	E	X
8		61.3	25.8	9.7		3.2
10	3.3	44.0	48.4	2.2	1.1	1.1
12	1.8	49.7	39.5	3.9	1.3	3.8
14	3.7	52.8	35.3	3.6	1.8	2.8
16	4.9	57.9	32.4	2.2	0.4	2.2
18	6.9	62.3	26.6	2.2	0.9	1.2
20	8.1	63.8	23.3	1.7	0.9	2.2
22	16.4	64.3	16.4	2.3		0.7
24	19.5	66.2	10.8	1.3		2.2
26	15.6	70.1	11.7	2.6		
28	12.1	69.7	18.2			
30	51.4	45.7	2.9			

Again it is necessary to note that some of these cells have very low occupancy,
which makes the formation of percentages in these cases potentially misleading. In
particular, it is noted that the 8-point category consists of only 31 cases and the 30-
point of only 35 cases. 10-points, 26-points, and 28-points have less than 100 cases
each.

Table 35: 1993 SCE Performance (Percentages) by H-POINT score:

H pt	A	B	C	D	E	X
8	-	61.9%	31.7%	-	1.6%	4.8%
10	-	42.7%	43.8%	3.1%	1.0%	2.1%
12	2.8%	58.5%	31.7%	3.1%	1.2%	1.6%
14	2.8%	54.1%	34.5%	2.6%	1.3%	2.8%
16	5.9%	57.8%	29.3%	2.3%	0.8%	2.3%
18	5.8%	59.6%	27.9%	1.8%	0.8%	2.3%
20	7.3%	62.7%	25.1%	1.8%	0.8%	0.8%
22	9.0%	70.4%	16.6%	1.0%	0.3%	2.0%
24	25.7%	61.7%	11.2%	0.9%	0.5%	-
26	19.1%	53.2%	14.9%	2.1%	-	6.4%
28	22.2%	77.8%	-	-	-	-

Lastly the 1994 cohort was examined and a similar analysis made.

Table 36: 1994 SCE Performance (Percentages) by H-POINT score:

Hpt	A	B	C	D	E	X
10	6.1%	55.4%	23.7%	3.3%	1.1%	7.5%
12	6.1%	60.4%	23.0%	2.4%	1.2%	4.7%
14	4.6%	60.0%	27.0%	2.0%	0.5%	3.4%
16	4.4%	61.4%	22.9%	1.8%	1.9%	4.8%
18	4.9%	63.2%	23.1%	1.7%	1.5%	3.1%
20	11.5%	69.0%	14.1%	1.4%	0.1%	2.6%
22	12.9%	66.6%	16.2%	1.1%	0.5%	0.5%
24	15.7%	66.7%	11.6%	0.6%	0.3%	3.8%
26	20.7%	68.1%	6.0%	0.9%	-	0.9%
28	62.9%	37.1%	-	-	-	-
30	35.5%	64.5%	-	-	-	-

In examining the above for trends it may be observed that those with higher H-Point scores did tend to have a greater chance of attaining A grades in university study and this was particularly true of those with the highest H-Point scores. Further those with the highest H-Point scores did not fail. This was evidenced by completely empty cells in the above tables. It was by no means a smooth transition which would mean that the performance was a gradual slope up with increasing H-point scores.

The question may be posed, does it have an affect then on the likelihood of passing overall in university units? i.e. without regard to grade of pass. The following table illustrates the answer to this question.

Table 37:   SCE students passing by reference to H-POINT score.

H Pt	1992	1993	1994
8	87.1%	93.7%	-
10	95.7%	86.5%	85.6%
12	91.0%	93.0%	89.8%
14	91.8%	91.4%	92.3%
16	95.2%	93.0%	89.3%
18	95.8%	93.3%	91.3%
20	95.2%	95.1%	94.4%
22	97.1%	96.0%	96.4%
24	96.5%	98.6%	94.7%
26	97.4%	87.2%	96.4%
28	100%	100%	100%
30	100%	100%	100%

Figure 28: Pass Rates and the H-Point Score.

Percentage of Passes
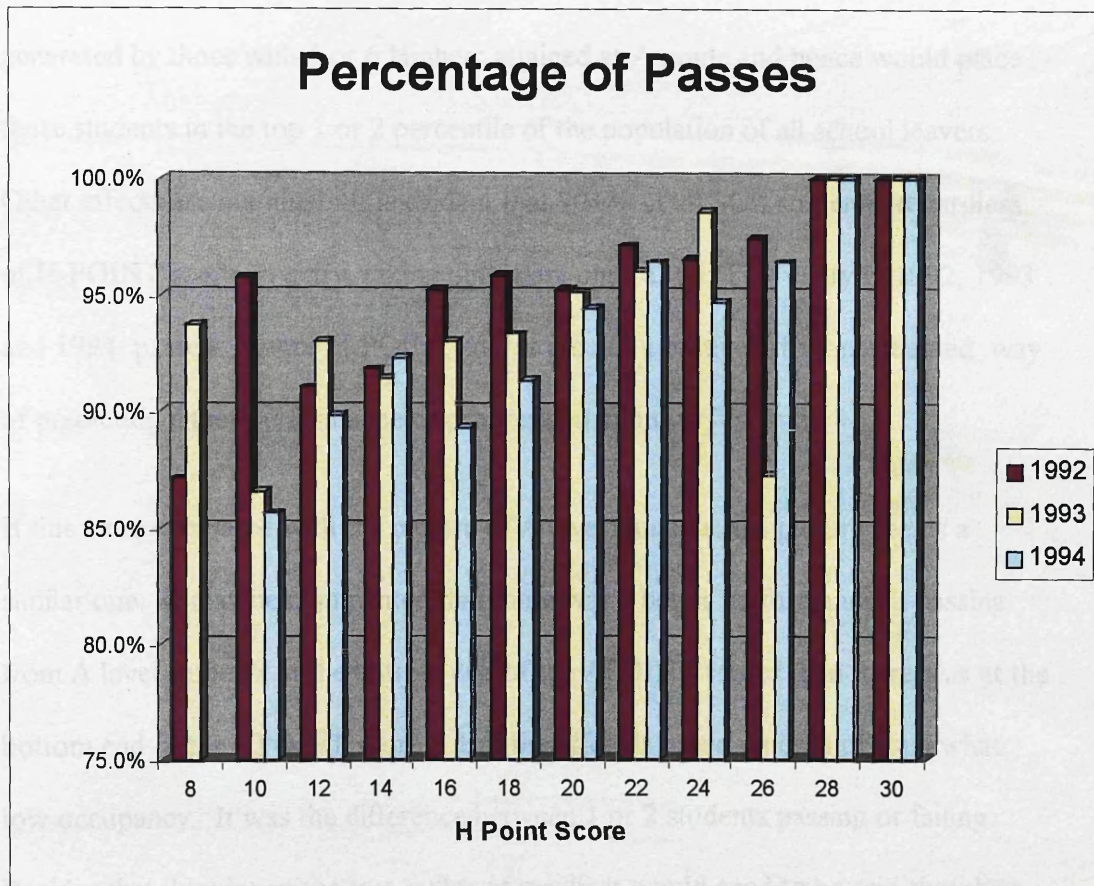
For the first time there is a sliding scale effect. One would have to regard it as
marginal but there is a definite slope upwards from left to right of the graph. Also
there are end-effects. i.e. at either end of the continuum the very lowest H-POINT
scores were slightly less likely to pass. And at the other end, the very highest H-
POINT scores all passed without exception. It might be said then as a generalisation
that the likelihood of progression would seem to be enhanced by very high scores

gained for SCE Highers before entry. This level of H-POINT of course would be generated by those with 5 or 6 Highers attained at A grade and hence would place these students in the top 1 or 2 percentile of the population of all school leavers. Other effects are marginal. It is evident that 90+% of all SCE students, regardless of H-POINT score on entry, taking university units at this University in 1992, 1993 and 1994 passed. Hence H-POINT scores are not a particularly sophisticated way of predicting either performance or progression in university study.

If this were compared with the picture of A level students, the picture seems a similar one. It may be commented that there was a better performance in passing from A level students at the bottom end of the APOINT scores than there was at the bottom end of the HPOINT scores. But the effect is based on cells of somewhat low occupancy. It was the difference between 1 or 2 students passing or failing. Besides that, looking at the two tables of results it would need to be said that they were very similar. The conclusion would seem to be that as far as passing units of study at the university are concerned, those coming from an SCE Highers background seemed to pass as frequently as those from an A-level background do. The major difference between the two classifications of student were in the frequency of attaining A grades at university.

5.7   Comparison of Grade Profiles by Entry Mode.

One further point of consideration was to examine the grades profile of the main

entry qualification groups which interest us to look for any major differences

between these various groups of students. The most instructive point would seem to

be to compare the performance profiles of three groups: viz. the Access group, the

A-level group and the amalgam of all SCE students. (i.e. combining together entry

qualification codes 40-43. By examining the SPSSx crosstabs and combining

together the necessary figures, this reveals the following information.

Table 38: 1992 Performance Profiles of Various Entry Modes:

Entry Mode	A	B	C	D	E	X
Access	7.0%	51.4%	31.2%	4.2%	1.3%	4.8%
A-level	16.9%	65.1%	14.9%	1.3%	0.5%	1.4%
SCE	7.0%	59.3%	28.2%	2.5%	0.7%	2.2%

Figure 29: 1992 Performance Profiles for Various Entry Modes.

Performance Profiles by Entry Mode
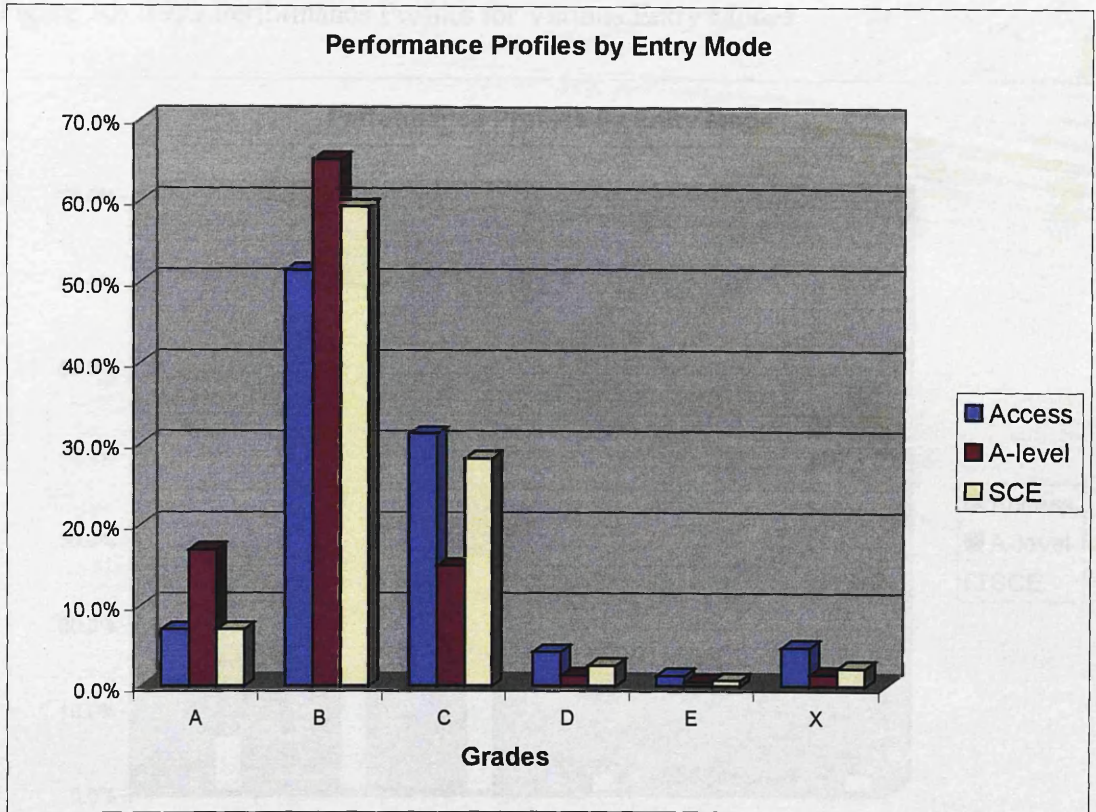
Table 39: 1993 Performance Profiles of Various Entry Modes:

Entry Mode	A	B	C	D	E	X
Access	7.4%	53.1%	25.7%	3.7%	2.0%	7.0%
A-level	15.0%	65.0%	15.8%	1.1%	0.3%	1.7%
SCE	6.5%	59.0%	27.8%	2.1%	0.9%	2.3%

Figure 30: 1993 Performance Profiles for Various Entry Modes.

Performance Profiles by Entry Mode
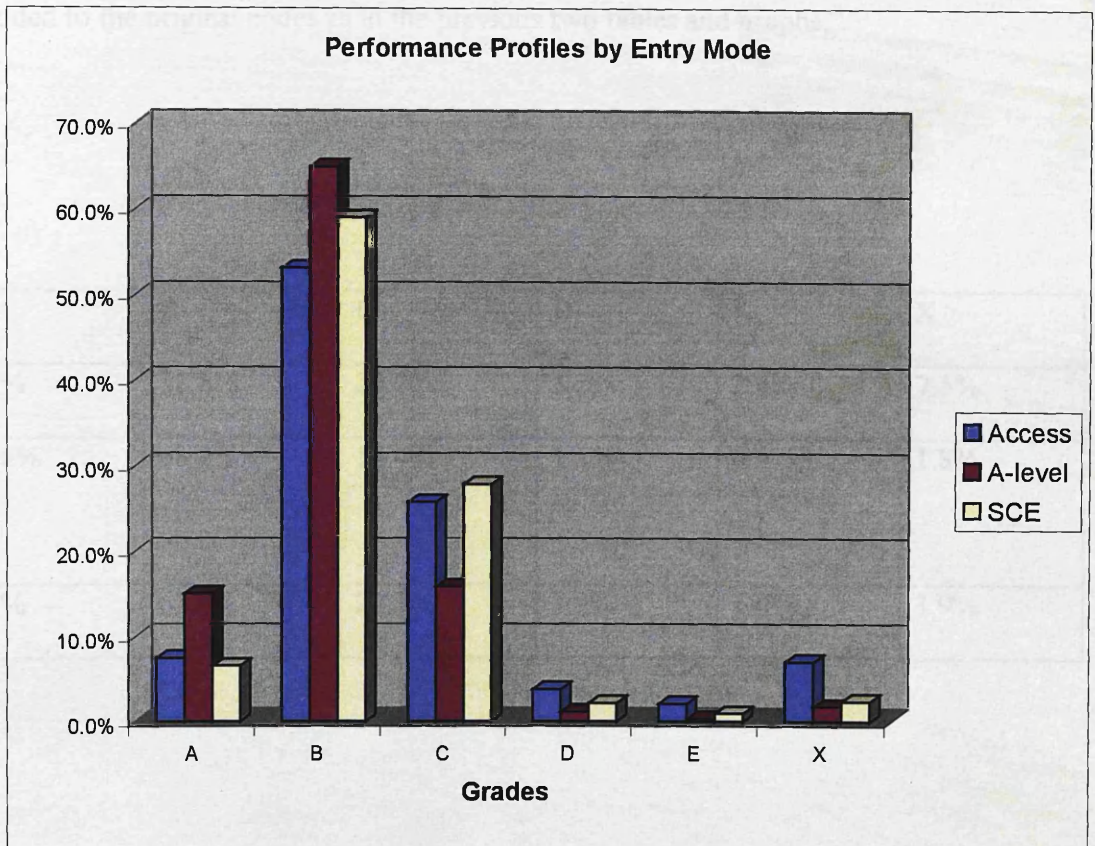
Table 40: 1994 Performance Profiles of Various Entry Modes:

The entry codes used in 1994 were of course HESA codes which are
different. Codes 44 and 45 corresponded to all Access students. Code 31

referred to A-level students and 32 and 33 referred to all SCE students. For ease of comparison in the following table and graph, these have been recoded to the original codes as in the previous two tables and graphs.

Entry Mode	A	B	C	D	E	X
Access	8.1%	51.8%	24.2%	3.2%	2.6%	7.5%
A level	11.6%	68.2%	14.4%	1.1%	0.4%	1.8%
SCE	6.8%	61.6%	22.3%	1.9%	1.0%	3.9%

Figure 31: 1994 Performance Profiles for Various Entry Modes.
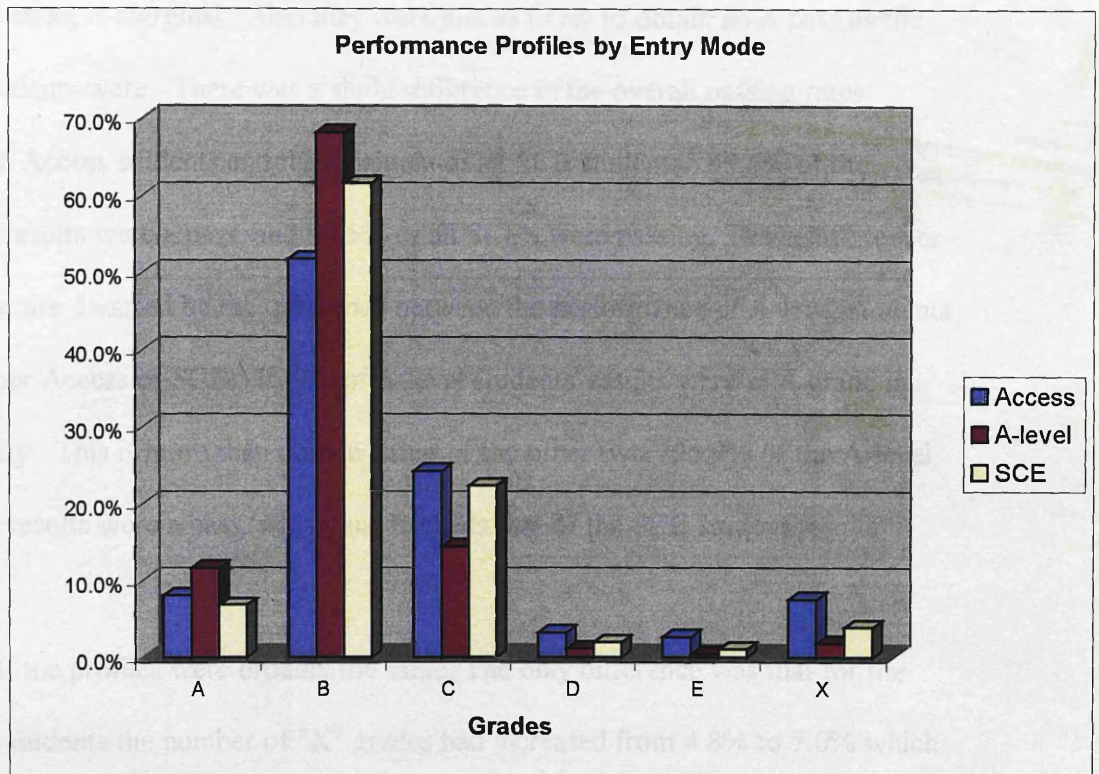
Performance Profiles by Entry Mode

In examining the 1992 profiles, it must be commented that the difference between

A-level students and all others is a much more marked difference than any

difference between Access and others. The A-level students scored many more A's,

more B's and as a result fewer C's. They also had fewer fail grades overall and

significantly fewer "X" grades which represent incompletes.

Indeed in looking at the performance profile of Access students it would appear to

be broadly similar to the performance profile of SCE students. The Access students

were slightly less likely to obtain a B grade and slightly more likely to obtain a C. But the effect is marginal. Also they were just as likely to obtain an A pass as the SCE students were. There was a slight difference in the overall passing rates between Access students and the amalgam of all SCE students. 89.6% of the Access results were a pass, and 94.5% of all SCE's were passing. These differences however are dwarfed by the difference between the performance of A-level students and either Access or SCE. 16.9% of A-level students' results were at A grade in university. This is more than double either of the other two. 96.9% of the A-level student results were a pass, which just exceeds that of the SCE student results.

In 1993, the profiles were broadly the same. The only difference was that for the Access students the number of "X" grades had increased from 4.8% to 7.0% which was more than double the percentage of incompletes among the SCE students and more than double that of the A-level students.

In 1994, again there was a remarkable similarity between the Access students and the SCE students. The Access scored a slightly higher percentage of A grades but a lower percentage of B's. The only other difference of note was again in the area of incompletes. The Access had double the rate of incompletes or "X" grades.

Since the Access students by definition are older and tend to have more home responsibilities than the school-leaver, it may be postulated that this higher degree of outside commitments may lead to a higher probability that students will fail to complete units of study. Clearly, there is no suggestion that they have lower ability or a less adequate degree of underpinning knowledge prior to beginning study as the other sections of the profile compare very favourably with the largest group of student intake, the SCE students.

5.8 Reasons For Leaving.

Finally, the eighth crosstabs operation examined the reasons cited for leaving amongst those students who left the university. It should be stressed again that the event being measured is a student entered for a certain unit of study who left. Hence since a student would be entered for a number of units of study, the total number of "leaving" events is not equal to the number of students but that would be considerably less than this, since each student may well have been entered for several units. Nevertheless this will suffice to give us an indication of the relative proportions of students leaving for the various reasons cited. The codes for reasons for leaving are noted earlier.

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Table 41: 1992 Entry Qualifications by Reason for Leaving: (actual numbers of cases not percentages).

Entry	10	20	50	61	62	63	64	66	67	68	69	80
Access	92	28	-	20	-	-	-	7	12	3	-	--
NTE	484	3	6	27	-	-	-	3	6	-	-	6
Alevel	99	15	-	18	-	-	-	27	21	-	-	91
SCE non direct	123	14	-	26	-	-	17	2	8	-	-	12
SCE 5 yr	35	8	-	-	-	-	-	12	6	-	-	6
SCE 6 yr	471	73	12	46	2	-	6	25	9	3	3	6
SCE 5 yr qual	112	15	-	19	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	11
Acc in house	34	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	-	-	-	-
Acc non link	12	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acc not Scot	22	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
OU	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

For the Access student the most common reason for leaving was category 10, which was successful completion of course. This was 56.8% of the cases of leaving. A further 17.3% was accounted for by academic failure.

Entry code 26 (labelled as NTEs above), which dealt with SCOTVEC and BTEC had 90.5% of those who left explained by successful completion of course. This dwarfed all other reasons.

In looking at the A-level students 36.5% of all cases of leaving were due to successful completion of course and a further 33.6% were due to transfers to another university. Hence with reference to the A-level students this should be noted as a major contribution to those students leaving. Whether this is for academic or purely geographic reasons is not clear and may provide an interesting avenue of study at a later date within the university.

If entry codes 40-43 are combined, this presents an overall picture of all SCE students which may be useful for generalisation purposes. There were 741 cases leaving because of successful completion of course which amounted to 68.1% of all cases of leaving. 110 cases of leaving were due to academic failure (10.1%). The next most common reason for leaving was "other: reasons general or unspecified"

which accounted for 45 cases or 4.1%. Other reasons accounted for even fewer cases. 12 cases cited death as the reason for leaving. This probably referred to 1 or 2 students.

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Table 42: 1993 Entry Qualifications by Reason for Leaving: (actual numbers of cases not percentages).

Entry	10	20	61	62	63	64	66	67	68	69	80
Access	8	43	26	-	-	-	6	-	-	6	-
NTE	106	22	30	-	3	-	6	15	6	6	-
Alevel	12	-	16	-	8	-	21	-	-	33	-
SCE non direct	-	27	11	-	-	3	-	-	-	6	-
SCE 5yr	-	6	-	-	-	-	6	8	-	9	-
SCE 6yr	11	28	24	3	-	-	41	11	-	-	37
SCE 5yr qual	-	-	9	-	-	-	19	6	-	-	-
Acc in house	-	11	6	-	-	-	2	-	-	6	-
Acc non link	-	-	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Acc non Scot	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	-

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In 1993, the picture for leavers among the Access was different. In this cohort the highest incidence of leaving was 43 and this was for reason code 20 which represented academic failure. This was 48% of the cases amongst the Access.

Students with an assortment of modular qualifications were labelled as NTEs above. The highest proportion of reasons for leaving was code 10 which was successful completion of course. This represented 54.6% of all cases of leaving amongst this student group.

Amongst the A-level students the highest figure was 33 cases who left by transferring to another university. This was commented on earlier for the 1992 cohort and again find it to be noticeable here. This represented 36.7% of all A-level leaving. Further there were fewer cases of leaving amongst this student group than other student groups.

Among the SCE students there were a total of 265 cases where a reason for leaving was registered. This was accounted for by 61 cases of academic failure, 44 were deemed to have withdrawn, 66 were covered by the blanket term "reasons unspecified", 25 cases represented domestic reasons and 52 cases were transfers to other universities. Hence the largest percentage 24.9% were for unspecified reasons.

A complete reclassifying of the system of coding for the 1994 cohort due to the bringing in of the HESA system of data meant that a comparison between 1994 and the other two cohorts was not possible.

Clearly the level of information from this institution was very full and useful observations could be made. Many of the original questions mentioned at the beginning of this chapter were investigated. However, although many interesting observations could be made it was decided that this did not illuminate the real factors which affected learning or were deterministic of rates of success or perseverance.

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Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

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Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Chapter 6.

Former SWAP Access students at University B.

Using data supplied by a modern University in the West of Scotland, it was possible to check on the progress of five hundred and twenty six (526) former Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) students who had progressed to study at the university. These students spanned 1989-94 in their Access year study and it was decided to include all students as this would broaden the data base and allow a rudimentary statistical analysis.

There were a number of limitations on the quality of the data supplied. It contained no information on grades attained in units of study. There was no information for comparison purposes with other entry modes at the university, the data related only to the former Access students.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

6.1 Overall Progress of Students.

When the progress of all students was examined it revealed the following information:

Table 43:

Status	No of Students
Degree	2
Dip Social Work	4
Unclass Hons	3
hons 1st	24
hons 2:1	45
hons 2:2	77
hons 3rd	34
non-award pass	1
on course	134
pass degree	54
suspended	7
transferred	2
withdrawn	138

There was a sizeable number of students (134) who were described as on course. This included a number from later cohorts and also some who awaited the results of resit examinations. This represented some 25.5% of the sample.

There were a further 138 students who had withdrawn from their study, some were described as voluntary withdrawal (i.e. not on the basis of academic failure) and a larger number who had involuntary withdrawals. This represented a failure rate of 26.2%. 56 students in all achieved what was described as a pass degree (10.6%) 3 students achieved an unclassified honours degree (0.6%). 34 gained a 3rd class honours degree (6.5%), whilst 77 achieved a second class honours

lower (14.6%). 45 students achieved an upper second (8.6%) and 24 gained a first class honour degree (4.6%).

Summarising all of the above it was found that 243 students received some kind of award (46.2%), whilst 138 had withdrawn from the university (26.2%). Of the remaining 145, 134 were on course (25.5%) and the few remaining were made up of those who had transferred to other universities or had had their studies suspended. Since the study included students who studied over a number of cohorts between 1989 and 1994, it was inevitable that there would be a number who were found to be on course when the results search was carried out within the university.

However the percentage of withdrawals (26.2%) is high.

This may be depicted graphically by the following histogram.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 32:
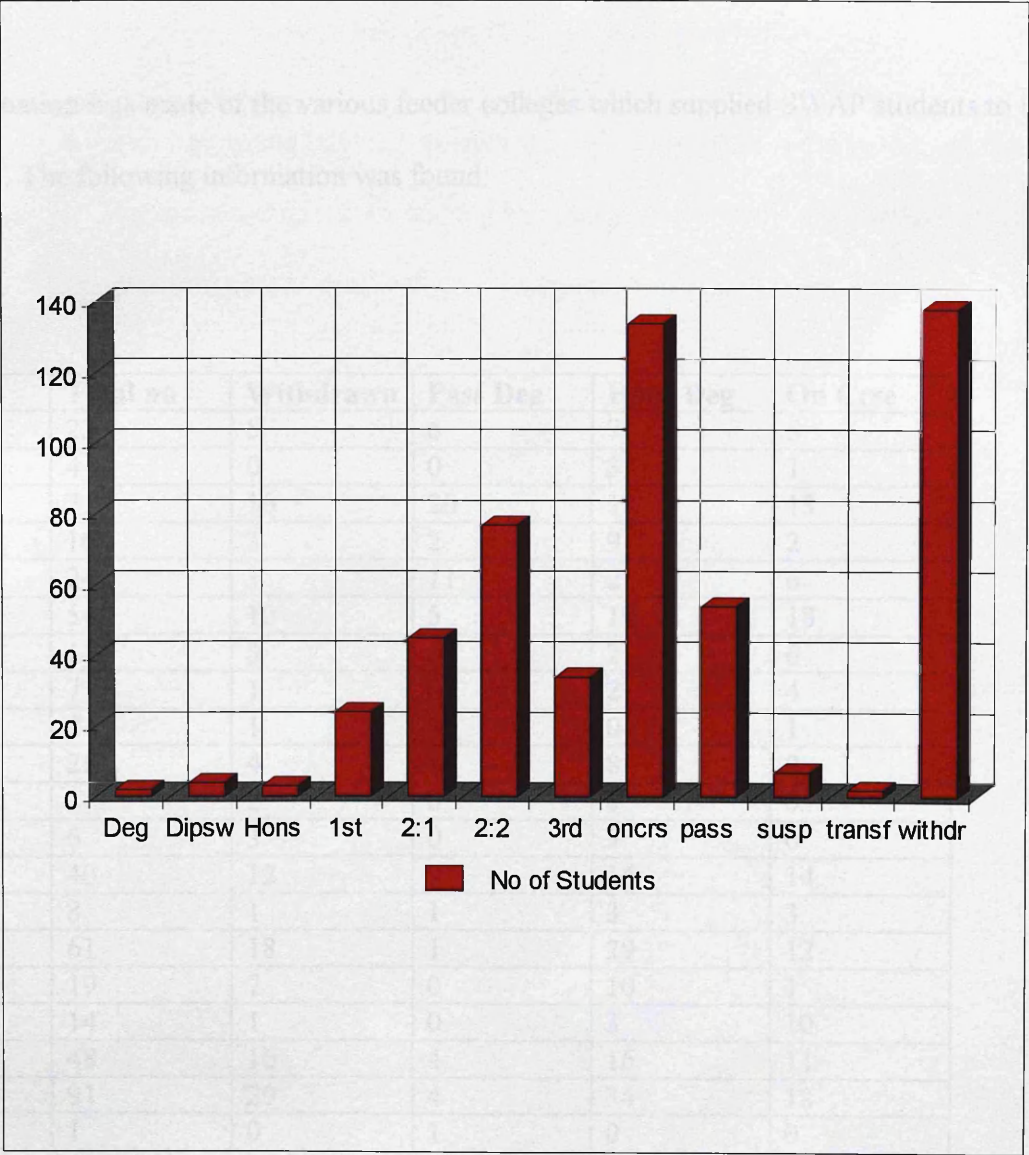
Figure 32: [Bar chart titled "No of Students" showing categories: Deg, Dipsw, Hons, 1st, 2:1, 2:2, 3rd, oncrs, pass, susp, transf, withdr]

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

6.2. Source of SWAP Students and Performance.

An examination was made of the various feeder colleges which supplied SWAP students to the university. The following information was found:

Table 44:

College	Total no	Withdrawn	Pass Deg	Hons Deg	On Crse
A	23	5	6	7	5
B	4	0	0	3	1
C	71	16	20	19	13
D	16	3	2	9	2
E	24	3	11	2	6
F	54	10	5	19	18
G	11	3	0	2	6
H	7	1	0	2	4
I	2	1	0	0	1
J	25	4	4	8	9
K	2	2	0	0	0
L	6	3	0	3	0
M	40	12	0	14	14
N	8	1	1	3	3
O	61	18	1	29	12
P	19	7	0	10	1
Q	14	1	0	3	10
R	48	16	4	16	11
S	91	29	4	34	18
T	1	0	1	0	0

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Note Diploma in Social Work was regarded as a Pass Degree for the purposes of this table.

Institutions A – T are twenty Further Education Colleges in Scotland.

The above table yields interesting information about the SWAP students who pursued further study at University B. The various proportions coming from the different further education colleges in the SWAP West area were noted. These are now portrayed in a pie chart which follows:
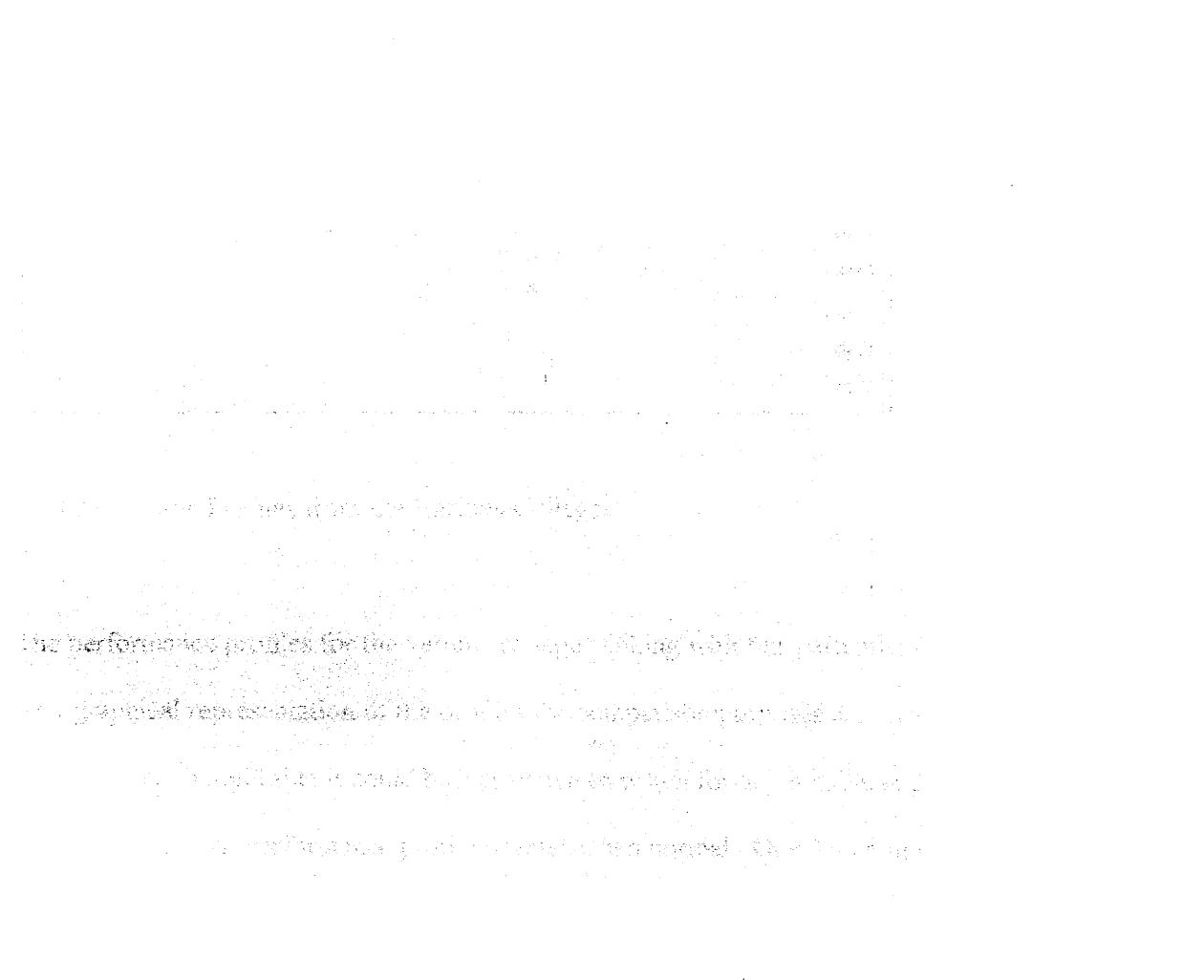
Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 33:

Feeder Colleges to University B
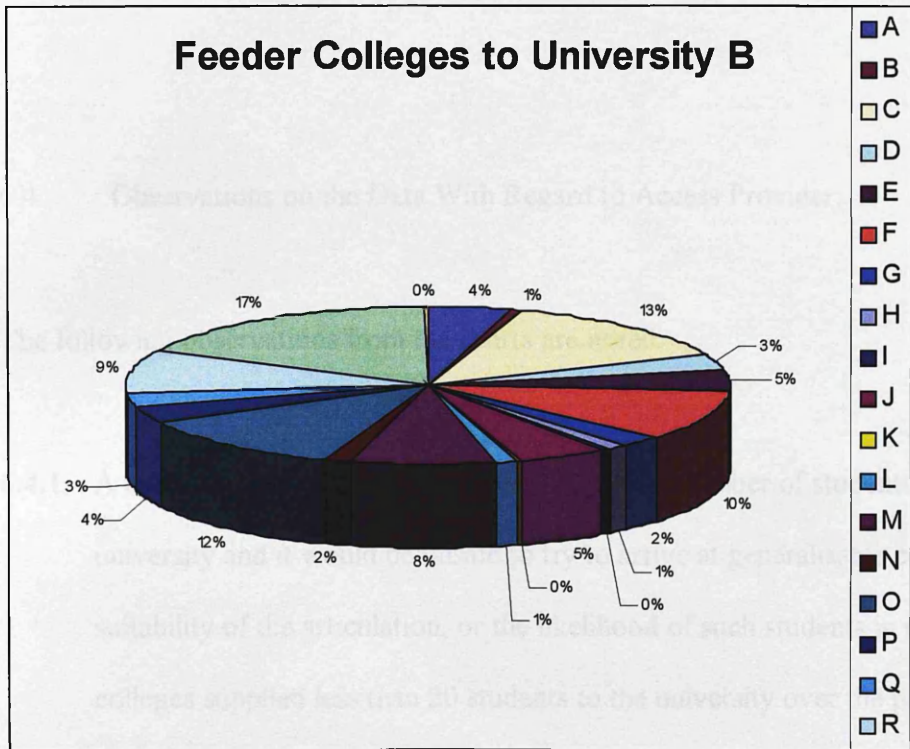
6.3 Progression Profiles from the Various Colleges.

The performance profiles for the various colleges linking with this particular university were noted. And graphical representation of the profiles for comparison purposes are included in Appendix Four. It was thought that it could be instructive to watch for any notable profiles which indicate a higher than normal performance profile or lower than normal. Only by comparing each profile in

turn can it be determined whether the college of supply into degree study is significant in terms of performance.

6.4   Observations on the Data With Regard to Access Provider.

The following observations from the charts are noted.

6.4.1. A number of the colleges had a relatively small number of students proceeding to this university and it would be unsafe to try to arrive at generalisable conclusions about the suitability of the articulation, or the likelihood of such students in the future. The following colleges supplied less than 20 students to the university over the period examined.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Table 45:

B	4
D	16
G	11
H	7
I	2
K	2
L	6
N	8
P	19
Q	14
T	1

6.4.2. When the profile for College A is considered it is noted that the four columns which represent withdrawal, pass degree, honours degree, and on course are all very similar in size. i.e. approximately one quarter of the sample in each category. The total population for A was quite small at 23.

6.4.3. College C represented a much larger population at 71 students. It was however interesting to note that the College A profile was repeated at C with the increased population. i.e. all four columns captured approximately one quarter of the population. The withdrawal rate was 22.5%, just under one quarter of the sample, and an almost equal number of pass degrees and honours degrees.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

6.4.4. The population of ex SWAP Access students from College E numbered only 24 and so was at the lower end of the populations considered. There was a proportionately smaller group of withdrawn students (12.5%). Also it is noted that the number of students gaining pass degrees exceeded all of the other categories (46%). Because of this the number gaining honours was also quite low (8%).

6.4.5. The profile for College F was based on 54 students. The number of withdrawals fell below the one quarter level at some 18.5%. There was a quite small number of pass degrees (9.25%) and in this profile the categories were skewed towards honours degrees and those remaining on course. These represented approximately one third of the population each. In comparison to the other colleges examined thus far this represented a higher level of attainment and a lower level of wastage.

6.4.6. College J had a population of 25 students. The level of withdrawals and pass degrees was equal at 16%. Hence the number of honours degrees was increased at 32% and there were also a further 36% who were categorised as on course.

6.4.7. College M had a population of 40 students. The withdrawal rate was 30% which was a little higher than most other colleges. However there were no pass degrees attained from this group of students. The number of students who gained honours degrees and those who

were on course both represented some 35% of the student body. Hence with reference to College M students there were no pass degrees and the other three categories captured about one third of the students each.

6.4.8. College O at 61 students was one of the largest student groups. Again similar to College M there was an almost zero pass degree rate (in fact only 1 pass degree). Hence it is a matter of some interest to see what this did to the level of withdrawals and honours degrees in particular. For these students the profile tells us that 29.5% of the students withdrew. Further there was a very high level of attainment of honours degrees. viz. 47.5%. The remaining 19.7% were described as on course. Hence the most notable feature of this profile is the high number of honours degrees resulting. This suggests that when these former Access students can be retained in study, then they tended to be successful in their studies, including the attainment of honours degrees.

6.4.9. The population of College R students numbered 48. The profile is characterised by a low number of pass degrees (8%). One third of the students withdrew and one third attained honour degrees. Some 29% of the students were classed as on course.

6.4.10. The largest student group came from College S and consisted of some 91 students. Again the number of pass degrees was extremely low at 4%. The number of withdrawals and

number of honours degrees were similar in magnitude at 31.8% and 37.3%. A further

19.8% were still on course. One feature of those colleges who have a zero or very low

number of pass degrees is the higher level of honours degree attainment and also the higher

level of natural wastage due to withdrawals.

6.5.   Performance and Gender.

An examination of the performance of the former Access students was made with reference to

gender.

Table 46:

Gender	Total	Hons deg	Pass Deg	On Course	Withdrawn
Female	288	101	30	80	74
Male	221	73	29	49	68

It is noted from the above data that the number of female students entering the university from

Access was somewhat higher than the number of male students.

This could be summarised in the following chart:

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 34:

Distribution of Students by Gender.

Male

Female
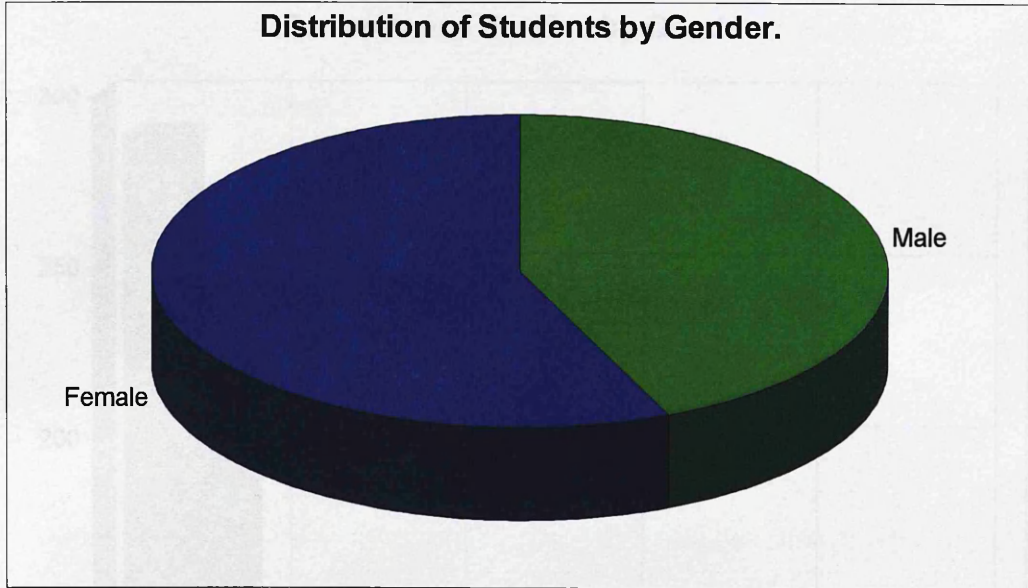
It is also desirable to examine the performance profile by gender.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 35:
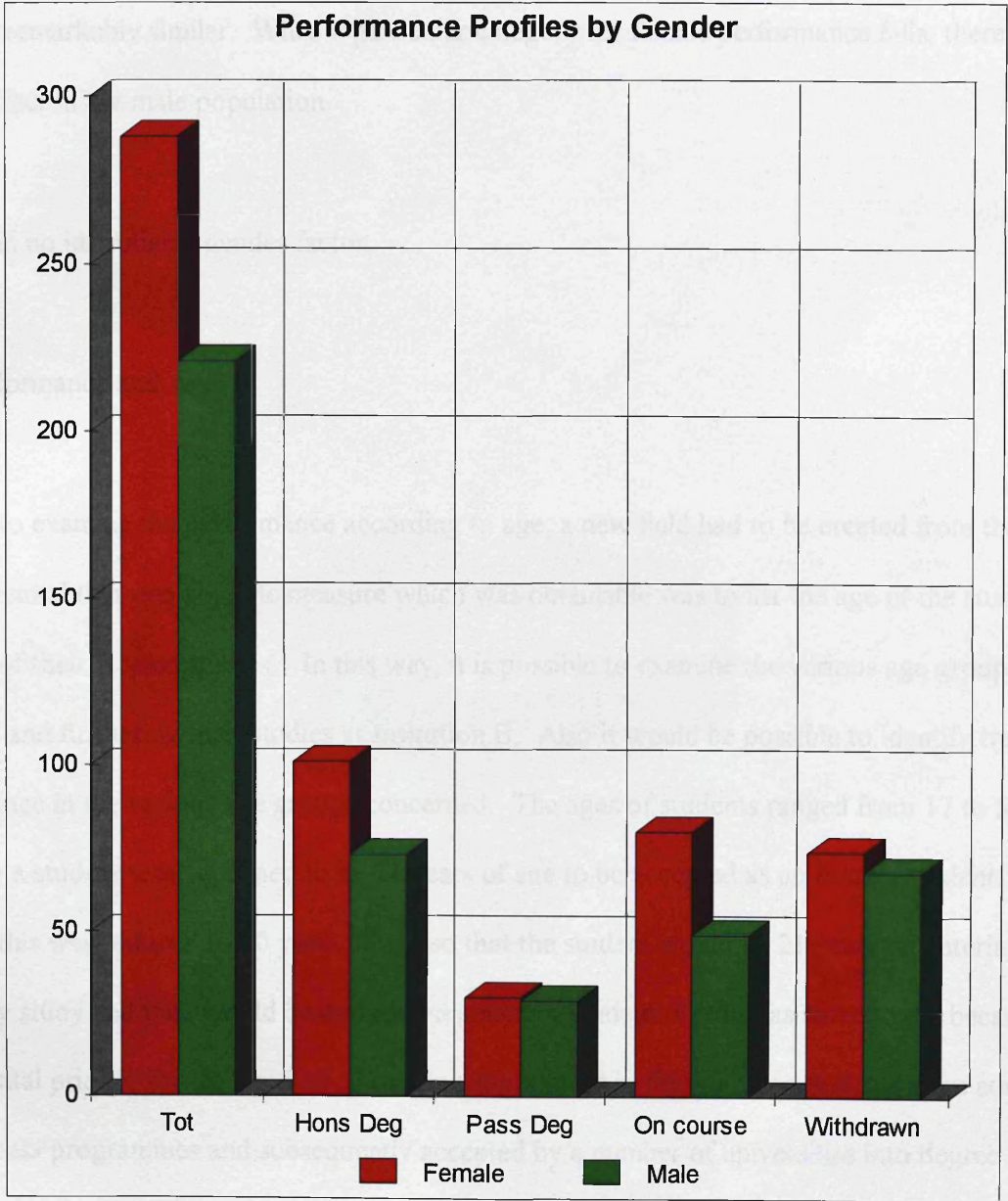
Performance Profiles by Gender

The chart shows bars for Female (red) and Male (green) across categories: Tot, Hons Deg, Pass Deg, On course, Withdrawn, with the y-axis ranging from 0 to 300.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Given the total number of female students exceeded the total number of males, the pattern of the profile is remarkably similar. When a particular category for female performance falls, there is a similar effect in the male population.

There was no identifiable gender factor.

6.6. Performance and Age.

In order to examine the performance according to age, a new field had to be created from the data. It was decided that one possible measure which was obtainable was to list the age of the student at the time of their Access studies. In this way, it is possible to examine the various age groups recruited and furthering their studies at Insitution B. Also it would be possible to identify trends of performance in the various age groups concerned. The ages of students ranged from 17 to 56. Officially a student was supposed to be 21 years of age to be accepted as an Access student. In practice this was reduced to 20 years of age so that the student would be 21 years on entering university study and thus would be considered a mature student. Further as recruitment became a fundamental priority for the survival of certain programmes in FE, younger students were admitted onto Access programmes and subsequently accepted by a number of universities into degree study.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

In this analysis the population was split up into classes which spanned 5 year bands beginning with 16-20 years and up to 51-55 years. The distribution of students in these bands may be indicated by the following pie chart:

Figure 36:

Age Distribution of Students
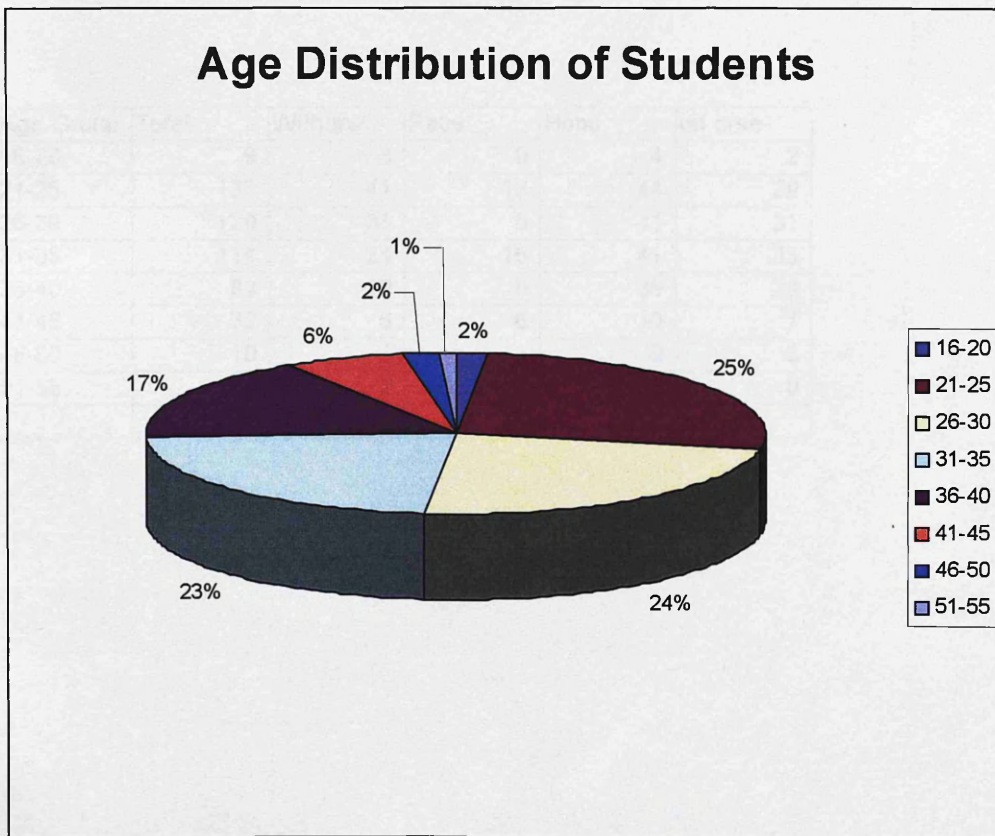
In an examination of central tendency it was found that the modal class was 21-25 years. However the median age was found to be 30 years and the mean age 30.9 years. This indicates that the biggest single group of students was in the 21-25 years age group and this will have influenced the

mean and median down towards the 30 years mark. There were relatively few students in the over-

40 age bracket.

The performance of students in the various age brackets may be summarised by the following table:

Table 47:

Age Group	Total	Withdrw	Pass	Hons	on crse
16-20	9	3	0	4	2
21-25	132	41	18	44	29
26-30	120	35	8	41	31
31-35	114	24	15	41	33
36-40	84	19	9	35	20
41-45	32	6	6	10	7
46-50	10	3	3	0	3
51-55	4	2	1	1	0

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 37:
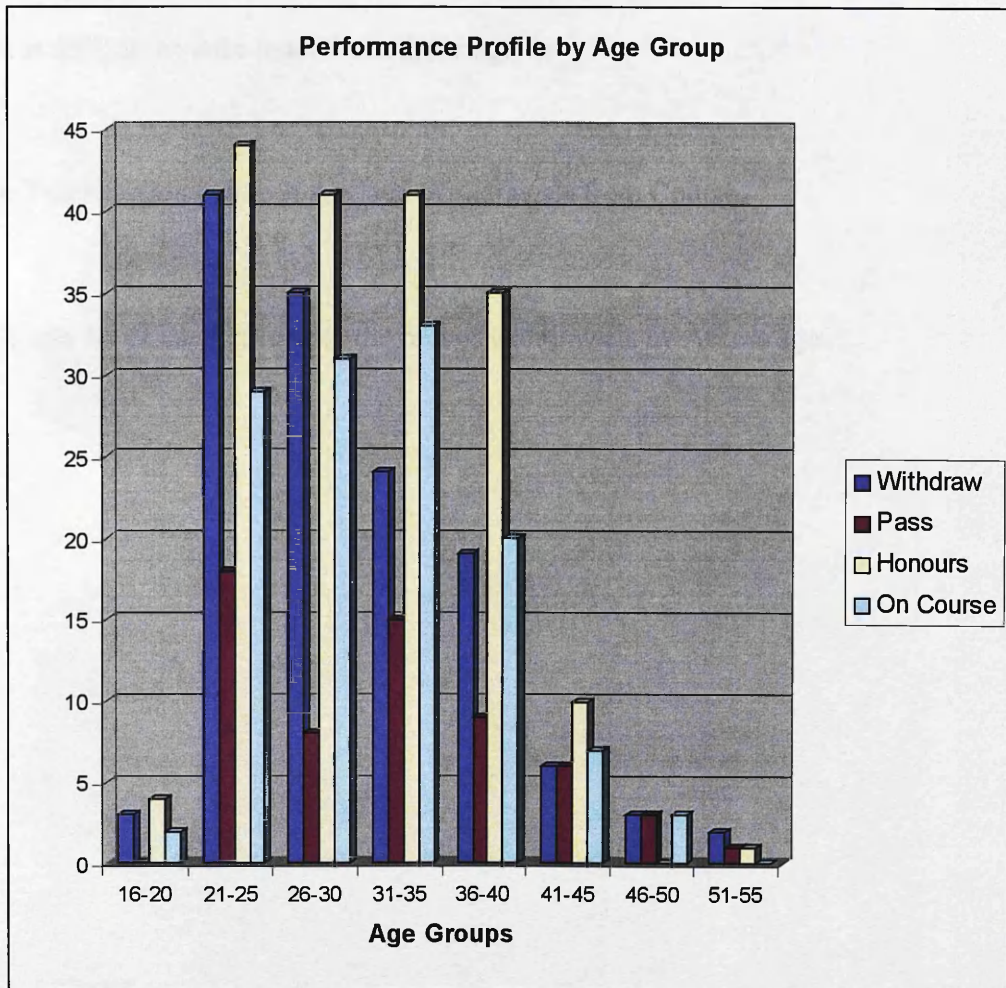
Between the ages of 21 and 45 it is noticeable from this chart that the number of students in each age range achieving honours exceeded those who withdrew from their course. Also, the number of withdrawals fell with increasing age, even in the 21 to 35 age range when the total number of students did not fall very much. For these students, increase in age seemed to signal increase in

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

maturity for study. Total population numbers at opposite ends of the age spectrum were small and

it is difficult to infer much from these figures.

6.7 Correlation between Age and Withdrawals from Course.

It may be of interest to note the rate of withdrawals by Access age.

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Figure 38:

Withdrawal Rates for Various Age Groups
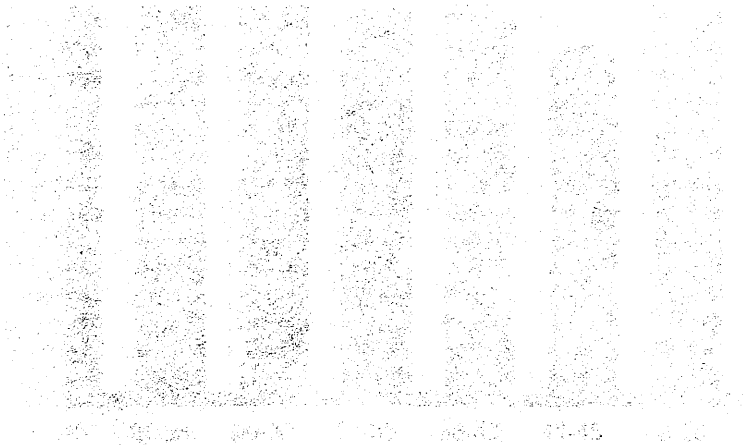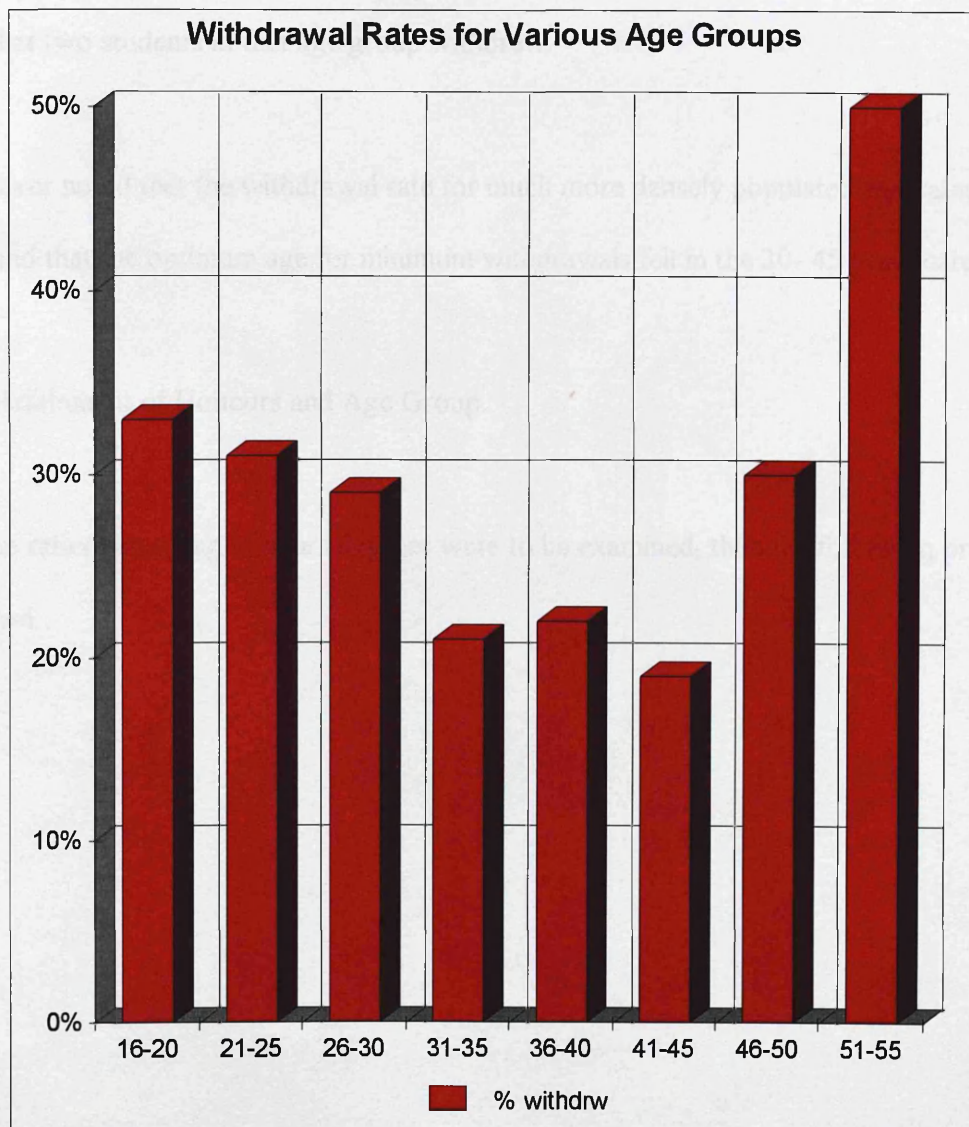
There is a steady decline in the rate of withdrawals with increasing age until the last two categories.

It is not possible to say much about these last two categories as they were populated by very small

numbers of students. For example the last category shows a 50% withdrawal rate but this only reflects that two students in that age group withdrew.

It is however noted that the withdrawal rate for much more densely populated age categories fell steadily and that the optimum age for minimum withdrawals fell in the 30- 45 years categories.

6.8   Attainment of Honours and Age Group.

If only the rate of attaining honours degrees were to be examined, then the following profile would be obtained.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 39:
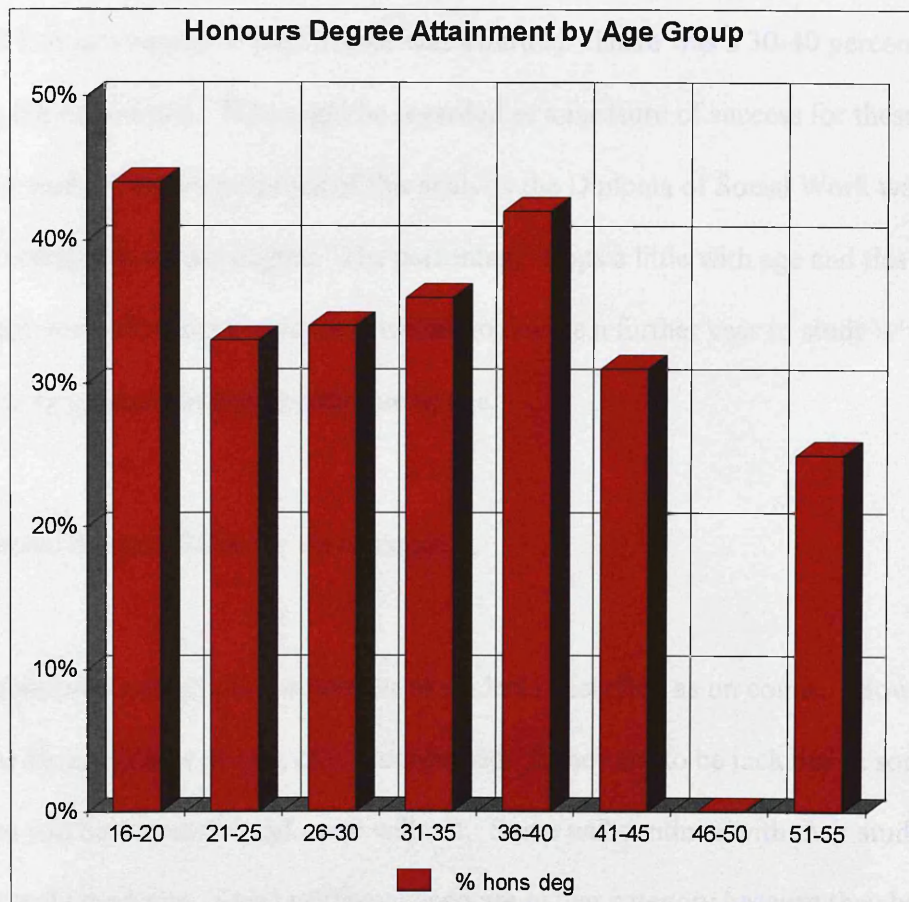
Honours Degree Attainment by Age Group

It should be noted that the 16-20, 46-50 and 51-55 categories contained very small populations. In any examination of trends considerable care would require to be taken about making any generalisable observations using these categories. However looking at the other age groups it is noted that the optimum age group for attaining honours degrees was the 36-40 age group.

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Further it may be of interest to examine the percentage success rates across age groups, indicating where an honours degree or pass degree was awarded. There was a 30-40 percent level of achievement of honours. This might be regarded as a measure of success for these students in their university study. For the purposes of this analysis the Diploma of Social Work was awarded, and this was counted as a Pass degree. The percentage drops a little with age and this may reflect the feeling that some students would be unwilling to devote a further year to study when their working life following graduation was shorter due to age.

6.9 Projected Success Rates for these students.

One troublesome matter was the number of students described as on course. How should they be treated as far as success or lack of it is concerned. If they are to be included in some way it is clear that some will be successful and some will not. Some will continue with their studies and some will ultimately drop out. Some of them indeed are in that category because they have resit examinations. On the other hand if they are omitted from the successful group then it could just as reasonably be argued that some of these students will indeed be successful and attain awards. Hence an attempt has been made to project the likely success of such students. This was done in a very simple way. If the actual success rate in an age group was say 47%, then it was postulated that 47% of the students who were listed as "on course" may ultimately be successful. In this way it is

possible to project a success rate for that age group and the results are displayed below in the bar

chart.

Fig 40:

Success Rates/Proj Success Rates
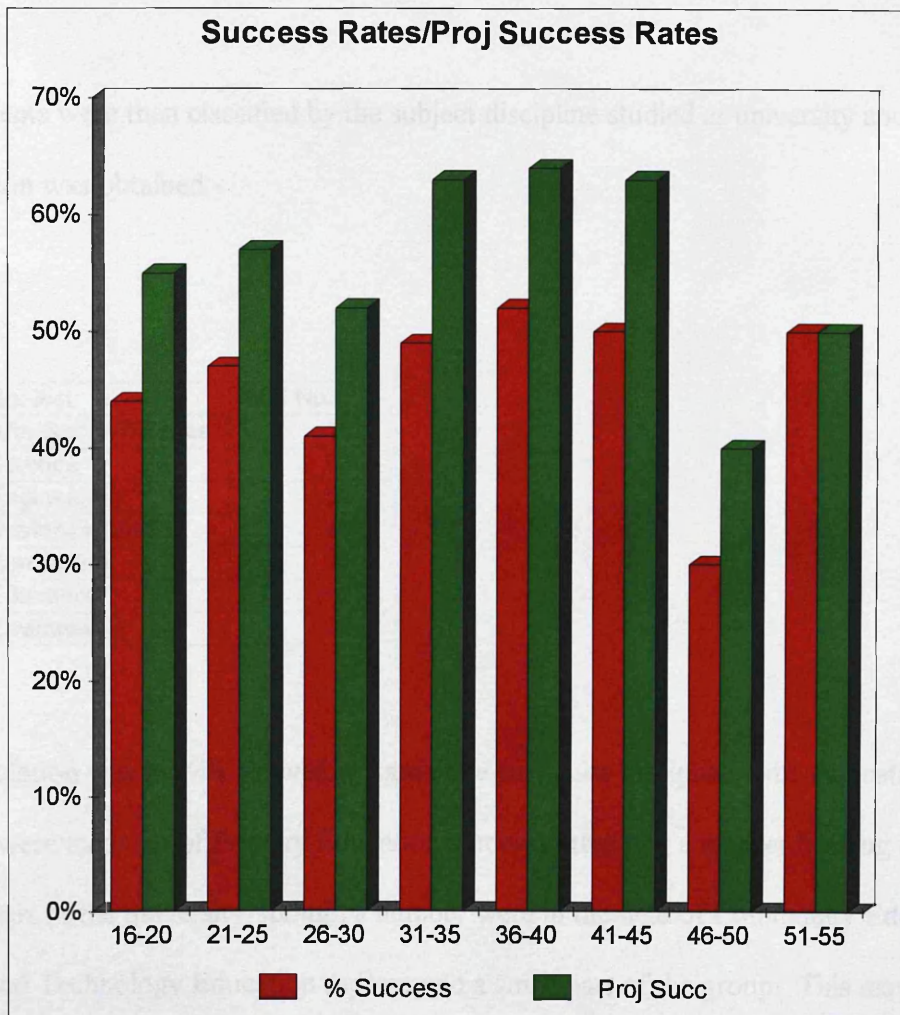
With exactly the same provisos as before with reference to sparsely populated groups, however it is

noted that the optimum performance as far as age was concerned was from the 36-40 year olds.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

It is noted that the overall levels of success seem low.

6.10 Performance by Subject Discipline.

The students were then classified by the subject discipline studied at university and the following information was obtained:-

Table 48:

Subject	Total No.
Arts/Social Science	16
Science	83
Engineering	54
Business Studies	46
Computing	23
Education	242
Environment	35

The population was heavily skewed towards one particular discipline. viz. Education. The majority of these were made up of Primary Education students attending a teacher training college which formed part of the university, though a number were in the field of Community Education and Design and Technology Education represented a small part of the group. This may be displayed as follows:-

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 41:

Subject Distribution
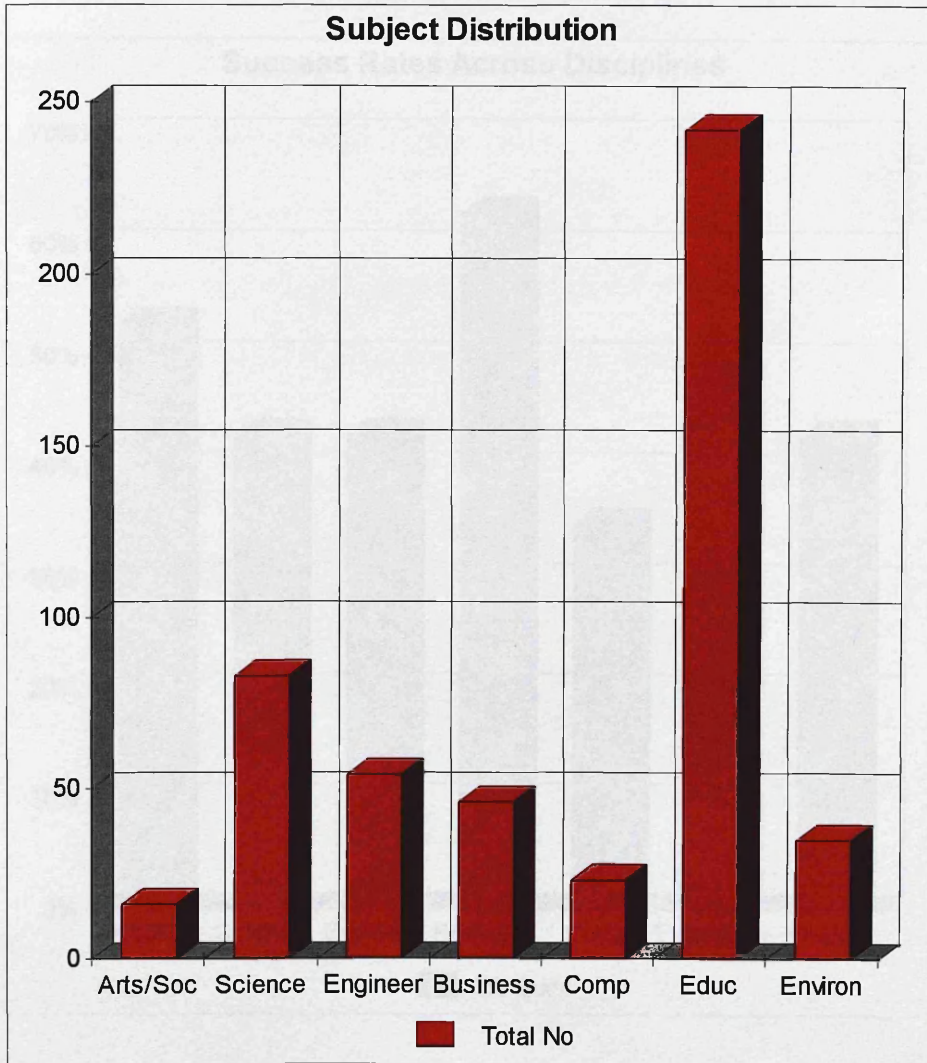
It is possible now to consider the comparative success rates for these various subject disciplines.

The actual success rates are considered in this particular chart ignoring any projected further

success. The results found were as follows:-

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 42:
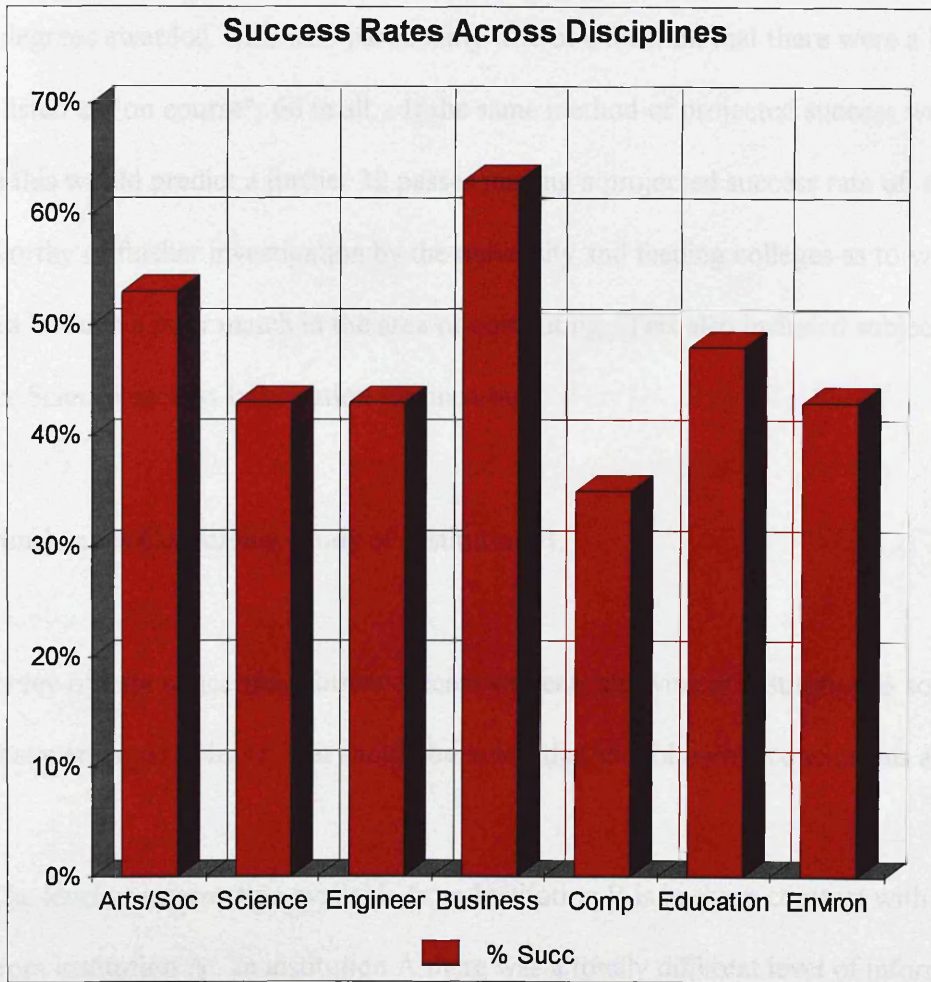
Success Rates Across Disciplines

Legend: ■ % Succ

The worst performance was in the area of computing where the success rate was only 35 percent

and the best performance was in the area of Business Studies which had a success rate of 63

percent. The other subject areas all had a similar level success around the mid 40's percent.

It is also worthy of noting that of the 242 who were studying education there were 16 first class honours degrees awarded. It is also particularly true of education that there were a large number of students listed as "on course", 66 in all. If the same method of projected success were to be used as before this would predict a further 32 passes making a projected success rate of 61%. It may also be worthy of further investigation by the university and feeding colleges as to why there appears to be such a poor match in the area of computing. This also included subjects other than Computer Science such as Information Engineering.

6.11   Conclusions Concerning Study of Institution B.

In this survey of data concerning former Access students studying in Institution B some interesting findings have emerged. However it should be noted that the following conclusions are apparent:

6.11.1 The level of information available from Institution B is in sharp contrast with that available from institution A. In institution A there was a totally different level of information available in terms of performance in thousands of individual units. When this was discussed with Institution B it was stated that it was not possible for them to supply this information.

6.11.2 The only performance indicators available in this study was gleaned from data which should properly be considered as perseverance or continuance data. i.e. it was possible to identify students who had continued their studies into an honours year.

6.11.3 There were some indications of an age related factor in the data pertaining to this university. Since certain age categories contained very small populations of former Access students they would have to be eliminated from generalisable comment. These lowly populated groups were 16-20 years, 46-50 years and 51-55 years. When these are removed from the picture, there was an optimum age group for success in attaining an honours degree. This was the 36-40 years group. However, as this could not be compared with the global picture of all students in this university, or those from other entry modes, there was limitation as to the generalisability of such information.

6.11.4 As a general statement, it could be observed that pass rates amongst former Access students at Institution B were much lower than they were in Institution A.

6.11.5 There was no identifiable cause for this discrepancy. Indeed with the limitations of the non-homogeneous nature of data across institutions, it would appear that this process of large scale gathering of information would have definite limitations in addressing the research questions raised in chapter four of this thesis.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Chapter 7.

Research into Post Access Performance in Higher National Certificate\Diploma study

7.1 The objectives of this phase of the research were as follows:

7.1.1   To examine the progression of former Access students who had left Access study to

pursue study at a Higher National Certificate or Diploma level in a number of

Further Education Colleges across Scotland.

7.1.2   To gather information chiefly through SCOTVEC records. (SCOTVEC

subsequently was superseded by SQA since this phase was completed.)

7.1.3   To determine where possible the relative performance of these former Access

students in comparison with either all students within the system, or where possible

other specific subsets of the student population. i.e. chiefly with what might be referred to as traditional entrants.

7.2   Introduction to SCOTVEC Study:

In addition to the pursuit of performance records of former Access students in the universities dealt with in the previous two chapters, it was decided to pursue the performance of those former Access students who did not enter into higher education sector at all, but perhaps followed HE study within the FE sector. The primary goal of Access programmes is to guarantee progression to higher education, not simply higher education institutions. From the beginnings of SWAP this has included higher education within the FE sector.

A fuller discussion of the growing importance of HE provision in the FECs is dealt with in chapter two. There has been a very remarkable growth in this provision throughout the period of this study. A very significant percentage of all HE provision is now centred on HN provision in FECs. This made this phase of the research of considerable interest and importance.

Partly this trend has been based upon national and local strategies and historical agreements, and partly on student demand. Following incorporation in 1993, there was an uncontrolled dramatic growth in provision as FECs determined this area as a growth market and the growth was

determined by market forces. Thus articulation into HN study in the FE sector became a viable and

growing exit route from Access study. See chapter two for fuller discussion of this.

It should be borne in mind that not all Access students are ready for degree study at the end of the

Access year and some may not view it as desirable. For many, the prospect of articulating into

university study is daunting and they would prefer to articulate into an HNC or HND option which

is seen as less demanding or threatening, and importantly a locally available provision. Many

mature students form relationships within their Further Education colleges which encourage them

to view that environment as one in which they can flourish. The very thought of articulation with

an institution filled with unknowns can be a daunting prospect. A further reason why many

students may choose this option is the difference in assessment regimes. As Access students are

unused to formal examinations, they feel more comfortable with a continuous assessment system

which they have grown used to during the Access year. This, at the moment is simply put forward

as an assertion and was subsequently investigated in focus groups. These findings are presented in

the next chapter. Undoubtedly, in many cases, Access students may very well be recruited initially

in order to articulate into programmes within the host college. This is an attractive option for the

further education college as it increases activity which attracts funding and contributes part of the

explanation of numbers of students articulating within certain colleges.

These records are now examined in this chapter. The 650 students were former Access students

who entered Access over a period from 1989 to 1994. Though these dates are not exactly the same

three cohorts as those pursued in the study in the university sector, it was decided that this should be viewed as a wholly different category of study and there was no need to restrict the search for information in this instance to the three cohorts only. Spreading this out over these 6 years maximised the quantity of data and allowed us to look more meaningfully for any overall trend. It would also more convincingly average out any variations from year to year amongst the cohorts.

7.3 Procedural Matters.

Due to the large number of students who were recorded as remaining on course, it was decided to request from SCOTVEC another search for results of 338 of these students one year later than the date of the original results pulled from the SCOTVEC computers.

7.4 Categories of Study.

Information was gathered concerning each student under the following headings:-

1. Surname.
2. First Names.
3. Access No.
4. Access Course.

5. Group Award.

6. Partial Success Index.

7. College.

8. Year of Birth.

9. Access Year.

10. Age achieved in the year that the Access year was completed.

7.5   Access Codes.

The first three pieces of information were used to clearly identify the individual concerned. It would also be a good indicator of certain other pieces of information. i.e. the Access No. would identify the colleges where the Access courses were pursued and may allow us to identify colleges where Access students were more likely to pursue Higher National study rather than degree study. There were 23 different course code prefixes identifying 23 different centres where the Access course was completed. (There was one student record without an identifying number which would not permit us to assign this student.) The spread of students per centre was examined in order to determine any trends. It made it possible to determine centres where there was a prevalence of students being supplied to Higher National study. It should of course be noted that this does not measure the percentage of students within Access programmes in these centres who articulate to Higher National study as opposed to degree study. However, it was deemed to be of general

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

interest to note the origins and destinations of the HN study group. The spread of origin was tabulated and a pie chart prepared as follows:-

Figure 43:
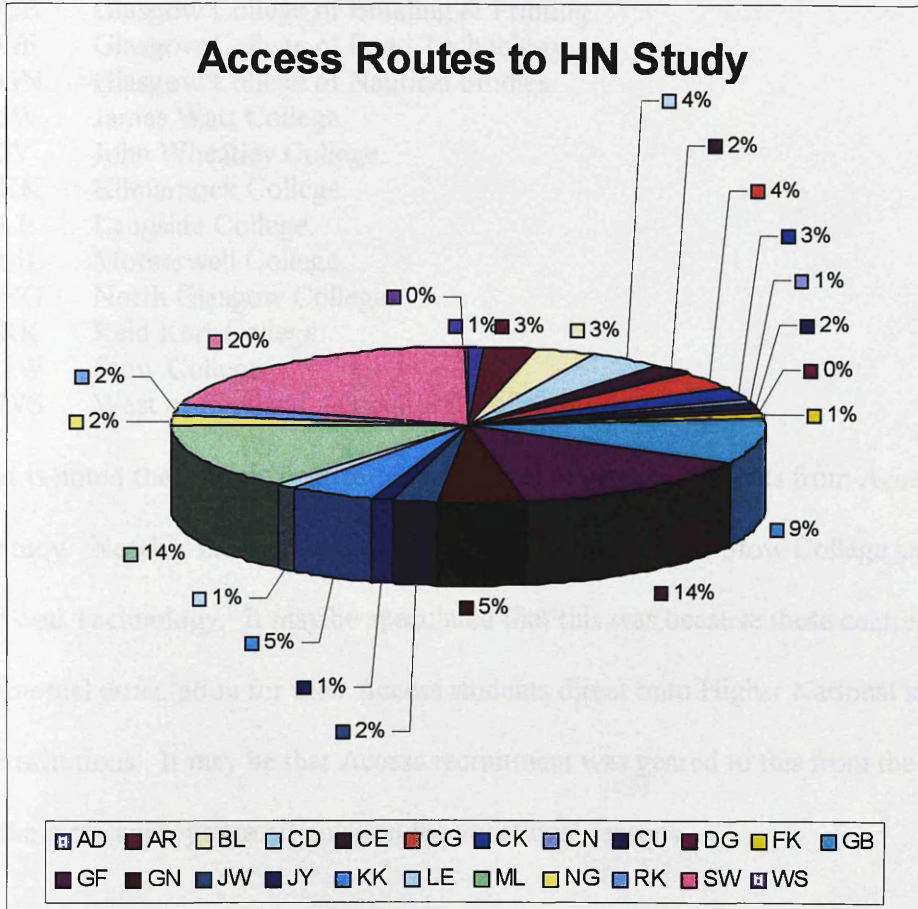
A key to the above chart is now given:-

AD   Anniesland College.
AR   Ayr College.
BL   Bell College.
CD   Cardonald College.
CE   Coatbridge College.

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CG   Cambuslang College.
CK   Clydebank College.
CN   Clackmannan College.
CU   Cumbernauld College.
DG   Dumfries & Galloway College.
FK   Falkirk College.
GB   Glasgow College of Building & Printing.
GF   Glasgow College of Food Technology.
GN   Glasgow College of Nautical Studies.
JW   James Watt College.
JY   John Wheatley College.
KK   Kilmarnock College.
LE   Langside College.
ML   Motherwell College.
NG   North Glasgow College.
RK   Reid Kerr College.
SW   Stow College.
WS   West of Scotland Agricultural College.

It is noted that certain centres predominated in sending students from Access into Higher National study. Notably these were SW and GF which represented Stow College and Glasgow College of Food Technology. It may be speculated that this was because these centres offered appropriate internal articulation for their Access students direct onto Higher National study within their institutions. It may be that Access recruitment was geared to this from the outset, or that this was the most appropriate articulation for vocational reasons.

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7.6   Access Subject Areas.

The Access Course listing may identify particular Access courses which were most likely to produce HN study. In identifying which courses were represented as producing Higher National students, it was found that the following frequencies were noted:-

Table 49.

Art & Design	5
Art & Social Science	16
Biology and Environment	2
Built Environment	148
Business	60
Design Rel	2
Engineering & Computing	39
Environmental Health	8
Food Tech	41
Health	9
Hospitality Operations	74
Information Technology	95
Maths & Computing	4
Marketing and Media	2
Nursing	1
Office Technology	13
Primary Education	8
Science and Technology	122

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Figure 44:

Subject Areas of Study
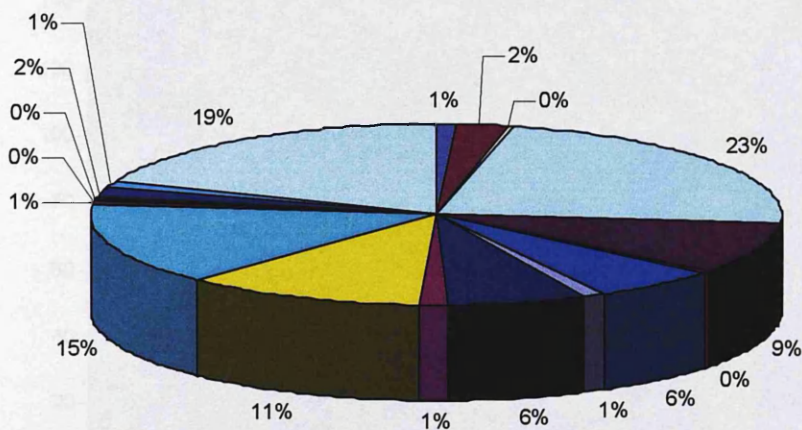
This chart may be simplified by selecting the six most common Access courses which produced students who pursued further study at HN level in the FE sector rather than articulating to the HE sector.

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Figure 45:

Most Popular HN Courses
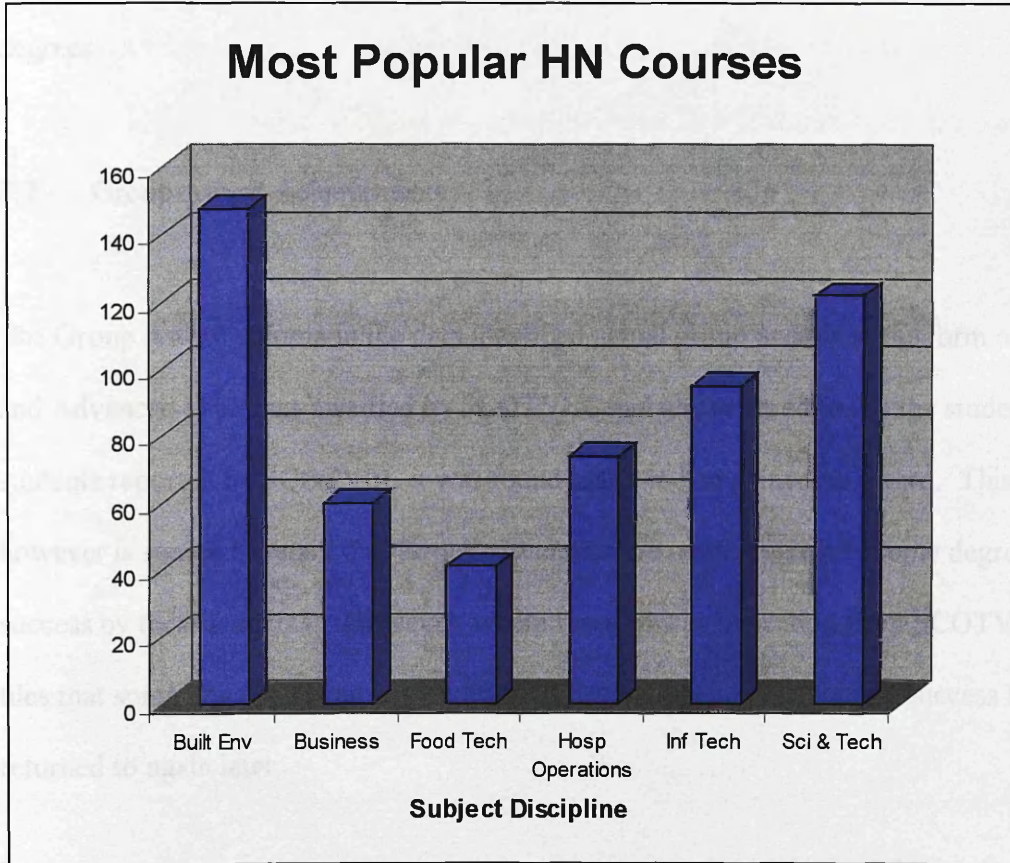
The above chart clearly shows the predominance of certain courses which produced study at Higher National level as a natural exit route. Built Environment was a clear leader with Information Technology and Science and Technology coming not far behind. The reasons for this are found in recruitment patterns in certain key vocational areas, policies at work within various FECs and the change of funding arrangements in recent years resulting in stronger internal pressures to internally articulate students. Clearly the entrance into work in certain vocational areas make HN certificates

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and diplomas, with their greater degree of vocational input more appropriate qualifications than degrees.

7.7   Group Award Achievements.

The Group Award column in the data identified actual group awards in the form of HNC's, HND's, and Advanced Diplomas awarded by SCOTVEC and already credited to the student. Of the 650 students reported by SCOTVEC it was found that 186 had gained no award. This statement however is somewhat stark and further attempts were made to identify some degree of partial success by these students. However, where there was an indication from SCOTVEC computer files that some units had been passed, this has been noted and this Partial Success Index shall be returned to again later.

There were a further 190 who had no group award recorded in the SCOTVEC files but however were described as "On Course". Some of these could eventually end up in the same category as the above students. It is also inevitable that whenever this gathering of information is done that there will be a substantial number of students in this "active" group. It is possible that results gained at college had not yet been registered with SCOTVEC or that they were in the midst of a 2 year HND programme and thus had no group award associated with them at that stage. Naturally whenever such a study is done, there will of necessity be a number of such students who are still recorded as "on course" and only partial information would be available about such. In this particular case it

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was found that of the 650 student records searched who were identified as being former Access students and who had not articulated on to University study, 190 of these were identified as currently being on course. This information was given at 5 February 1996, but manually updated where information was available as of 25 July 1996. It was further updated in March 1997.

In discussion with SCOTVEC about this matter, it was admitted that the criteria for continuing to hold someone in the category as "on course" is somewhat unclear. It was stated that SCOTVEC did not have a clear criterion for removing a student from the list. It is regarded that a student may not have achieved a group award but there is no certainty whether such a student might at some stage return to study and satisfy the requirements for such an award. There was no clear statute of limitations on when a student may be considered as having lapsed and therefore should be regarded as having ultimately failed to achieve a group award. Hence in this group of 190 students, there is likely to be a high proportion of students who are unlikely to achieve a group award. It should be noted that this was the position in March 1997 concerning students who had entered into HN level study between 1989 and 1994.

However, for a number of these students without a group award, there was information on their partial success in achieving a number of HN units credited with SCOTVEC at the time of the survey of information within the computerised records.

This left a total of 274 students out of the 650 who had already gained some kind of group award. This represents some 42% of the original population who have definitely achieved some kind of group award. Of these, there were a variety of such awards. One student had gained a certificate in electrical retailing. Ten others had achieved an Advanced Diploma. Two were credited with B.Sc. degrees, and 2 with B. Tech Ed degrees. One was described ambiguously as having a "group award" whilst another was credited with SCE's. Of the remaining, 80 had achieved an HNC and 175 had gained HND's.

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Figure 46:

Awards Gained
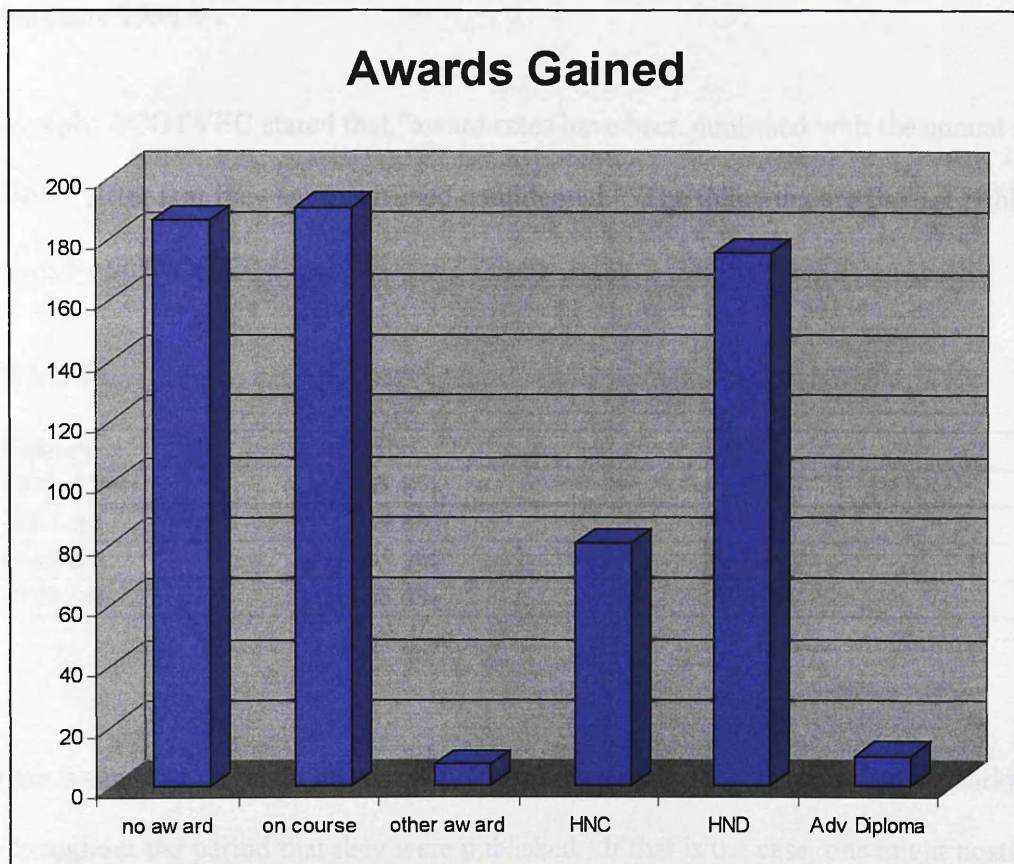
It would be of further interest to examine this level of performance with other client groups entering into Further Education. However at that time, Further Education colleges made no HESA returns and there does not appear to be a ready means of collating such, though it must be said that such data should be available on FEMIS (Further Education Management Information System) within each individual college, and certainly in the form of Annual Course Reports which are made for internal scrutiny and to assist with returns to the Scottish Office. Further, SCOTVEC were

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asked if they could supply global data for success rates for all students entering into HN study in the years 1989-94.

In reply, SCOTVEC stated that "award rates have been published with the annual reports until 1990. After that they have remained confidential." The following are the last published award rates by SCOTVEC:

Table 50.

Cohort	HNC	HND
1986-87	63.8%	65.6%
1987-88	64.6%	67.4%
1988-89	65.5%	63.8%
1989-90	66.4%	63.9%

One comment that might be passed on the above is that success rates were remarkably static throughout the period that they were published. If that is the case, one might postulate that there might not be any strong reason to imagine that they changed radically in the 1990-95 period which our data is concerned with. On a very broad sweep it might be said that these 650 ex Access students showed a 42% success level in attaining some group award. This would be a substantial drop in success rate from the inferred global figures of somewhere in the low to mid sixties percent successful.

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It was decided to approach the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department requesting

information concerning the success rates of students studying HNC's and HND's in Scotland in

order to obtain a global national figure with which to compare the group of 650 former Access

students. In view of information already received, it was decided to ask them for information on

success rates for the cohorts 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94, and 1994-95. Reply was

received from them on 8 May 1998 yielding the following information concerning the three main

cohorts which made up the greater part of this research in Higher Education. i.e. cohorts 1992-93,

1993-94 and 1994-95:-

Table 51.

	HNC	Cumulative %age Pass	HND	Cumulative %age Pass
1992-93 new enrolments	14,710		10,034	
Award gained 1992-93.	7,257	49.3	2,844	28.3
Award gained 1993-94	129	50.2	12	28.5
Award gained 1994-95	3,900	76.7	3,382	62.2
Award gained 1995-96	682	81.4	483	67.0
Award gained 1996-97	249	83.1	103	68.0

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Table 52.

	HNC	Cumulative %age Pass	HND	Cumulative %age Pass
1993-94 new enrolments	9,581		7,237	
Award gained 1993-94	4,753	48.2	1,162	16.1
Award gained 1994-95	3,286	83.9	2,995	57.4
Award gained 1995-96	521	89.3	438	63.3
Award gained 1996-97	74	90.1	47	64.1

Table 53.

	HNC	Cumulative %age Pass	HND	Cumulative %age Pass
1994-95 new enrolments	10,647		8,697	
Award gained 1994-95	5,175	48.6	1,002	11.5
Award gained 1995-96	3,299	79.6	3,129	47.5
Award gained 1996-97	584	85.1	516	53.4

These global figures provided an adequate basis on which to compare the success rates of the 650 students who left Access programmes to pursue Higher National level study in the Further Education sector. It is also instructive to note the time lag which is typical for all successes to be

recorded. This is a somewhat surprising result and sheds light on the reduced level of success noted on the 1994-95 cohort of the 650 ex-Access students.

It is noticeable that the global figures for percentage success in higher national programmes is substantially higher than the 42% success rate gained by the former Access students. The result in 1994-95 for the former Access students was radically different from the previous years and may be due to the fact that these figures may not have become as complete as previous years due to students still pursuing their studies. i.e. the "on course" problem discussed earlier.

In all previous years the Access performance compared to the global average was some 20% lower. The reasons for this may be diverse. It may be postulated that those Access students who decide to pursue study in the FE sector may be regarded as those least confident or perhaps least able to pursue study at University. They may well have regarded themselves as least prepared to do so. Hence it may not be so surprising that the performance level in this group may be shown to be somewhat lower than might be hoped and substantially lower than would appear to be the case amongst those former Access students who did articulate directly into the HE sector. This was to be investigated further in the focus groups, recounted in chapter eight.

Gallacher (2004, p17) stated that more recent figures continued to bear this feature out. His figures pertained to 2000-01, and stated that,

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"However, on the basis of data available from SFEFC it would appear that in 2000-01, 58% of HNC students and 54% of HND students passed. While these completion rates are relatively low, it should be noted that there is evidence that in institutions which admit a heterogeneous student population, many of whom do not have the traditional qualifications required for entry to higher education, completion rates are generally lower than in those institutions which select students on the basis of high academic achievement".

Bearing in mind the time lag for achievement in HN studies referred to earlier, Gallacher's figures for the later cohort are in broad agreement with the patterns seen earlier.

This finding may be of substantial interest to FE colleges as retention and other success indicators become increasingly important through being linked to funding (Scottish Executive 2003). The Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC) have put in place increasingly more sophisticated means of tracking, retention, success and achievement ratios and these have become defined as performance indicators for the FE sector. These ratios have had to be calculated for each course by course administrators and managers and have formed part of the Annual Course Report returned to the Quality Assurance Officer and Senior Management Team of each college. Thence these formed part of the Further Education Statistics (FES) return for each college.

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SFEFC (2001) is a typical circular letter from SFEFC and illustrates the funding council's need to monitor performance indicators such as Post Course Success Ratio (PCSR), Student Programme Achievement Rate (SPAR) and Student Acheivement Rate by Assessment Credits of Learning (SARU). Definitions of these measurements of performance, success and retention were derived in consultation with the sector.

Given the incentivisation instigated by the funding bodies, the results of this analysis must be of considerable interest to colleges. However, there is nothing in this set of data which will shed light on the reasons why the performance or success rates should be substantially lower than in Institutions A (university studied in chapter 5) or B (the university studied in chapter 6) Success rates in Institution B were lower than in Institution A, but these students showed a substantially lower success rate than either. It is also noted that this result is not what might have been predicted, since the academic rigour of the courses would be less demanding than that of degree study. Also, these students should have had a "comfort factor" in continuing their studies within the Further Education Sector since it was there that they completed their Access courses successfully.

7.8   Partial Success Index.

The Partial Success Index was constructed from all the information made available on each student's record of acquiring of Higher National units. This information was sometimes available

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for students who had completed their courses and gained awards, or who were still on course, or who had finished their courses but had not been credited with a group award. The easiest way to analyse this information is simply to look at all students for whom information was given about partial success, ignoring for the moment whether such a student had in fact completed a group award or not. It is impossible to keep track of all loose ends and some criteria for analysis must be chosen. Hence this might include those who had no group award but were on course for a higher award.

Of the whole group, there was no information on 161 of the students as to number of units passed. This number is uncomfortably large but unavoidable and seemingly irreducible. It is seen as a limitation on the recoverable information. The results were as follows:-

Table 54:

No information	161
0	21
0.5	2
1	15
1.5	3
2	7
2.5	1
3	7
3.5	4
4	12
4.5	1
5	6
5.5	4
6	11
6.5	3

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7	9
7.5	1
8	15
8.5	1
9	15
9.5	0
10	12
10.5	2
11	5
11.5	0
12	50
12.5	4
13	10
13.5	2
14	23
14.5	1
15	18
15.5	2
16	7
16.5	1
17	1
17.5	0
18	5
18.5	0
19	0
19.5	1
20	2
20.5	1
21	2
21.5	2
22	0
22.5	0
23	0
23.5	0
24	1
24.5	0
25	2
25.5	0
26	2

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26.5	1
27	3
27.5	1
28	2
28.5	2
29	2
29.5	0
30	182
30.5	1
34	1
35	1

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 47:
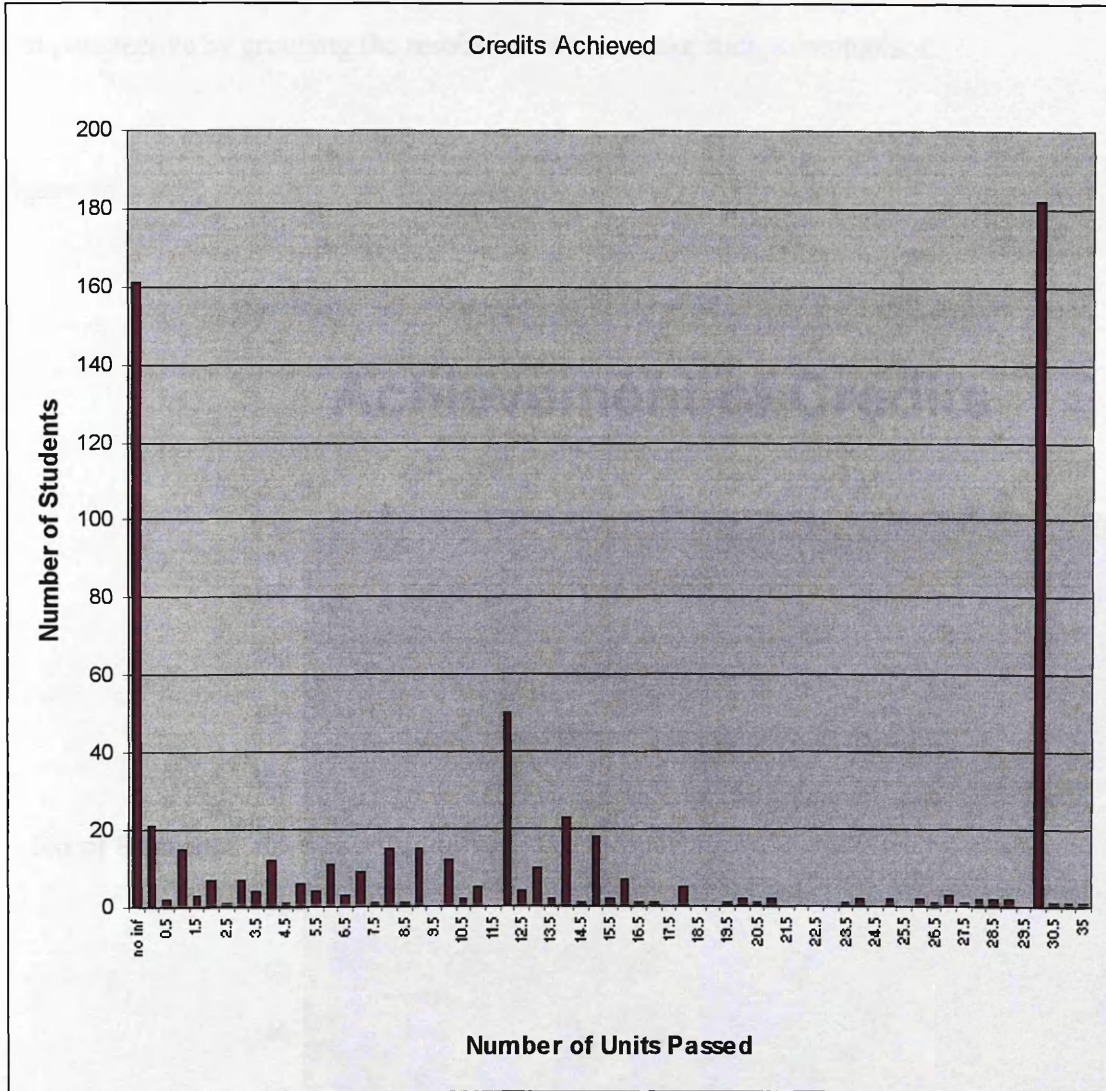
On this chart there is a spread of results ranging from 0 credits all the way up to 30 credits.

However it is noted that the amount of detail required is too great to make a successful

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

representation and it is difficult to accommodate in one chart. Hence it was necessary to get this into perspective by grouping the results in order to make such a comparison.

Figure 48:
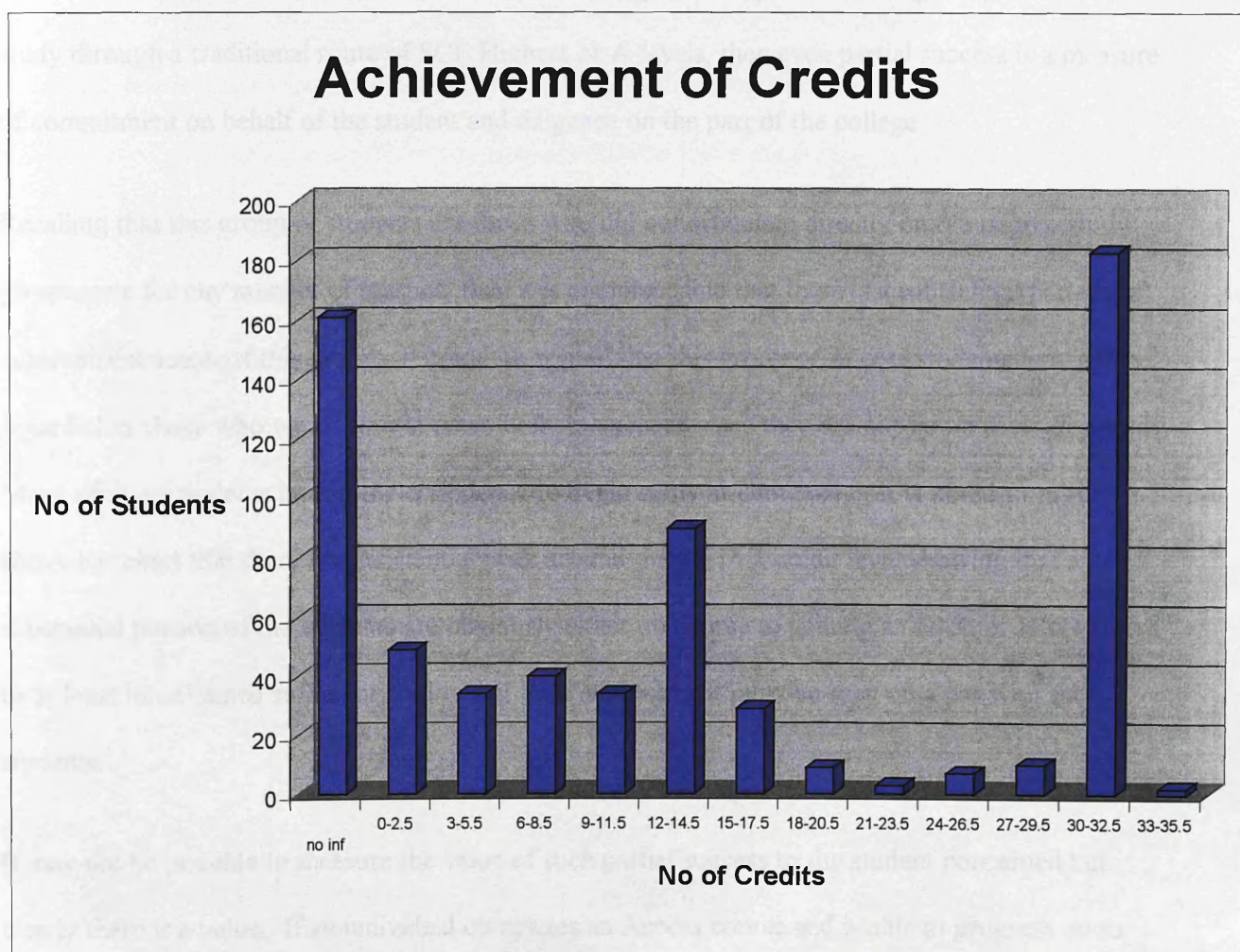
Achievement of Credits

No of Students, ranging from 0 to 200, plotted against No of Credits with categories: no inf, 0-2.5, 3-5.5, 6-8.5, 9-11.5, 12-14.5, 15-17.5, 18-20.5, 21-23.5, 24-26.5, 27-29.5, 30-32.5, 33-35.5

It should be noted that even in cases where no group award has been gained that there are many cases of partial success in Higher National programmes of study. Although this may not be completely satisfying to institutions providing such programmes, nevertheless the "added value" to such students should be taken into account. i.e. Remembering that Access students are learners who could be regarded as being educationally handicapped through not arriving at higher level study through a traditional route of SCE Highers or A-levels, then even partial success is a measure of commitment on behalf of the student and diligence on the part of the college.

Recalling that this group of students are those who did not articulate directly onto a degree study programme for any number of reasons, then it is commendable that there is a substantial pattern of achievement amongst this group. It could be argued that this group of Access students may not be regarded as those who were thought most likely to succeed since they did not go on to degree study. Many of these students lacked the confidence to begin study at University. It is noted from the above bar chart that there is a substantial peak around the 12-14.5 credit level showing that a substantial portion of the students are obviously either on course to gaining an HNC or HND award or at least have gained sufficient credits that their achievement must be seen on a par with such students.

It may not be possible to measure the value of such partial success to the student concerned but clearly there is a value. If an individual completes an Access course and is able to progress on to

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HN level study, then success in achieving Higher National units should be accorded a value of some kind to the student.

7.9   Merits Achieved.

Another means of examining the successes of these former Access students is to note wherein merits are achieved as a measure of excellence in Higher National Unit study. As is widely understood, there is no grade attached to Higher National Units under the SCOTVEC system. i.e. There is no assigning of A, B, C, or D grades to the units. However, there is some degree of grading in that merits in the unit may also be awarded for excellence in the work of the student. The criteria for awarding such "merit" passes varies from course to course and even sometimes from unit to unit within a prescribed programme. At one time, one commonly used criterion which , accompanied by other criteria, was passing the Learning Outcomes at the first attempt. Latterly, SCOTVEC and thence SQA policy prohibited this for all future descriptors. However, to generalise, merit awards are granted in cases where the work of the student is seen to exceed that which was necessary simply to pass the unit. Often this involved work which indicated an ability to integrate learning from various parts of the unit, or to apply the performance criteria in different contexts. Thus, the one area that may allow an examination of performance rather than progression was in the area of merits granted.

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It should be noted that there was less than complete confidence that the SCOTVEC records were accurate in this regard, and that all merit passes had been noted in the computer record. However, perhaps some broad indication could be gained from the information.
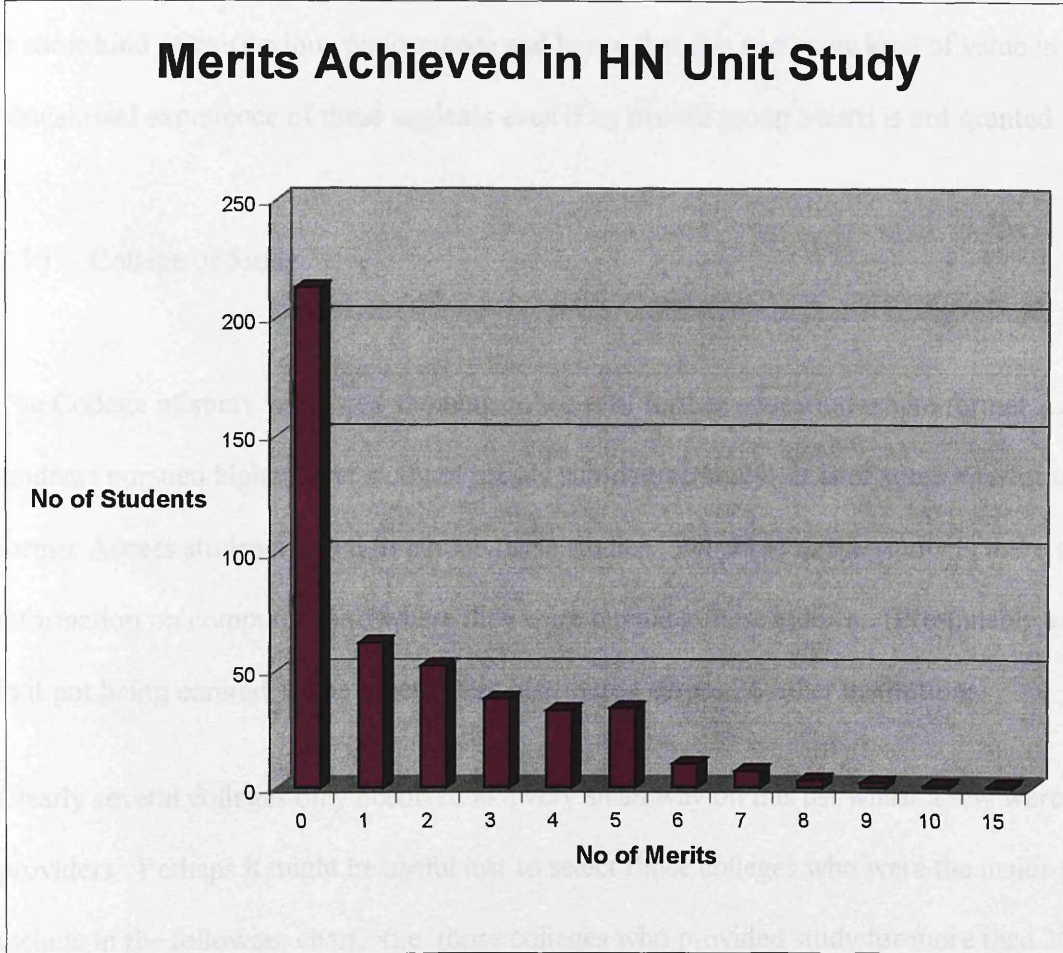
Of the 650 students in the population examined 194 had insufficient records in the system to determine whether merits had been granted or not. (i.e. 29.8% had insufficient information.) Hence these are excluded from the analysis at this stage and examine the remaining cases where information is available. It should be remembered that a number of the units over which a merit was gained had in fact a credit value of more than one and sometimes up to three. Hence the total number of merits should not just be deducted from the total number of credits to make up an HNC or HND. Hence a merit in a triple credit rating unit should be accorded added value. No attempt here is being made to distinguish between a merit in a single credit and a merit in a greater weighted unit. The findings were as follows:-

Table 55:

0	213
1	62
2	52
3	38
4	33
5	34
6	10
7	7
8	3
9	2
10	1
15	1

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Figure 49:

Merits Achieved in HN Unit Study

No of Students

| 250 |
| 200 |
| 150 |
| 100 |
| 50 |
| 0 |

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 15

No of Merits

The percentage distribution is that 47% gained no merits, 13.6% attained one merit, 11.4% two merits, 8.3% three merits, 7.2% four merits, 7.5% 5 merits, 2.2% six merits, 1.5% seven merits, and 0.7% eight merits and 0.4% nine merits.

Clearly there were significant levels of attainment of merit amongst these students, 53% of those students concerning whom there is information that they achieved at least one merit. This included

a substantial number of students who did not attain a group award. Again it is concluded that there is some kind of meritorious performance and hence that this had some kind of value in the educational experience of these students even if an overall group award is not granted.

7.10   College of Study.

The College of study was listed showing colleges of further education where former Access students pursued higher level study of mainly sub-degree study. It is of some interest to see where former Access students opted to pursue these studies. For three of the students there was no information on computer as to where they were pursuing these studies. (Presumably an oversight in it not being entered.) The others were distributed across 26 other institutions.

Clearly several colleges only occurred in a very small way on this list whilst a few were the major providers. Perhaps it might be useful just to select those colleges who were the major providers to include in the following chart. (i.e. those colleges who provided study for more than 30 of these students.)

The distribution was as follows:-

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Table 56:

Stow	123
GCFT	102
College Building & Printing	75
Motherwell	65
Bell	61
Cardonald	31

The following abbreviations hold:-

Stow = Stow College.

GCFT= Glasgow College of Food Technology.
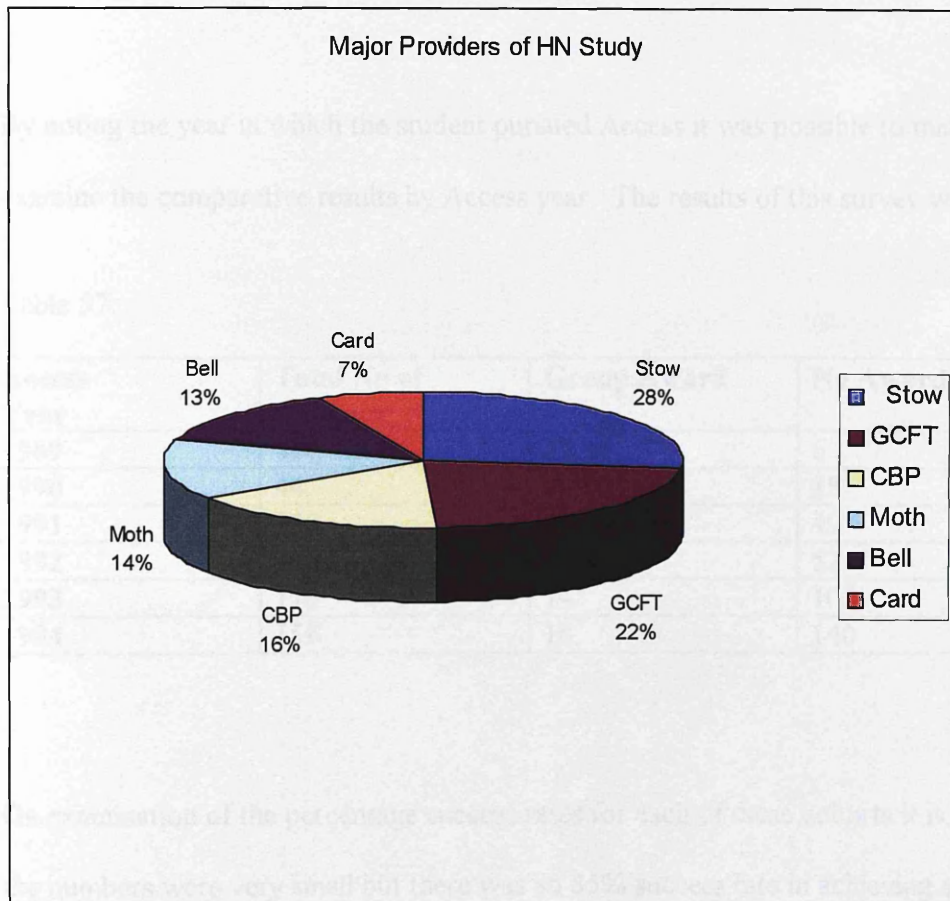
CBP= College of Building & Printing.

Moth = Motherwell College.

Bell= Bell College.

Card= Cardonald College.

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Figure 50:

Major Providers of HN Study

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7.11   Access Year.

By noting the year in which the student pursued Access it was possible to make some attempt to examine the comparative results by Access year. The results of this survey were very interesting:-

Table 57:

Access Year	Total No of Students	Group Award	No Award
1989	41	35	6
1990	44	26	18
1991	100	51	49
1992	130	78	52
1993	176	74	102
1994	158	18	140

On examination of the percentage success rates for each of these cohorts it is found that in 1989, the numbers were very small but there was an 85% success rate in achieving some group award. In 1990, the numbers were similarly small but the success rate was then 59%. In 1991, the numbers for the first time reached 100 and the success rate was 51%. In 1992, there were 130 students and the success rate was 60%. In 1993 there was the largest number of students involved in HN study, 176 in total and the success rate was down to 42%. However it must be said that the most remarkable result was that in the 1994 cohort where there were a grand total of 158 students but

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only 11.4% successful in achieving a group award. This may be demonstrated in the following chart:

Figure 51:
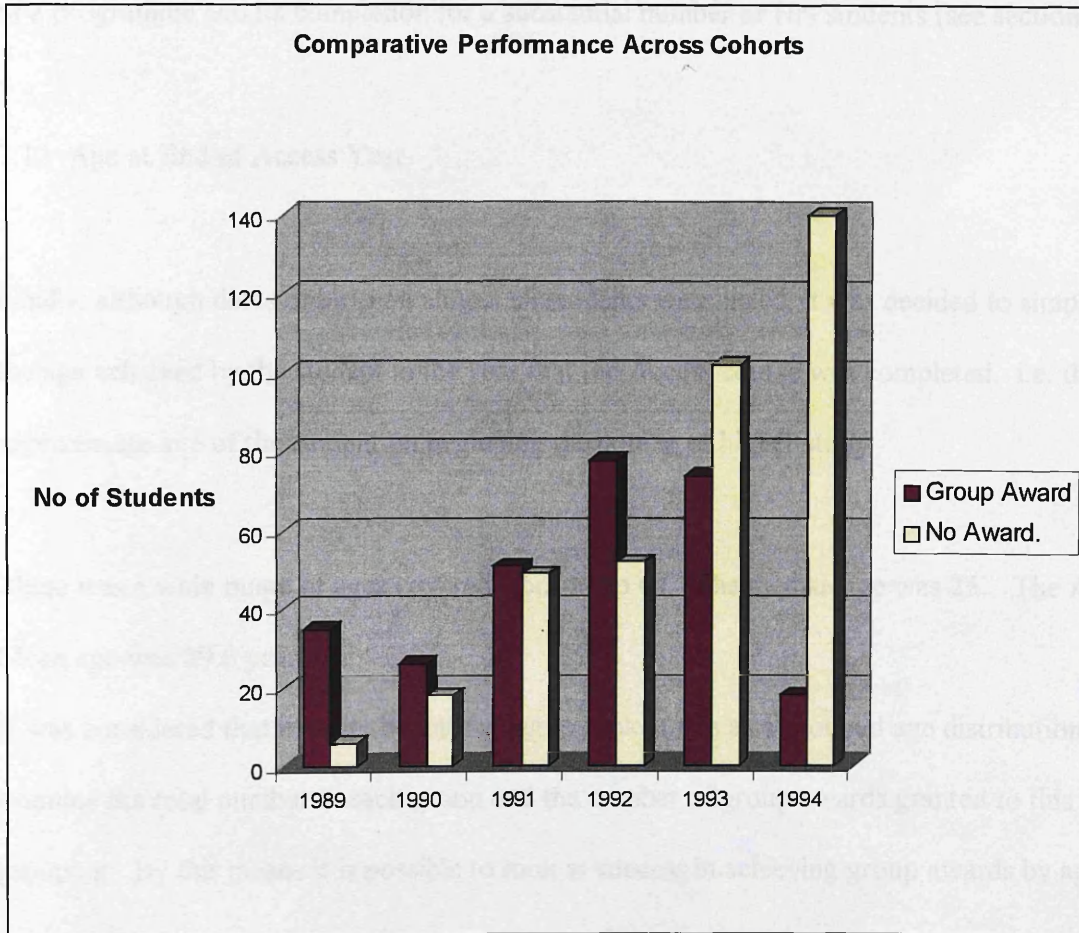
On first examination, the 1994 figures looked somewhat alarming. However, perhaps it should be recalled that if any of the cohorts examined were likely to be unfinished at that time of writing it would be the 1994 cohort and it must be assumed that this constitutes the greatest number of

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students yet to complete and achieve a group award. In fact of the 158 students in the 1994 group, 88 were listed as "on course". This represented some 56% of the group. It should be recalled that in the figures produced by the SOEID, there was a substantial time delay in between the beginning of a programme and its completion for a substantial number of HN students (see section 7.7).

7.12 Age at End of Access Year.

Finally, although dates of birth on almost all students were listed, it was decided to simplify this to the age achieved by the student in the year that the Access course was completed. i.e. the approximate age of the student on beginning the course of higher study.

There was a wide range of ages covered from 17 to 64. The median age was 25. The Arithmetic Mean age was 29.6 years.

It was considered that it might be interesting to look at this as a grouped age distribution and to examine the total number in each group and the number of group awards granted to this age grouping. By this means it is possible to look at success in achieving group awards by age.

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Table 58:

Age	Total No	No of Group Awards
<21 yr	40	8
21-25	182	67
26-30	174	82
31-35	109	49
36-40	80	34
41-45	31	15
46-50	14	8
51-55	4	3
55+	1	1

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Institutions.

Figure 52:
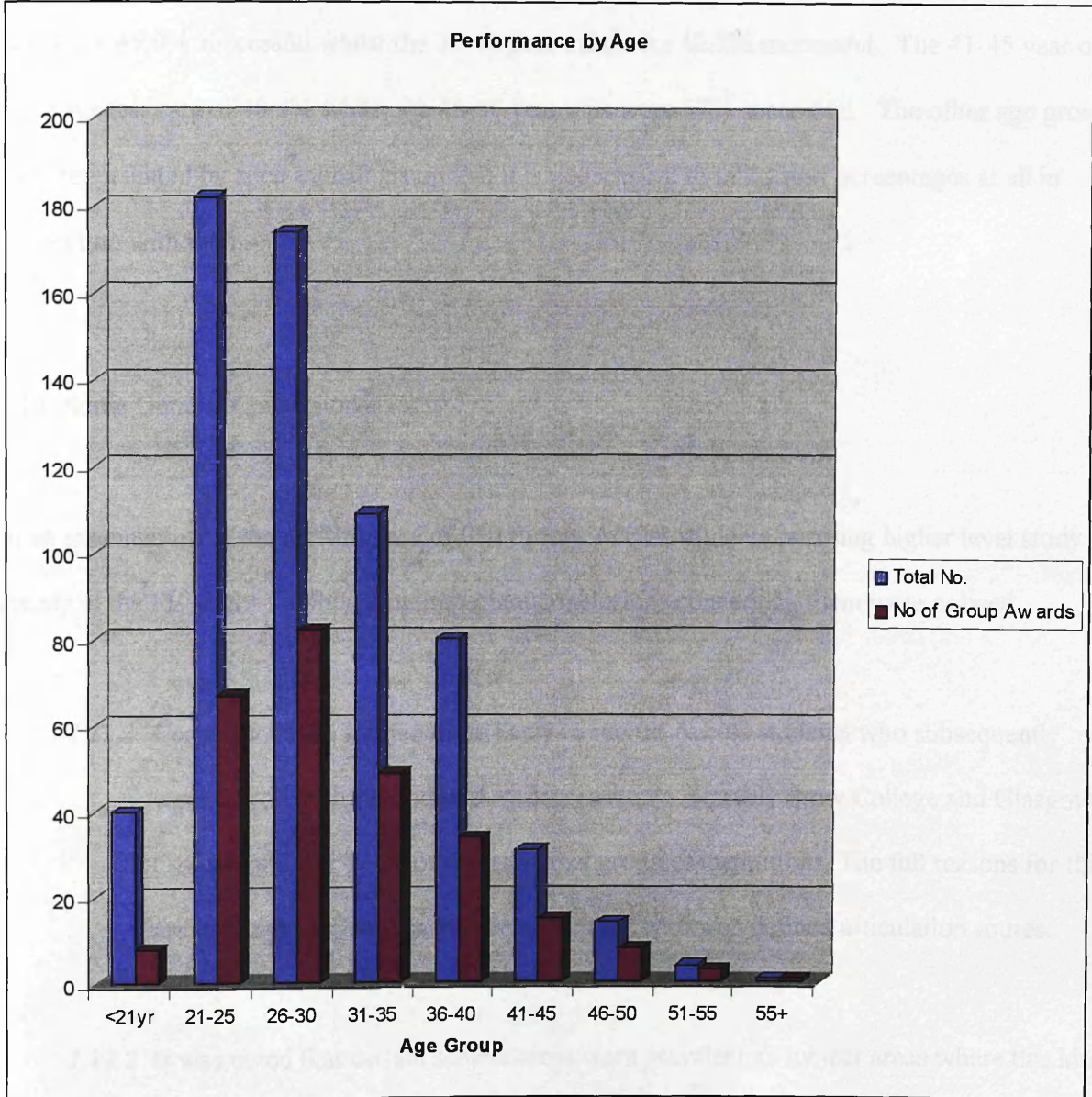
Performance by Age

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In the above, the under 21's were 20% successful in achieving a group award, whilst the 21-25 year old age group were 36.8% successful. The 26-30 year olds were 47% successful. The 31-35 year olds were 45.0% successful whilst the 36-40 year olds were 42.5% successful. The 41-45 year olds had a success rate of 48.4% whilst the 46-50 year olds were 57% successful. The other age groups were represented by such a small group that it is nonsensical to talk about percentages at all in connection with them.

7.13 Some General Conclusions.

In an examination of the performance of 650 former Access students pursuing higher level study mainly in the FE sector the following important conclusions concerning them were noticed.

7.13.1 Certain colleges seemed more likely to recruit Access students who subsequently went on to HN study rather than degree study. Notably Stow College and Glasgow College of Food Technology led in this group of institutions. The full reasons for this are not entirely clear but may be associated with well defined articulation routes.

7.13.2 It was noted that certain subject areas were prevalent as subject areas where this kind of HN articulation proliferated. The largest sectors noted were the Built Environment,

Science and Technology and Information Technology. These were followed by

Hospitality Operations, Business and Food Technology.

7.13.3 It was found that in studying the success rates of the 650 students who studied over a

period of some years some 42% were successful in achieving some group award.

7.13.4 It was found in comparing this with figures released by SCOTVEC before they began

to consider such information restricted, and the more recent information derived from

the Scottish Office that this was typically 20% less than the success rate for the global

figure of all students in Scotland being entered for such awards.

7.13.5 It should be noted that even in cases where no group award has been gained that there

are many cases of partial success in Higher National programmes of study. i.e. There

were many of these students who although not achieving a group award, did in fact

achieve success in a number and in some cases a substantial number of HN units. It

may be considered that there is some value to this as an educational experience. i.e.

That even partial success is a measure of commitment on behalf of the student and

due diligence on the part of the college.

7.13.6 Looking at the achievement of merits was one way in which performance could be examined rather than just progression in study. On making an examination of the achievement of merits in HN unit study, it was found that there were significant levels of attainment of merit amongst these students, 53% of those students concerning whom information is available achieved at least one merit. This included a substantial number of students who did not attain a group award. Again it must be concluded that there is some kind of value in the educational experience of these students even if an overall group award is not granted.

7.13.7 It was possible to examine performance by cohort of these former Access students to search for any trend across the years of Access running. The success rates fluctuated from 85% successful (with very small numbers in 1989) down to 42% successful in 1993. There was however a figure of 11.4% success in 1994 which was greatly tempered by the large number of people who remained on course at the time of sampling. The only overall observation that might be made is that there is considerable fluctuation from year to year.

7.13.8 There was an interesting finding with reference to performance when considered with reference to the age of the Access students when entering into HN level study. The very youngest in the group (age less than 21) did not perform as well as their more

mature counterparts. The figures for performance by age were, the under 21's were 20% successful in achieving a group award, whilst the 21-25 year old age group were 36.8% successful. The 26-30 year olds were 47% successful. The 31-35 year olds were 45.0% successful whilst the 36-40 year olds were 42.5% successful. The 41-45 year olds had a success rate of 48.4% whilst the 46-50 year olds were 57% successful. (note this is for a small sample). The other age groups were represented by such a small group that it is nonsensical to talk about percentages at all in connection with them. If the 46-50 year olds were discounted since the sample was so small, it is noted that there is a peak level of performance after the age of 25, and those who were over the age of 30 made comparatively more successful students. It is clear that Access courses as a means of entry for lower age groupings is not as successful for students in this study, and of course, Access was never designed as an appropriate articulation route for such students.

Chapter 8.

Qualitative Phase of Research.

8.1   Introductory Matters.

Research thus far has suggested certain conclusions:

8.1.1   That performance and progression varied widely from institution to institution.

8.1.2   That in a comparison of Institution A (chapter 5), Institution B (chapter 6), and 650 sub-
        degree students in 26 FECs, there was a great variability of performance, the worst success
        rate being found in the FECs.

8.1.3   That the reasons for such variability are not entirely clear. This matter was discussed in the
        literature search (chapter two), and a postulation of a theoretical construct was suggested.
        This construct could only be tested by qualitative approaches in which the learning world of
        the individual learner is explored and opportunity given for narrative from the learning
        experience of individual learners.

8.1.4   That there was a considerable difference in performance between former Access students pursuing HN level study in the FE sector and former Access students studying degree level courses in HE sector. The reasons for this were unclear.

It was decided as a result to investigate this discrepancy as an intermediary stage between the quantitative work and any individual interviews with learners.

8.2   Reasons for Discrepancies Between Former Access Performance and Global Performance.

It may be instructive to pose the question why there seemed to be such a discrepancy between success rates among these 650 former Access students and the global figure of all HN entrants in Scotland. Certain anecdotal reasons could be postulated for the lower level of performance amongst former Access students and the global picture of performance amidst all entrants to HNC or HND study.

These all hinge on why Access students may choose to pursue HNC/HND study in preference to pursuance of degree study at University. Reasons for pursuance of higher education within the further education sector may be postulated to include:-

a) Advised to do so by staff in the Further Education College.

b) Lack of confidence on the part of the student.

c) Geographical considerations which have become important due to child care, other domestic responsibilities, or travel costs. FECs are mainly situated close to areas of social deprivation, and hence close to areas where a proportion of Access students are domiciled.

d) Travel arrangements associated with the above.

e) Familiarity with the assessment regime in FE and lack of familiarity with assessment regime in university. (i.e. It has often been observed that Access students lack examination practice due to exclusive use of continuous assessment within Access programmes.)

f) Lack of ability or opportunity to complete the Access programme in its entirety leading to articulation restrictions for certain individual students.

g) Unwillingness to commit to a programme that lasts for three years or more. Domestic responsibilities for many Access students limit their willingness or ability to commit to a programme of more than one year at a time. HN study would allow convenient jumping off points at the end of each year of study.

Given all of the above it is difficult to postulate with any confidence which of the above, or perhaps some other reason as yet not identified would affect the decision of students to opt for study in an FE rather than HE institution.

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If, for example, it were to be demonstrable that students selected HN study in preference to degree study because they were advised to do so by their tutors in Access, because such tutors had reservations about the ability of the student to pursue degree study successfully... or, the students ruled themselves out of degree study because they were not confident about their ability to pursue degree study, then it might not be surprising that student cohorts made up in such a way would have a lower performance record than the global norm.

It becomes important then to discover if former Access students pursuing Higher National Certificates or Diplomas choose that option for reasons which are academic rather than geographical, sociological, domestic, psychological or some other reason.

Because of the nature of this phase of the study, in that it examines the performance of students over a period of several years, and that it is broadly larger scale in attempting to look at the performance of some 650 students then it would be difficult to now go back and ask what governed the choices of these 650. Indeed since this sample population is taken over a number of years it would be doubtful if it would be possible to find all of these students now to ask. It was deemed that an attempt at polling these by questionnaire is unlikely to be particularly successful.

8.3   Factors Affecting Articulation Choices of Current Choosers: Focus Group Operational

Matters.

Hence a different approach at triangulation might be to investigate "current choosers". i.e. It was

feasible to ask a group of current Access students nearing the end of their Access year what choices

they are making with reference to articulation route and why they are making such choices. What

factors are involved in that choice?

The method of investigation was a focus group with current Access students. A description of a

pilot focus group session is described in chapter 4.

8.4   Findings from the focus group.

Current choosers were first asked to identify the various articulation routes they had considered or

that they considered may be open to them. All of these were written on post-it labels. The group

were issued with 4 post-its each but were told that there was no necessity to use all four and if they

needed more than four these could be supplied. The group were then invited to arrange all of the

post-its into classifications, and the group came up with the following categories for their

responses:-

      1.   Miscellaneous.
      2.   Vocational Study.
      3.   HNC or HND study.
      4.   Degree study.
      5.   Job.

They were also asked to consider what reasons were likely to lead them to choose one of these

particular options. Hence the focus group were being asked to identify what the options were and

also to identify what the main arguments would be for choosing one of these options.

Under these headings , the following were listed:-

1.   Miscellaneous category included statements such as,

        "defer for one year due to child care considerations",

        "don't know because uncertain what the result of Access course is likely to

        be",

        "no decision made yet though HNC/D under consideration and degree also

        under consideration".

This student added the words "more vocational" after the HNC/D and "more academic" after the

degree option. Another student response was virtually identical to this one.

2.   Under the heading Vocational study, there were seven responses.   The following is a summary of the student comments:

> "more choice of subject study: easier access"
>
> "larger grant paid than for degree (nursing)"
>
> "more practical experience- less is dependant on exams"
>
> "vocational ambition"
>
> "vocational suits" (further explanation on this was sought and by it the student meant that vocational study suited their desired articulation into work)
>
> "Nursing Diploma: larger grant available, more practical course studies, at Glasgow Caledonian University which is close for travel"
>
> "Nursing has always been my ambition… degree course is too long and intense. More practical experience with diploma."

3.   HNC/HND study was the third category identified.   Under this heading there were five student responses.   The five responses identified the following reasons for possibly making this choice:

> "continual assessment- some with work placement experience"
>
> "shorter course time"
>
> "not as demanding as a degree"

"suits best for family commitment"

"gradual progression"

The kind of arguments being stated by this group of current choosers seemed to include certain themes. Clearly mode of assessment figures in their thinking. The idea of exams, which are not necessarily part of their Access experience is something which causes them much uncertainty and concern. Also financial considerations loom large. And clearly for some people well-defined vocational articulation routes are the chief reason for their choices. Of the five responses above it is seen that three of these concerned the difficulty of degree study or the assessment of degree study. HN study was perceived to be not as difficult, or not as demanding. It was thought of as being more gradual. Continual assessment presumably means continuous assessment instead of end-of-course exams. The remaining two responses seem to reflect more on family commitments. There was a feeling that it was not always easy to commit to a three-year plan economically whereas a one year commitment was seen as more manageable. And hence HNC/D might suit better in terms of family commitments for this reason as well as perhaps for geographical reasons.

4. The fourth category was degree study. There were thirteen responses noted in this category. Each response identified reasons for choosing degree study as an option over HNC/HND or some other choice. Two of these responses simply said, "better qualifications". Three

further indicated the reason was "Better employment prospects". One student listed, "personal confidence in your academic skills". By this, the student was identifying that the more confident you were as a student the more likely you were to choose degree study. A further response said, "Tutor confidence in your academic skills". i.e. By this they meant the confidence of the Access tutor(s) had that the student would be successful in degree study. It would seem reasonable that the converse of this may also be regarded as true. Four further responses identified individual specific degree programmes that students had identified that they wished to follow. One of these was a degree in Child Psychology. A further was a Biomedical Science degree, another a Computer Engineering degree, and the last was a part time degree leading eventually to teaching qualification. One further response indicated that this route was "a way of changing your career". The last response indicated that the degree route was seen as a "straight route." This student evidently considered that there were other articulation routes that involved intermediate steps but this was the most direct route to a degree.

5.   The final category of choice was job. There were six responses under this heading. Five of the six responses indicated that the reason for choosing this option would be financial. In discussion it was made clear that mature students do have financial and family responsibilities and hence a decision to study can be a costly one. If the job route were to be chosen it would seem that the chief reason for choosing it would be financial. The one

remaining response indicated that the job route might be chosen if the right job offer came up at that moment.

6.   As the members of the group were nearing the end of their Access year, they were asked to state what their final choice of articulation was, based on the reasons they had given earlier.

- 7 identified degree study as their chosen path

- 2 indicated that they would pursue work options

- 3 could be classified as miscellaneous as they wrote (defer studies for 1 year, don't know, evening classes)

- 5 indicated that they had opted for HNC/HND study

- 6 indicated that they had opted for a vocational diploma of some kind. (some of these indicated that in their case this was a nursing diploma).

The findings from the focus group were that the reasons for choosing HN study were complex and made up of a mix of different motivations including, academic, learning approaches, geography, economics, social factors, domestic factors and vocational factors. There may be occasions when the less academically able were steered in the direction of HN study by lecturers or guidance staff but this was not by any means a generalisable statement. The situation was much more complex than that.

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Hence the reasons for low performance are unclear from this study. Other factors must be sought which govern or affect the learning performance of these students not yet revealed by this approach.

This study has thus suggested the need for a model of learning to cover these wide variations in learner performance from institution to institution and from HE sector to FE sector. It was also clear that the reasons for such variations were not simple but complex. The variables were numerous, as were the variability in quality of data available. Focus groups failed to determine a clear distinction between former Access students who pursued HN study in FECs and those who pursued degree study in HEIs. Further the literature review suggested that it might be more instructive to consider mature learner performance as part of a socially embedded activity.

As the quantitative phase of research brought up findings that failed to suggest a model to explain student retention and performance, it was decided to pursue a series of student interviews with former Access students now studying higher education courses. Two universities and one further education college were selected and a series of interviews conducted with six students from each institution. University C was a new university and former polytechnic in the West of Scotland. University A was an older university and College D was a Further Education college offering a wide range of higher education courses, chiefly in the form of HNC and HND qualifications in a wide range of subjects.

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This phase of the research was designed to ascertain the usefulness of the model suggested at the end of chapter two. This suggested that a key element in the learning experience of the student is the presence or absence of supportive relationships, which enhance or undermine the identity transformation of the learner.

8.5   Pilot Interviews.

It was decided to perform a number of pilot interviews in the first instance with former Access students engaged in their third year of degree study at a West of Scotland university. All were mature students and all happened to be female.

The following demographic information pertained to those participating in the pilot interview schedule.

Table 59:

Student	Gender	Age	Household Income	Ethnic Background	Disability	First in household to study
PC002	F	46	40-60k	white	none	info not sought
PC005	F	42	20-40k	white	none	info not sought
PC004	F	36	20-40k	white	none	yes

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The pilot interviews were conducted initially with the interview schedule recorded in the Research Methodologies section (chapter 4) and interviews were taped and an account of the interview typed up with impressions shortly thereafter.

In speaking of the impact of student peers, one student indicated that there was a very positive impact from student peers on the learning experience. She described forming alliances with other students of similar age and "way of thinking." She described how students formed themselves into an informal bottom-up study group. This was established very quickly on arriving at university. The study group were all within a five to ten year age-band. It was seen to be very effective and had a profound affect upon the performance of those in the study group. They had all benefited both academically and in terms of support. This was seen to be a major factor in their learning experience providing a very strong feeling of support and an effective tool in learning.

The next topic of discussion was the effect of the partner or spouse on the learning experience. One student expressed that her husband had a very positive affect on her learning. "He assists". Asked in what way he assisted the student reflected that he gave her time for studying and took domestic duties from her to allow her to concentrate on her studies. Also he took an interest in her work and looked at her work and gave his own opinion or guidance on her work. "He is a great mentor really". He read through essays, listened to practice talks etc. This student's husband was in a similar subject area to the student's field of study and was a teacher, so was in a position to offer a significant level of support and did so. The student commented that "This was a bonus".

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This student has four children ranging in age from 17 down to 3 years. Hence this was seen as an area where a profound affect could be experienced on the learning world of the student. She commented that the children were very demanding of her time but that she had a predetermined priority arrangement which said that the children had to come first and her needs second. She said she felt that this was very tiring at times but that it was a system that worked. She admitted that there were times when there was occasional resentment of the fact that Mum was too busy or too tired to engaged in activities with them.

In terms of how the children viewed their mother as the student, she commented that the two younger ones didn't really remember anything different. She is now in the third year of her degree and spent a year in Access prior to that. "So they really don't know anything different from Mum the student". Her 12 year old holds her in high esteem for being a student, however the 17 year old just feels some degree of resentment for the fact that there is reduced income due to his mother's student status. Sometimes they are more supportive than others.

In speaking of her experience of coming into the university for the first time she spoke of being overwhelmed by the number of students. She was also struck by the fact that the tutor was of a similar age to herself and that was something she was a little uneasy about and didn't feel too comfortable with it. Very quickly she attached herself to other mature students in the room and

found that she felt more comfortable with them. We see how age assumes a very exaggerated importance in the mind of the mature student coming into this foreign environment populated mainly by young people.

"We very quickly formed relationships amongst ourselves and that made a huge difference and the lecturers also became people to us and that made a big difference too. Relationships built up very quickly!"

The university had an open door policy and that meant you could chap the door and see a lecturer at any time and this was good. "You build up a relationship with some lecturers more than others and you feel that you can approach them more."

In terms of contacts with the university itself, her initial contact with the university was via the Access tutor and by speaking with the university tutor by telephone. She felt that she built up a good initial rapport with him and she stated, "I felt that I could work with him and he with me."

With reference to the lecturing staff, initially they seemed frightening and powerful, even to mature students. "But as the years have progressed all of that has been stripped away and you get to know the real person, and as you get to know them that makes it easier. Obviously you get to know some better than others. As a relationship was established with teaching staff, without a doubt this

helped your learning experience". If you have this relationship, then if there was something you didn't understand she felt she could stop them and ask for help. But in first year she was too scared to do that. "You just sat there and the lecture was over and you thought to yourself, "what was that all about?" "You went away not understanding. You had to rely on the study group to try to get a better understanding and sometimes you would appoint someone in the group to go and speak to the lecturer.... Without a doubt the building up of a relationship over three years with the lecturing staff has made quite a difference".

"In university the student had a "year tutor" that she could approach with difficulties, be they academic or personal. "I've never really used the facility as such. If a family issue came up and I needed time off I would maybe use that service. We just mainly have an annual meeting to see how we are getting on. It's there more as a safety net".

Under the heading of other factors affecting learning, the student raised the issue of work, which takes up some of her time. And it can be quite a demanding role which eats into her family time and study time. "So this is a financial factor but it does have an effect on my learning". This student is heavily committed with four children, one of them being only three years old, works as an elected councillor and is studying a full time degree course. Yet she maintains a positive attitude throughout and seems to be well supported with supportive relationships especially in terms of spouse and peer groups.

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Another student commented "There are a large number of mature students on the course, 40 or 50% and so this means that you can identify with a large number of other students".

This student was in the same bottom-up study group as the previous student. The interaction with other mature students was a very positive influence on the learning experience. All are from a similar age band. "Two members of the group I knew previously, one from the Access course and one a previous friend. We all have the same understanding. We want to pass exams".

"Each member of the group brings something different to the group. All play a part. Some collect information. Some bring organisation. Someone else likes to talk whilst someone else listens and may be able to correct something".

"With reference to spouse, my husband said I should go to university and he was the major influence on me to embark on the course. He suggested that I do something for me. I returned to study and he thinks its great. He will check my work. He will provide the income for me to go to university. He is not brilliant at the household chores but if I lack confidence he will give me the confidence to tell me I can really do it". The various areas where support was offered were: verbal encouragement, some assistance with domestic duties, listening, reading what she'd written even if he does not understand the context he can understand the sense of it and gives motivation.

She has two teenage children "and two teenage children in the house at the one time is quite difficult". She has a 15-year-old son and a 13-year-old daughter. "They think it is cool that I am at university. Because they are a bit older they don't need as much from me. They have no problems with me going in to study because they know that at the end of the day they come first. And they are really interested in my results when they come through".

"On first coming into the university situation it was really daunting. I was really terrified. I had little or no confidence that I could succeed and there was the constant feeling that I had to prove myself and show that I was worthy of my place in the university". And so there was initially the struggle to show that the student was worthy of her place as a university student. This has been stated in the literature as a change of identity to a new identity as a learner. This student has been describing this process in the interview. There was a lack of confidence in assuming the new identity. This seemed to have a profound affect on the level of confidence and hence the quality of learning. This student when questioned said that it took to the first year exam results to show that you had earned the right to occupy your place at university. "You could then be taken seriously". Her identity as the university student was seen to be totally dependent on exam results.

"At first the lecturers seemed like god. But that was because we did not know them and they did not know us. And I did not know if I was capable of keeping up and passing exams. But the

lecturers were approachable and you got to know them. And I expected that university would be a very intellectual hierarchical environment and it wasn't like that really".

"I had a very positive initial interview and it was very positive. I was terrified in the interview but the end result was positive. They were very friendly although I felt very daunted because I had never been in a university before. But I had this strong feeling that I wanted to achieve here. It felt good to be here. I had no further contact with the university till the first day. 53 were here in the class to matriculate and it felt like hundreds".

"As far as the lecturing staff was concerned there were a few who were exceptionally nice and there were some that were scary, and that was intentionally scary. They were communicating to you that you needed to prove yourself. They were sending out signals that they were in charge and you were the student. It was a power thing. Once you got to know them at a clinic setting, it was different. But that was because the 53 had to be trimmed down to the ones who were going to survive and succeed. They weren't going to support the 53 but the remnant would be supported. After a period of time you established a relationship with the lecturing staff and that made a difference to how you felt about them and maybe how they felt about you. They are now very supportive".

This student hadn't used the guidance system at all. It was there. There is an open door policy and you have an interview with them once a year and if you needed them you could approach them. The guidance system is clearly not a factor of any importance to this student.

Under any other factors that could be regarded as important the student brought up extended family. Also friends were mentioned as people that the student loved and she felt she could not support all the contacts with family and friends she would have liked. Study needs were very pressing. The student also raised financial issues as being important. Becoming a student had huge financial implications even with a supportive partner or spouse.

This point made it clear that a more open policy in the interview process had to be established in order to allow the students to pursue these other issues of relevance to them. In the next pilot interview it was decided to develop a new scheme that would allow the student more autonomy to determine the agenda of the interview.

This led to the third and revised pilot interview in which the learning world map was constructed by the student. A copy of the instructions is contained in the appendices. The Learning World Map allows the student to share in the setting of the agenda for the interview by allowing the student to determine what influences were important in the learning environment and hence to some degree influence the discussions that follow. Samples of the learning zone maps for the eighteen actual interviews are included later in this chapter. The student was asked to identify relevant significant

others who had an impact on their learning and situate these on the learning map. If they had a profound affect then they should be placed near the centre of the map, and if their affect were more peripheral then they would be placed in a peripheral area on the map. The interviewer did not suggest any individuals to be placed nor where any should be placed. This was left to the initiative of the interviewee.

This was the first interview utilising the revised pilot interview structure. In this case we were dealing with a thirty six year old female student in the third year of a four-year honours course at a West of Scotland university. She came from the DG14 post code and lived part of the week away from home at university and three days per week at home in Dumfries.

This student was the first to generate a Learning World Map in which she placed others who had a significant affect on her learning on a map, with those who had the greatest affect closest to the "Me" sticker in the centre of the learning world. She placed a number of others equidistant around the centre. These read:

- Study group
- Spouse
- Lecturers
- Children

- Mother-in-law

There were two other entries placed at a greater distance from the centre and those were:

- Friends in general

- Family in general

Hence it is noticed that this student identified 5 different classifications that had a strong affect on her learning. Four of these were existing classifications included in the hypothesis suggested at the end of chapter two and one was not. The one that was not in the original list, "mother-in-law" may well have served as a parental substitute and hence would have occurred in the hypothesis.

In the next section of the interview the discussion turned to the affect of student peers on learning. The student commented that they had always had a very positive affect on her learning world. She was then asked to identify in what way they had made a positive contribution to her learning.

She said that each member of the study group brought their own strengths. They would mainly meet for a few weeks before exams but if there are things that came up between times they would ask one another and bounced ideas off one another. When the group met there was an agreement about what they were going to deal with and some study was done privately beforehand. One person would start then they would all add their little bits in.

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This student commented that her husband supported her study financially. She studied away from home during the week and returned home to the family at the weekends. "When you are at home you feel you should be there for them and this means you can't study at all at the weekend. As far as the effect of husband is concerned if you want to go into the room and go on the computer he would say, "why do you want to do that?". So he doesn't help on the study side at all, just supports me financially to study."

This student has an 11-year-old son. In terms of his effect on learning it was described as "in between positive and negative". Her family supports her by providing childcare during the week. Her son stays with her mother-in-law during the week. He says that he doesn't mind and he tells people that his Mum is "at school".

Her first experience of coming into the university was described as "very strange". She came from a very rural and quiet area and coming into thousands of people in an urban university. "But after a while you settle down and you are no so much afraid. You settle into a routine, and begin to find your way around".

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"I used to work in a fish factory and now I've become a different person. Even the language you talk is different from the language or the factory floor". Asked if she was comfortable with the different person she had become, she said yes that she was now more assertive than before.

With reference to initial contacts with the university itself, she made mention of letters received that indicated you would be welcome. "It was very welcoming. Of course you arrive and have to use your own initiative and you knew some of the Access students from before you came here. Out of the four Access students that came three are still here, though one is repeating a year".

"With reference to the lecturing staff, you can speak to them all. After the first three months you could approach them all. It is only in third year that I felt I could really go and ask questions".

This student did not have a guidance tutor in the Access year. But with reference to the university, she saw the guidance tutor once per semester. "It is good. You get feedback on your progress; it shows you where you are and how you are getting on".

With reference to other people who have an effect, the student mentioned "friends in general". By this she meant friends out-with the educational environment. These were ex factory-floor friends. She saw these as being very positive. She stated that any who were really friends would never express resentment at the changes. "They know that you have changed but deep down they would

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like to change also. They come and show you their feet (Podiatry student) and this all adds to your learning". Another important factor is described as family-in-general. She lives with her cousin and her family during the week away from home and gets domestic and motivational support from them.

This concluded the pilot interview stage and interviewing proper was commenced with students from the University A, University C and College D.

8.6   Summary of Interview cycle.

Table 60:

Student	Gender	Age	Household Income	Ethnic Background	Disability	First in household to study
A059	M	34	40-60k	white	none	no
A117	M	30	0-20k	white	none	yes
A087	F	36	20-40k	white	none	yes
A026	M	35	20-40k	white	none	no
A025	F	27	0-20k	white	none	yes
A069	M	38	20-40k	white	none	yes
C142	F	36	0-20k	white	none	yes
C156	F	33	20-40k	white	none	no
C083	F	38	0-20k	white	none	yes
C200	M	24	0-20k	white	none	no
C027	F	34	20-40k	white	none	yes
C088	M	43	20-40k	white	none	no
D100	F	24	0-20k	white	none	yes
D101	F	38	0-20k	white	none	yes
D102	F	38	0-20k	white	none	yes
D017	F	18	0-20k	white	none	no
D200	F	34	0-20k	white	none	yes
D028	F	41	0-20k	white	none	yes

The mean age of the group interviewed was 33.4 years. It consisted of six males and twelve females. The mean income was just under 19,000 pounds per annum. Twelve of the eighteen interviewed were the first person in their household to study in higher education.

8.7   The Learning World Map.

This was a device that was suggested and implemented in the course of going through the pilot stage. It is further suggested to some extent in the literature and this is dealt with in 4.5 in the Methodologies section. In the Interview phase, each of the students interviewed were invited to respond by constructing a map of their learning world, indicating who were the main players. Any individual or group of individuals who had an effect on their learning was to be placed in the learning world map. The only guidance given was that if the affect was major, then this individual or group was to be placed towards the centre of the diagram and if the affect was more peripheral then their placing on the diagram was to be further away.

Included in the next few pages are scanned copies of different types of learning world maps drawn up by the students interviewed. It should be remembered that there has been a minimum of guidance given to the student at the stage of constructing the learning world map. This was important to allow the student to define the agenda for the interview, which was to follow. This in

itself resulted in some anomalies. For example, students in Institution D, the further education college, stated in interview that their guidance tutor (they used the title course co-ordinator) was an important figure in their learning, and yet this individual did not show up in their learning world maps. This indicates that the interview process had assisted them to think through their experience of learning more deeply and this resulted in their later comments. However the construction of the learning world map is viewed as an important process because of its leading to a more democratic and open form of interview.

The following is a basic taxonomy of learning world maps which informs the research into psycho-sociological factors in the learning experience of these students.

8.7.1   Isolationist Focus.

Figure 53.
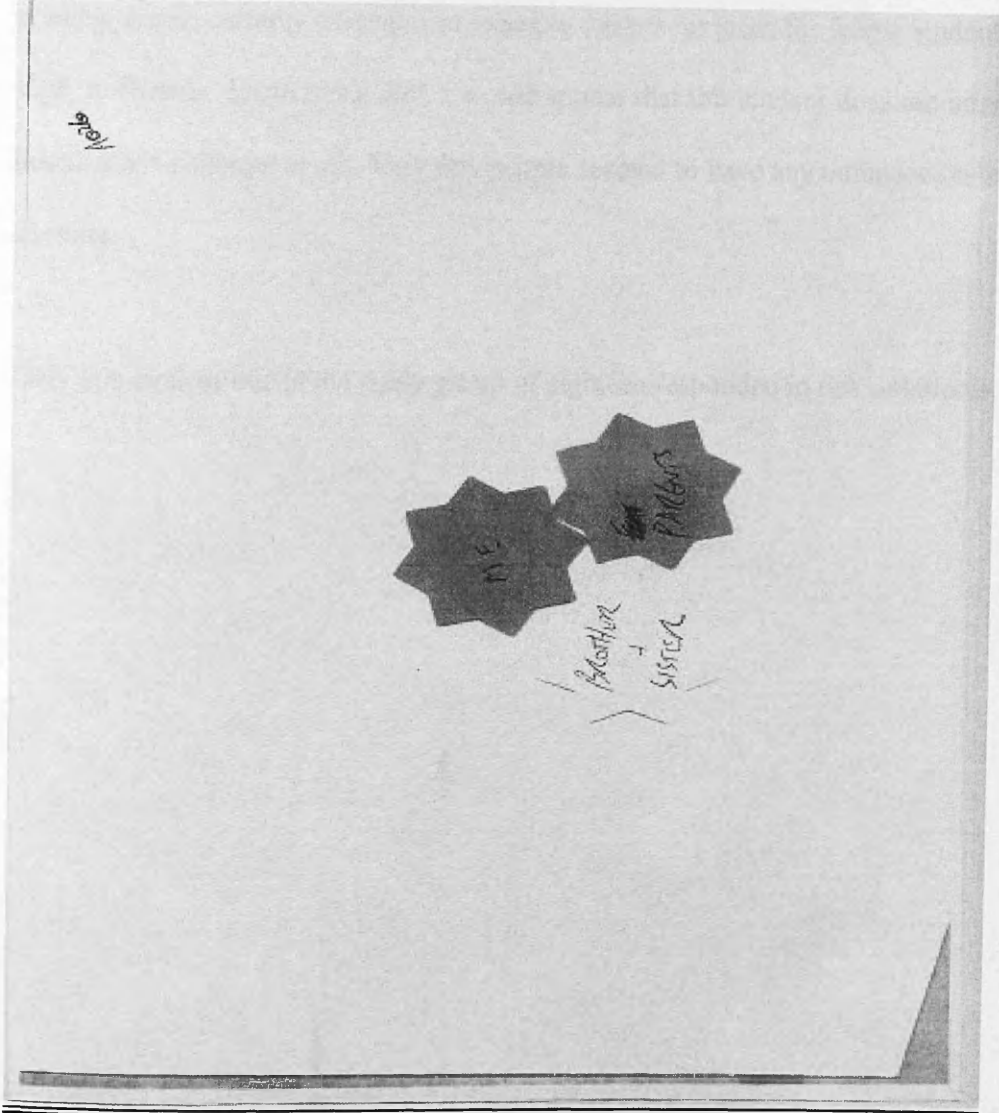
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There was one student who had what might be referred to as an isolationist focus. We note that the Learning World Map (LWM) is very sparsely populated. There were two entries placed on the map in total. One was marked "parents" and one marked "brother and sister". There are a number of possible entries notably missing. For example there is no place for fellow students, or members of staff, or friends. From this LWM it would appear that this student does not interface much with the learning environment at all. Very few people seemed to have any influence on this student's learning.

Only one student out of the study group of eighteen responded in this isolationist way.

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8.7.2   Institutional Focus

Figure 54.
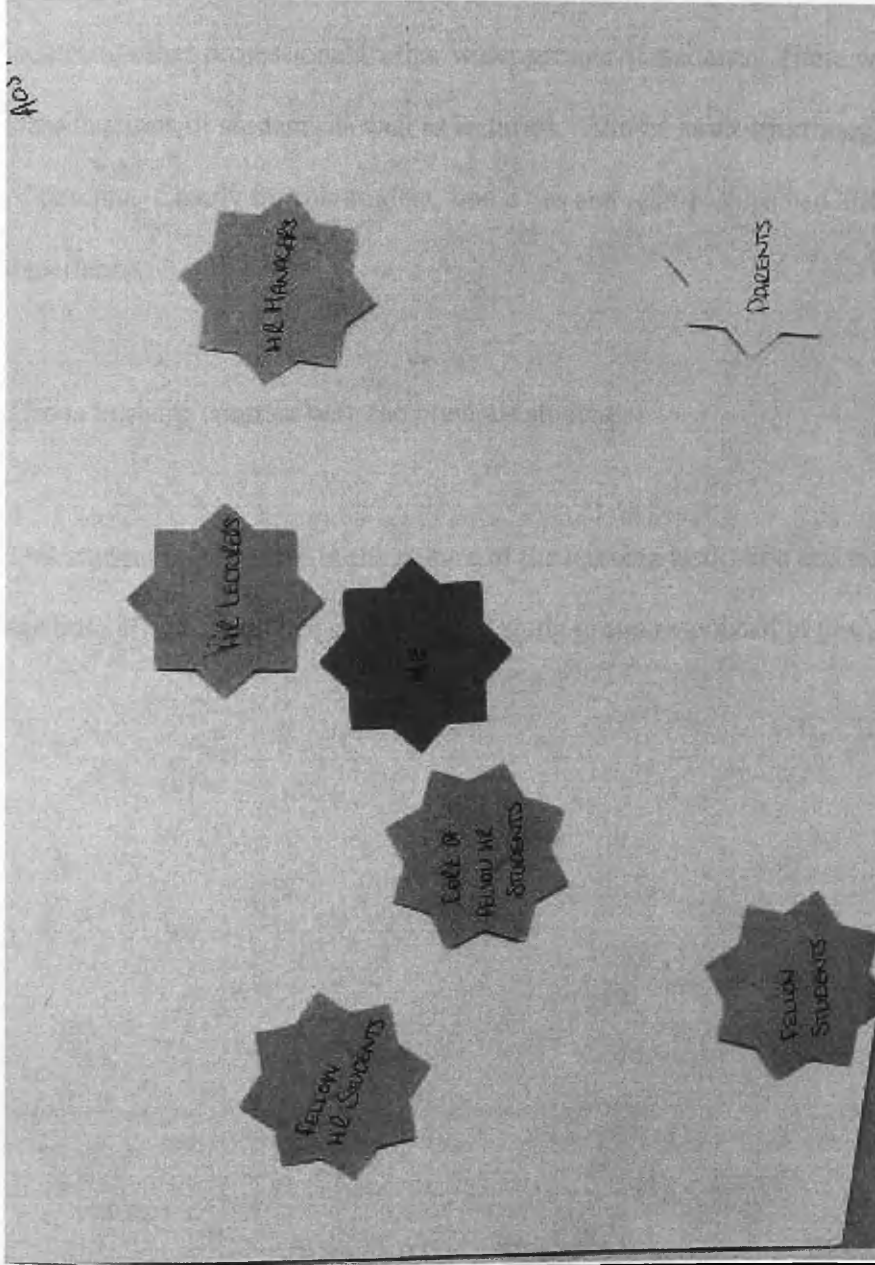
On examination of the above LWM it is noted that the primary focus of this student's learning world was strictly in the learning environment. All of the central influences were fellow students, lecturers, other professionals, other wider groups of students. There were three entries for different classifications of students as well as lecturers. Almost as an afterthought there is a peripheral entry of parents. Clearly for this student, home ties and relationships had little affect on the learning experience.

This is in sharp contrast with the previous student.

This student is immersed in the culture of the learning institution and family life and background has little effect. Only one student in the study group responded in this purely institutional way.

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8.7.3 Family and Friends Focus

Figure 55.
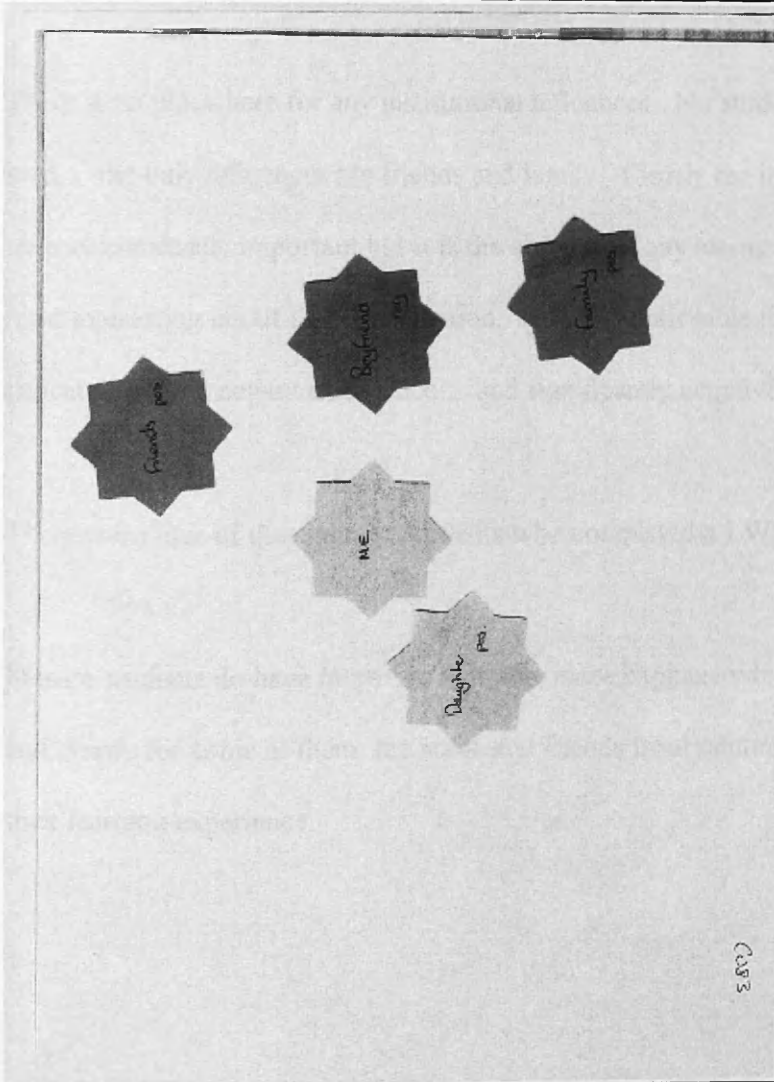
The only influences in this learner's world are listed as follows:

- Daughter

- Boyfriend

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- Friends

- Family

There is no place here for any institutional influences. No students, no lecturers or staff of any kind... the only influences are friends and family. Clearly the influences of friends and family are seen as immensely important but it is the absence of any learning environment figures which is most interesting about this classification. It is also noticeable that the listing of "boyfriend" is indicated to be a negative influence... and significantly negative.

There were four of the eighteen students who completed a LWM with this kind of profile.

Mature students do have more ties to home, more baggage which they bring into the learning world and clearly for some of them, the home and friends front continues to play a large and vital role in their learning experience.

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8.7.4 Mixed Focus.

Figure 56.
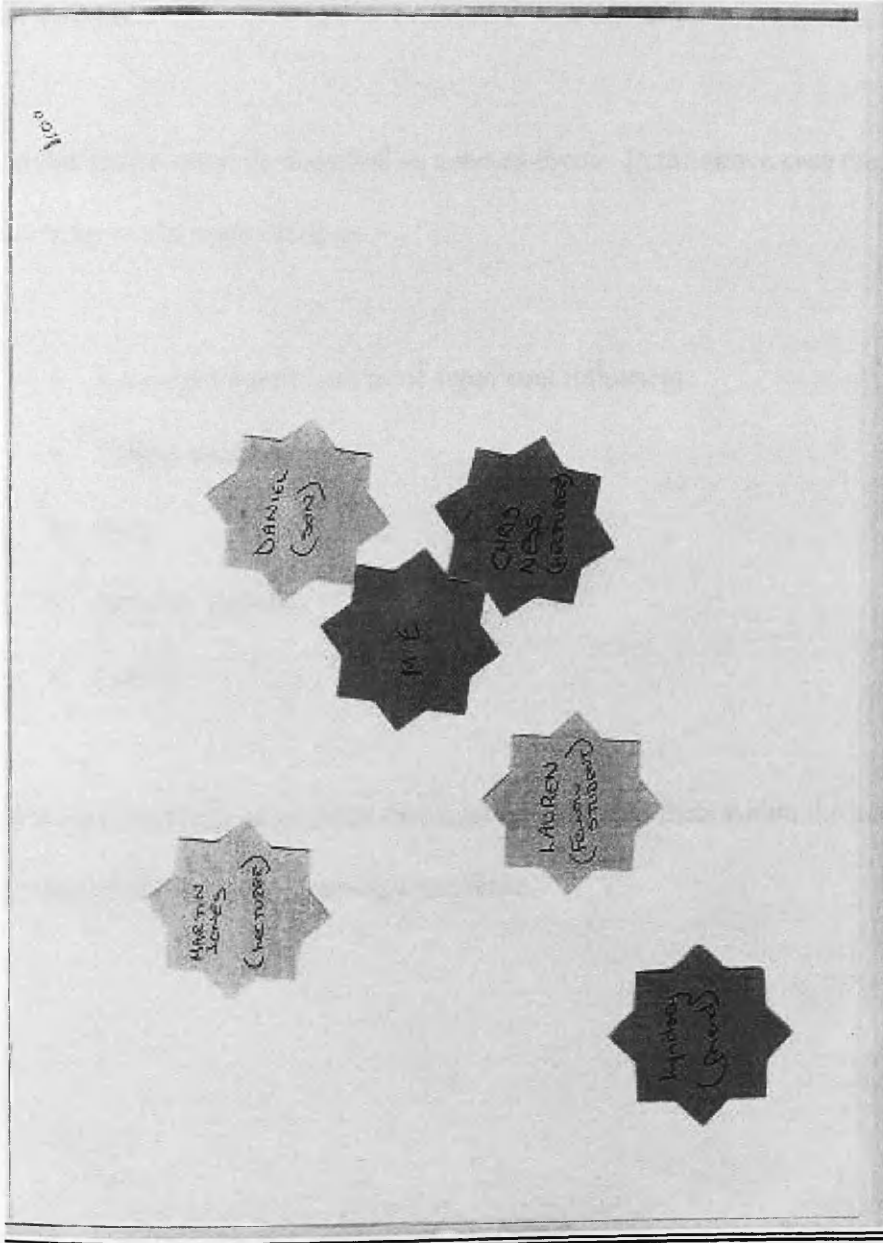
In the above LWM the significant others in the learning world belong to both the home, family and friends world (emotional world outside of the learning institution) and to the world of the university or college.

In this case it must be classified as a mixed focus. In the above case the significant others in the learning world were listed as:

- Lecturer (closest and most significant influence)
- Fellow student
- Son
- Another lecturer
- Friend.

It is clear that influences from the home life, and also from within the institution are both seen as having an effect on the learning experience.

8.7.5   Summary of LWMs.

Table 61:

The findings of this device of the learning world map may be summarised as follows.

Student	Peers	Partner	Parent/children	institution	teachers	personal tutor	friends/contacts	family	others
A059	x		x		x		x		
A117		x	x		x		x		
A087	x		x		x	x	x	x	
A026			x				x		
A025	x		x				x	x	
A069	x	x	x					x	
C027		x	x						
C142	x		x				x		
C083		x	x				x		
C088	x	x	x		x		x	x	
C200		x			x	x	x	x	
C156	x	x	x						
D017	x		x		x	x		x	
D028		x	x				x		
D200	x	x	x				x		
D100	x		x		x		x		
D101	x	x	x		x		x		
D102			x		x		x	x	x
Totals	11	10	17	0	9	3	14	7	1

On examination of the above table of results there is some indication which can inform a model of supportive relationships important to the student.   Each relationship supports the student in his/her new identity, thus increasing the level of confidence and comfort in this new identity.   On examination of the totals at the bottom of the columns we see a mark out of 18 showing the level of certainty that this relationship should be included in the model.

Peers were included in 11 out of 18 responses in the learning world maps. It should be remembered that the student was asked to complete their learning world diagram first before anything else was

asked or discussed in the interview. Some who did not include peers in the learning world map when the subject was raised in discussions during the interview then spoke of informal study groups, group discussion, pooling of ideas for essays and a number of other very important strategies which suggest that they perhaps ought to have been included in the diagram. Nevertheless there were still a high number of inclusions.

In 10 of the 18 learning world maps, partners were included as important to the learning of the student. In the majority of cases this was because the relationship was supportive and showed a high level of acceptance of the identity transformation being experienced by the learner. In one or two cases the opposite was true and the partner was a highly negative influence because of a refusal to accept the identity transformation.

The highest level of response was in the column representing either children or parental influence. In most cases this was spoken of in a very positive vein. Only one of those who had children spoke of their influence as negative (due to their being young and competing for her time and attention). The others were either a positive support or were seen as the chief motivation for study. Those who had no children saw their parents as a positive support.

It was not altogether surprising that the culture of the institution did not appear in learning world maps. This is an intangible concept, which was explored in the dialogue of the interview

and was unlikely to make an appearance in the maps before students were asked to consider and think about the effect of the culture of the institution.

Half of those interviewed included teaching staff in their learning world maps before being asked about the relationship with teachers. Again this showed the importance of this sense of relationship in supporting the learning.

Only three of those interviewed included the "personal tutor" or guidance tutor in their maps. It was very noticeable that the twelve who were interviewed in the university environment in general did not think the personal tutor important. However in the main those who were studying higher education courses in the FEC put a very high value on the personal tutor. There was a marked contrast between the cultures of HE and FE in the area of guidance support for learners.

The maps also revealed a couple of other categories. Other friends and wider family contacts were both mentioned as being important to students as mechanisms of support. These had a number of "hits" in the maps and should be considered as an important resource. In the column labelled "other" we include one student who said that her relationship with her dog was important. Obviously the therapeutic nature of pet ownership was important to her.

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8.8   Peer Relationships and the Learning Environment.

The next phase in the interview schedule was to investigate the effect of relationships with fellow students on the learning experience of the student. It is noted with interest that there were a number of students who spoke of the formation of informal study groups as a learning strategy.

A059 came to central Scotland from the south of England where he had completed his Access course. He confirmed that the effect of fellow students was very significant. He confirmed that he was part of a small group of four students who operated a study group and pooled resources and ideas when working on essays. They had similar interests and tended to select essay titles in similar areas. This meant that research could be pooled and articles found could be shared to the mutual benefit of all in the group. Competition within the group was also perceived to be a motivational benefit to members. This was identified as a bottom up informal study group, developed as a learning strategy and resource. The student was at pains to point out that this strategy only pertained for essay questions and not for exams and that one of the motivations was to cut down the costs of printing or reproducing relevant articles for researching essay questions. The group met informally every day over coffee and relevant and helpful discussions would follow from there. Interestingly this study group extended across the age range and was not confined to mature students only. And the student offered the opinion that this strategy was not anything to do with being a mature student. This student did not gravitate towards other mature students. This

particular student, though mature, was single. He had no partner and had no domestic responsibilities or ties. And hence it could be argued that he operated more like a traditional entrant than a mature student in this respect. Hence it may be that he had more in common with traditional entrants than he did with other mature students.

A117 said that he felt there was a significant difference in support from fellow students in university with the way things were in Access. In university there was not so much support. There were other mature students around, but there was a process to be gone through to find them. There was a mature student group but he had never been to it. Initially he felt isolated but that had changed now. "You tended to gravitate towards people who were nearer your own age", but now he had friends of other ages too. This student was not part of any study group neither formal nor informal.

A087 said that the effect of fellow students was positive. She stated, " If it weren't for them I wouldn't be here". Part of the strategy of coping involved encouragement, car sharing, moral and motivational support. She hadn't formed relationships in university at all and the positive relationships referred to were relationships which had existed prior to coming to University and continued on arrival. These relationships, one in particular, was with another mature student.

A026 spoke of being inspired by other students and their struggles round about him. These were people who were in the "same boat" as him. But this support was spoken of as "chit-chat". He spoke of his experience in university as doing his own thing. He had never formed or taken part in

any study groups. Any students he did have a relationship with seemed to be other mature students. Younger students however are more open and older students "are more analytical and more insular keeping their distance a lot more. They concentrate on family and their own lives." He described himself as just here to get a degree, a strategic learner. His own assessment was that other students were not a great factor.

A025 spoke of the effect of fellow students as being both positive and negative. Some people were passionate about their studies and their effect was positive on you. Others weren't passionate about their studies and are only interested in going to parties and they can distract you. "You try to fit in and want to join in. If you go out and party, then this detracts from your study. But some people study hard and they motivate you to study". This student spoke of experience of two different types of study group. One of these was a top down group organised by the university. The other was a bottom up and was organised informally in the first semester of first year. "Both study groups worked well and really helped. When it happened it was helpful but it is not happening now!"

A069 spoke of a very positive effect on his learning from peers. He had a very good relationship with 3 other students. They read one another's work, expressed evaluations on each other's work and helped one another with time management. Initially this partnership was a top down arrangement in that they were instructed to find a partner for the first two semesters. But this arrangement had persisted beyond the stipulated time and had hence become a permanent feature of

his learning strategy. The student then went on to express that peer support had been a large and important aspect of his Access year. Six of this Access cohort had come to the same university and they were still maintaining contact with one another. This had become a strong motivational factor.

With reference to the effect of student peers on the learning process C142 stated that it was positive. Students talked together and discussed difficulties experienced in the course. She stated that it was "one of the biggest resources because it was a continuing resource and went with you all the way through". C156 saw the effect of fellow students in two ways. She stated that there was "some very positive and some very negative". Some who were interested in working were a positive resource but others who wanted to party were a negative force. She was part of an informal bottom up study group of three students. She saw this as one of her chief learning strategies. C083 also saw the effect of student peers as being both positive and negative. Younger students were people that she did not relate to. She felt that the learning came easier to them. However with reference to other mature students she spoke of working closely together with them. They organised informal study groups, met together in the library and worked together. This was seen as a very significant resource. Significantly, she noted that later when younger students saw the benefit of such relationships then they added themselves into these groups. C200 continued the theme of mixed response to this question. He said that the effect of fellow students was mostly positive though one or two created a negative effect. He also spoke of an informal study group as a resource. In the last year he was part of a group of 3 students who got together for both social and

academic support. This began as a top down but it continued beyond the lifetime of the group on an informal basis.

C027 stated that the effect of fellow students was "neither positive nor negative". There were not many mature students in her course and she did not expect to have much in common with younger students. As a result she was not part of a study group neither formal nor informal.

C088 said that the effect of other students was "considerable". The nature of his course was such that there was a lot of group work and so he was placed formally in groups for work. There were a small number of other mature students coming from the same college as him, all of whom had studied Access courses. He also spoke of " a continuing relationship between the Access people".

With reference to relationships with other students D028 indicated that these were non -existent. She studied by herself and had no relationships with other students in the class. This had not been true during Access where there were other mature students. Then there were relationships, collaboration and contact. But with reference to the HE course this was no longer true. The other students were all younger, the next youngest student being 13 years younger. She tended to keep in touch with her former Access colleagues. In contrast D101 stated her peers helped a great deal. "There's always someone in the same boat as you". She felt that other students were the only ones who truly understood what she was going through, and since they all had different strengths there was always the possibility of real help coming from one's peers. She also confirmed that she had

maintained relationships with her former Access student peers who gave her moral and motivational support. D100 saw the effect of peers as being very positive. They were perceived as a major source of support and an important strategy for learning. "If you're not understanding it, they could explain it to you". She felt that she got support from both mature and younger members of her course and had taken part in informal study groups seeing these as significant in terms of learning.

D102 saw the effect of peers as good and positive. She confirmed that she was part of an informal group of six students who were close to each other, meeting together to discuss work and other things. D017 also confirmed that the effect of peers was "very positive". She found that she had basically the same interests as others on her course and they worked well together and met together to help one another out. They discussed essays and other aspects of the work.

D200 presented a contrasting view, saying that other students in her class were a negative influence on her learning. She saw them as lacking commitment and simply going through the motions. She tended to remain solitary. There had been a supportive environment in Access but this was not true in the HN study. She also confirmed that her course was part time and this meant that there was no strong sense of class identity.

In summary it may be stated that the sense of relationship with peers was viewed to be very strongly important to most students. Mature students tended to identify with other mature students

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first since they shared common experiences and problems. They readily formed informal study groups and these were sometimes extended to include younger students also as relationships formed across the age divide over the term of their study. One or two students were more solitary and tended to go through their course without forming relationships with anyone. To them, the relationships outside the university with family and friends were the more important ones and these relationships were what tended to sustain them rather than any relationships within the learning environment per se.

With reference to University A, three of the study group of six spoke of fellow students as a significant or highly significant resource for learning and spoke in glowing terms of being part of a student study group (usually a bottom up study group). Two others spoke of not belonging to a study group but one of those lamented the relative lack of student support as compared to the Access experience and the other did say that if it were not for other students she would not still be in the university, so significant was the level of moral or motivational support gained from them. Only one of the six stated that other students were not a significant factor and he described university study as a solitary experience.

With reference to University C, three of the interview group of six spoke of fellow students as a significant or highly significant resource for learning and spoke of informal study groups they had participated in. Two others spoke of fellow students presenting a mixed effect, some positive and some negative. They tended to identify with other mature students and found them a positive

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resource but found some other students had a negative affect on their confidence and study. Only one of the six stated that other students were not a significant factor and had neither a positive nor negative effect.

With reference to College D, four of the interview group of six spoke of fellow students as a significant or highly significant resource for learning and spoke of informal study groups they had participated in. One of the two remaining said that she was much older than all of the others in the class and she thought she might have represented a learning resource for them but she did not benefit from the relationship.

The one remaining student saw her peers as having a negative effect on her learning since they lacked commitment to the course.

8.9   Supportive Spouse/Partner Relationship.

Some of the students interviewed had no partner and hence this was not a relevant question for them. (A087, A025, A059, C142, D200) Some of these spoke of this as a profound regret that there was no support there.

A026 had a partner whom he described as quite supportive, and that she was understanding. She wanted the identity change. She did not participate in any academic support in any way through

lack of interest or ability or both. But she would agree that he was not the same person and would offer plenty of domestic support to aid study.

A117 stated that his wife was a very important factor in his learning, especially during Access and the initial stages of learning. His wife supported his decision to return to learning. And since she is an English graduate and he is engaged in a degree in English history they are able to converse intelligently and she was in a position to read over essays etc.

A069 had a wife who was also a current student at the university though on a different course. He stated that she played a major role in his learning. They had met initially on Access course and she is now currently one year behind him in her degree studies. It was deemed that life was more difficult when she was not a student but now that she is, it was more of a common experience. She was very supportive and helpful. Because she does not have English as her first language then he had to help her with language difficulties at times. He helped her with her work in sociology study and there were large areas of overlap with his degree studies. This gave them a substantial area of commonality.

In dealing with the effect of partner or spouse, C156 said that her husband was a teacher and "without him I would not be here". She spoke of him providing motivational, moral and some academic support where possible. She also said that he would take on domestic duties to free her up to study at times.

C083 said that her partner was a strong negative effect. She said that he "did not want me to progress. I was changing and he did not want me to change". Finally the relationship ended due to the identity transformation of the student.

C200 said that his partner had "… been my rock. She kept me going through the tough times. She shows her interest by asking questions, listens to presentations I am to make and also will read over my work for me". C027 said that her partner provided positive encouragement. He would adjust his work rota about her study needs and was very supportive providing a high level of domestic support. He was however unable to provide academic support due to his different academic background.

C088 said that his partner had a profound affect on his learning. She had also been a mature learner. He had worked to support her through her degree course. She is now a primary teacher and supporting him through his degree study. She also had been an Access student and this meant that the whole process will have taken 10 years by the time they were both graduated. He saw her as his critical friend who reads over his work.

D028 stated that her husband had always been encouraging. She had gotten married at the age of 17 and hence had not pursued her educational goals the way she had wanted to. Now her husband was very supportive, offering domestic support to allow her to study and providing moral support.

He took an interest and was able to discuss the course with her as well as buying books for her and generally supporting her learning.

D100 felt that her husband was more negative than positive. He was not in work due to a bad back and hence could not get a job. She stated that he did not understand her desire for new horizons and that she did not receive any encouragement from him whatsoever. He did not take an interest in what she was doing. She stated that he did not understand the changes she was going through and saw the whole endeavour as an economic goal only.

D102 spoke of her husband having a very positive affect on her learning. She stated "he helps with my maths... and anything that I need, he is there for me". He takes over domestic duties and is very flexible. D017 has a boyfriend who is always very encouraging. She said that he is "always telling me to do my homework first". D101 was more ambivalent stating that at times her partner was positive and at times negative. He was positive in that he offered support and encouragement and at times negative when he distracted me and wanted to talk about other things. She felt that he did support the identity transformation, and supported and helped her with her personal development.

With reference to University A, three of the six had no partner and hence the support from that area was not significant for them. The remaining three described the role of their partner or spouse ranging from quite supportive to very supportive. The one partner who was "quite supportive" was

very supportive of the identity change and it was expressed that the identity change was her idea initially. The very supportive partners either were or had been students and were able to offer academic as well as moral support.

With reference to University C, one of the six had no partner and hence the support from that area was not significant for her. Of the remaining five, four described the role of their partner or spouse as being supportive or very supportive. The one remaining student described her partner as extremely negative and unsupportive. And in the process of study so resented the change in identity that the relationship ended and they were no longer together.

In College D, one of the six had no partner and hence the support from that area was not significant for her. Of the remaining five, four described the role of their partner or spouse as being supportive or very supportive. The one remaining student described her partner as negative and unsupportive. He lacked understanding of her new identity and horizons.

8.10   Relationships with Children/Parents.

A059 had no children. The effect of parents did not have a profound effect on his learning. He would visit home and receive some domestic support and they assisted in providing financial support, which underpinned his learning. But in terms of quality of learning, they had minimal effect beyond the financial.

A087 stated that she had two children, a fourteen-year-old son and a ten-year-old daughter. The effect of these relationships were negative, pulling her away from her learning. Guilt was seen as a major factor in making her desert her learning in order to spend time with her children, or on domestic duties for their care. They tended to resent the sacrifices that had to be made. These sacrifices were mainly financial and time restraints. "My word for the moment is 'No!'"

A026 had no children but stated that his parents were encouraging and supportive. He sees his father daily and works part time for his father and this supports the family. His father regularly asks about studies and is generally interested. He does not understand the academic matters but gives positive encouragement. "But he is glad that I have taken the initiative to do a degree".

A025 had no children but described her mother as a very important player. She doesn't keep well and has been very ill in the past year and the student had to go home to look after her. In that respect she was a non-volitional negative. However she was also a very positive motivational influence. This was because she was very proud of her daughter's successes. She phoned and motivated her to study. The overall effect was more positive than negative. The only negative aspect was more domestic responsibilities caused by ill health.

A069 had no children but felt that his parents were an important motivational factor for him. He wanted to do something that would make them proud of him. At first they thought he was mad to give up a job to go into full time study. They were now advanced in years (in their 80's) and so there was a large age gap. But he continued to see them every week and he still felt that overall their relationship was a positive factor. They took an immense interest in his progress.

C142 was a single parent with a ten-year old son. She said that his effect was not negative and sometimes positive. "At the beginning he was more resentful and used to run and sit in my study chair in an attempt to stop me studying. But that is not true any more. He seems quite happy now". The student spoke of her son as a motivation for studying in order to provide better for him, and not have to rely on anyone else. She also spoke of the fact that he may leave home in another decade and she wanted a more meaningful life for herself after that.

C156 had no children but spoke of the positive interest shown by her mother in her studies. She lived some distance away but they spoke regularly on the phone and she was always interested in any success of her studies. C083 had a daughter and she was perceived as having a strong positive affect. After some further questioning it appeared that the source of this strong positive was in the motivational area. It was a strong motivation for her to succeed in her studies for the sake of providing for her daughter.

C200 had no children and his grandmother had acted *in loco parentis*. She was a strong source of support.

C027 had two children aged four and five. They were too young too understand "a half hour of peace" to allow her to study. However her mother would take them away for short periods to allow her to study. When asked how they reacted to their mother's new identity, she said that they quite liked that "Mum goes to university". But they did not really understand why Mum would not be available at times. She saw their overall effect as "slightly negative" as they were competing for her time with study needs.

C088 had two children who are 19 and 17 years respectively. Both were students themselves at a FE college. He said that they were both focused on their own studies and wanting to achieve success in their own courses. On the main he stated that he felt they were supportive.

D028 had two children aged 19 and 17 years respectively. She said that they were very encouraging to her in her studies and that they were "proud of me." They felt that she was going to be "a scientist" and that this was an admirable thing. She felt the loss of income resulting from the decision to enter study affected her more than her children, and that they were supportive of her aspirations and helped with domestic life.

D101 had two children aged 13 and 12. Again she felt that her children were very supportive. When asked how their children would react to being asked about their mother being at college she said they would say "good! Now she'll be able to help us with our homework."

D102 also had two children aged 16 and 12. She stated that she felt they were proud of her and the extent of their support was to give her peace to get on with her study at home.

D017 had no children but stated that her mother was always extremely supportive, and helped her with her work. This help included typing up notes and essays.

D200 had a 12-year old son who had a positive affect on her learning. She stated that it made her feel good to know that her becoming a student had raised her status in his eyes. She related that he tells his teacher, "Mum knows about that, I'll ask her".

D101 has no children but stated with reference to her parents that her father had a positive affect and her mother a negative. When asked to explain this she stated that she thought it was just part of a "mother-daughter thing".

In University A, of the six students interviewed, 5 had no children of their own. The one remaining student had 2 children, a 14 year old and a 10 year old. The effects of these relationships were negative, pulling her away from her learning. Guilt was seen as a major factor in making her desert her learning in order to spend time with her children, or on domestic duties for their care. They

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tended to resent the sacrifices that had to be made. These sacrifices were financial and time restraints. "My word for the moment is 'No!'" Two of the remaining students did not see parents as important factors in their learning. The three others saw parental influence as an important motivational factor to sustain their study.

In University C, six students were interviewed. Of these, 2 had no children of their own. They both spoke of their own parents as having a positive affect in terms of encouragement. Of those who had children of their own, one had children who were young (4 years and 5 years) and they were too young to offer support or encouragement. This student described the affect of the children as slightly negative due to competing for study time. The student's parent offered domestic support to help look after them. Others spoke of the children being the motivation for the study in the first place to provide a better life for them.

In college D, of the six students interviewed, 2 had no children of their own. They both spoke of positive support and encouragement coming from among their own parents. One of these had one parent positive and the other negative. Of those who had children of their own, all four spoke of their relationship as being positive or very positive, and provided motivational and moral support for their learning.

8.11 Institutional Culture and Learning.

This was a difficult area to investigate due to its abstract nature. In the interview structure, questions were asked about the provision of the institution and how the student felt about that provision and ultimately how the student felt about the institution as a whole rather than its representatives in terms of lecturing staff.

One student (A117) spoke of a feeling of "lost-ness" in coming into the university. He was just part of a vast crowd of 400 other people. He was conscious that he was older and that he was not living on campus and hence that there were a lot of people living a totally different life from him. A026 spoke of a smooth transition from Access to degree study. His Access was an in-house university Access programme and he described it as a seamless experience. A025 spoke of arriving at university with a feeling of great joy. And first semester was a great success. She came to university with only very slight apprehension but with much more a sense of great excitement.

With reference to the culture of the university, A059 felt that he was just a number. There was no sense of support coming from the university culture. In terms of his relationship with the institution, A059 felt that he was just a source of government funding to the university. "The university is now run more as a business". His first contact with the university was through an open day and he was impressed by the organisation and professionalism of that day. "But now I see that this was just part of the business strategy". A069 talked of his first reaction of university

as excitement, intimidation and a feeling of being overwhelmed. But as he settled into his course he felt that Access had prepared him well for his studies. After turning in first essays and getting the results back he stated feeling that "maybe I should be here after all". He is now going on to honours but admitted that there were still times when he had doubts about his role... doubts about his new identity as the student.

A117 said that after a couple of months he met other mature students, who had come through similar avenues to himself to get to university and found a whole new way of working. It was a more independent way of studying. He had to discipline himself to do the work... structure his time. The university had provided a welcome day and a library talk. And his general feeling was that his initial contacts with the university were positive on the whole.

Another student said she did not feel that she had participated in any way in university life. She came in, she did what they wanted her to do and she went home. "I'm here on my own". She did not feel that life on campus was geared to the mature student at all but was centred on the young undergraduate with no ties.

This was a general feeling among many of the mature students... that they were not really catered for... university was seen as for the young entrant and mature entrants would be allowed in but no special provisions would be made for them. It was up to them to fit into university culture not for university culture to do anything to accommodate them. In terms of provisions the university

made for the student, one interviewee was most negative and returned for the second time in the interview with strong negative feelings concerning the advisor of studies. She complained that the advisor was a "complete nightmare" and that she had been "misinformed on more than one occasion".

A026 was asked what the university had provided to help support his learning or enhance his learning experience and his reply was, "not much". He spoke about the odd bit of confidence boosting from individual lecturers and described that as "going a long way".

A025 spoke of the university as being understanding and helpful by providing half- units if you were having difficulties. And if you had problems then tutors were quite helpful. She spoke of there being very little support in later years. In first year they were helpful but in second year you were kind of just left to your own devices. "You didn't even know where to go to register.. no letters, no nothing".

C142 spoke of being very worried before going to university. The geography of the university itself seemed to present a worry. "Will I be able to find my way about?", was her abiding memory of this anxiety. However, when asked if she felt the university supported her learning, she replied "they don't really support you". There is no special consideration for the mature student. "Child care problems are **your** problem. You wouldn't even mention it". When asked questions which elicited a response concerning the new identity and her comfort with this new identity she indicated

that she did not feel comfortable with it. After some further discussion she admitted that the discomfort was an "age thing". She saw herself as too old to be a student and thought that everyone else would think that too.

C156 spoke of sheer terror when recalling her first day at university. There was anxiety about her social acceptance. She said that first year "was quite hard". And when asked to discuss this further she said she felt this was to do with her age. She said that if you still lived at home then you were still operating in that social context and were not pushed into making new friends. When asked what support she perceived the university as providing she replied, "not much". She further stated that in terms of support there was "nothing much for mature students".

C083 spoke of being overwhelmed by the thought, "how did I get here?" It became clear that other people thought I "belonged" but I couldn't believe that I had actually made it. She felt that Access presented a false perspective and she did not feel she was really prepared. "In Access we were all mature students, and tutors take time and are all supportive". In university however, she stated that there were thousands of people and more was expected of her. She however stated that the university did provide tutorial help and childcare which was "enabling". She felt that the university had supported her learning because she had been able to access funds from a fund for financial help with childcare. This was an important enabling factor.

C200 had gone from Access to university and had dropped out. He was currently on a different course. The first time was stated as being so different to Access, "it was scary".

C027 spoke of the first semester as being a big disappointment and felt that university did not live up to her expectations. The work had not been demanding enough and this led to the first semester being quite boring. She was now happy with her new identity which she thought was much more interesting. It was better to say that she was a student than that she was at home with the kids. In terms of how the university supported her learning, she stated "not a lot". She commented that nothing extra was provided for mature students.

C088 spoke of coming into university with a sense of dread and fear. When asked to explain further she said, "at the age I am. I was being put with a younger age group... people the same age as my children". When asked how this feeling of dislocation changed over time, he spoke of being put in problem solving groups and forming relationships that helped.

When D028 was asked about the culture of the university she commented on the helpfulness of the library assistants, and also the finance office. Also, she had been in receipt of a mature students' bursary. In general she spoke in positive terms about the institution.

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D101 stated that she had a bad experience 5 years before, however relationships with other students had made this a better experience. She felt that her contact with the college was basically positive and that the college was good and "give you all the help you need".

Although D102 had completed an Access course at the same institution where she currently studied higher education, the course was seen as completely different and it was still a big change. However her overall view was that the "college was a good learning place.... if you want to learn".

D017 indicated that there was a very positive feeling about the institution all the way through the course, but as she had just finished the course felt that there was little support in terms of exit guidance from the institution.

D200 contrasted the level of support given between Access year and the HN year even though both had been in the same institution. There was lots of support in the Access year and little or no support during HN study. She stated that she had the impression during Access that everyone wanted you to do well and to pass, but that was not so during the HN course.

D101 was extremely positive about the culture of the institution. Asked whether she felt the college wanted her to succeed, she gave a very confident "yes" to that question. She readily gave a

list of those areas where she felt supported which included, "Learning Support system, lecturers are there if you need them, Student Support Centre, other students and student tutoring".

The culture was perceived by some as being too oriented towards the 18-24 year olds who had no domestic ties or responsibilities and described the university's treatment of mature learners as insensitive with scheduling unsuitable for the mature student. More than one mature student mentioned being apprehensive when seeing mainly young people sitting in class. Their self-confidence was lacking and imagined that younger students would cope better with learning and they would get left behind. However all six in the further education college described the college as a very positive place. They perceived that the college wanted them to succeed and provided a positive learning environment to assist them to succeed. This was somewhat in contrast to the feelings expressed by students in the two universities interviewed.

8.12   Relationship with Lecturing Staff.

In terms of lecturing staff, A059 felt that at the start there is no relationship with the lecturing staff for the first two years because the numbers were too high to make that possible. But after that, you do find that a relationship becomes possible and this is helpful. "This relationship is definitely a very helpful thing. Everyone has problems with their work at some stage and to be able to and feel confident to go and speak to them is immensely important".

A117 spoke of the approachability and helpfulness of the lecturing staff as "highly dependent on which department they came from." The departmental culture was very significant. One department was declared to have a culture that, "It is our job to lecture and your job to learn". It is unclear whether this was openly stated or just the general perception. They were very academic in nature... and tended to use very academic language. One might be forgiven for thinking that there is a sense of inevitability about this... that academic departments in University should be staffed by academics who spoke like academics. However what was being suggested was more to do with approachability from a student perspective and how well the staff related to the student body. However, this student had contact with another department in the same university that was much more approachable. There was a feeling that with some lecturers there was a sense of relationship, and "as you go through the course it is more possible and more evident". And with another department there was a much more definite culture of establishing relationships between staff and students. He stated that he felt that the sense of relationship certainly makes a difference.

Theoretically we draw on the work of Bourgeois & Frenay 2001, who quoted from Becher (1989), Becker et al (1961). Becher's (1989) work looks at the relationship between academic disciplines and departmental cultures and behaviour:

"It would seem, then, that the attitudes, activities and cognitive styles of groups of academics are closely bound up with the characteristics and structures of knowledge domains with which groups are professionally concerned (1989:20)". (quoted in Bourgeois & Frenay 2001 p105.)

Thus the characteristics of a department can play an influential role in determining the quality of undergraduate student life both for young students and adults. The ideas and actions of the faculty affect the students.

"The rules the faculty makes, the way the faculty organizes and defines the situations in which students must perform, the way the faculty interprets and applies their rules and definitions – all these constitute a major part of the environment in which students act" (Bourgeois et al 2001, p 105).

The faculty and others in this way create the problems to which the perspectives and strategies of the student culture comprise some kind of solution.

The size of the class also would make a big difference. This must be affected by the rise in undergraduate numbers and the resulting increase in student-staff ratios. In a lecture hall with two hundred students there is no possibility of the establishing of any sense of relationship. The student

noted that in later years the sizes of the classes were smaller and this made relationships more possible. And in project work there is more of a sense of working one to one.

A087 also stated that the approachability of lecturing staff depended upon which department they came from. She felt that there was quite a different culture in different departments. It is clear that the concept of departmental culture within this institution was very marked. One department was spoken of in glowing terms whilst another department, it was stated, did everything wrong. She spoke of approaching for help but the advice given was unhelpful. The lectures were spoken of as being over the top and non-informative.

A026 spoke of lecturing staff as being 60 per cent friendly and 40 per cent unfriendly. When further asked about this he said that 80 per cent of them thought that learning was "my problem". Only 20 per cent would say that they were here to help me learn. This was completely different from the Access year. And in a telling statement he said, "Over the three years, I could only say that I had a relationship with one lecturer".

A025 stated that her lecturers were middle of the road to approachable. "And even those who at first you thought were unapproachable, when you had to approach them you found that wasn't really true. In some classes if the numbers are small then you do have a sense of relationship but in some classes there are over 200 students and that is just not possible". It was very hard to have any

personal interaction in first year because the numbers were high. But in tutorials there was more interaction and this would enhance the sense of relationship. "When the lecturer is approachable and you have some sense of relationship then it is helpful".

A069 felt that lecturers were "very approachable". However it was noted that this student was the student representative on staff student liaison committees and hence had perhaps more of an opportunity to establish a relationship with lecturing staff. "The biggest problem with lecturers is that they are specialists in their own fields but not skilled in how to present it". However, in tutorials there was more of a relationship established and they were more supportive.

When asked where she placed the lecturing staff on a continuum from friendly to unfriendly, C142 stated that they were 65 per cent of the way towards unfriendly. She did admit that some were reasonably helpful if you asked. "If you had a problem you could go and ask but you were more likely to ask another student". "They didn't really offer help". Some were quite distant.

C156 did not seem to think it very important if the lecturing staff were approachable or not. In her view 85 per cent of them were approachable, and the other 15 per cent had the attitude "don't bother me". However, it is not necessary that they be approachable, though it is "nice" if they are.

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C083 spoke of having "great" relationships with all of her tutors. She said that the mature students made "more of a connection" with the tutors than the younger students did. But she stated that the mature students "needed that". She felt that the approachability, or sense of relationship with teaching staff was an important factor.

C200 stated that he felt he mostly had a good relationship with lecturers. He was quick to stress that he felt it was very important that the lecturer be approachable... that he could relax with the lecturer rather than be formal.

C027 felt that lecturing staff went from one end of the continuum to the other. On average they were more towards the unhelpful side. She felt that she got more help from research students rather than lecturers per se. She spoke freely of a "them and us" distance between the staff and students.

C088 again spoke of a wide variance in lecturing staff, declaring "the older lecturers were the most unapproachable. The newer ones were more supportive... eager to get their feet under the table and hence out to help". Perhaps it might be regarded that this was encouraging, that newer younger lecturers were more helpful albeit for less than altruistic motives. She stated that there was no real sense of relationship though "it would be good to have a therapeutic relationship".

Attitudes seem somewhat different in the context of the further education college. D028 stated that she could not fault them. "They were there to help me to learn". She spoke of a very caring attitude and a definite sense of relationship. She spoke of the importance of their showing that they were human.

D100 indicated a similar assessment stating that the staff members were very good, giving you all the help you wanted. She spoke of a sense of relationship stating "it does have a big effect on your learning".

D102 said she found the teaching staff friendly and approachable. She mentioned one lecturer by name who was extremely approachable and stated that she felt this was very important... "...approachability is important for learning. I need the one-to-one for learning".

D017 was also enthusiastic about the lecturing staff describing them as "all very good... helpful.... understanding.... enthusiastic". She said that she definitely felt that she had a relationship with the staff stating that this was "very important..... I could come in and speak to these people".

D200 stated that she built up a friendship with some lecturers, which she thought was important. She stated, "the more down to earth and approachable the lecturers are the easier it is to ask questions, to discuss, and to learn".

D101 said that she got on well with the lecturers though she could not say that she had a relationship with them. She had one bad experience with a lecturer. She later clarified this and said that the lecturer had expressed doubts about her abilities to survive the course.

With reference to University A, it was found that of the six students interviewed one thought that the lecturing staff were "middle of the road to approachable", whilst another thought they were very approachable. Two of the interviewees were very outspoken about departmental cultures that were seen in some cases as unhelpful. Both named the same department within the university which they claimed was very unsupportive and disinterested in their students. Both strongly contrasted this with another department in the university, which was extremely supportive. Hence their feeling was that the level of interaction and support was most strongly determined by the departmental culture.

With reference to University C, it was found that of the six students interviewed two thought that the lecturers were basically friendly and approachable and that it was important to them that they could have this sense of relationship with them. One further student thought that there were both ends of the spectrum represented in the lecturing staff, the older ones being unfriendly and distant the newer ones being helpful and approachable. The remaining three viewed the lecturing staff as being towards the unfriendly end of the spectrum though not extremely so. "Them and us" was the telling phrase.

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With reference to College D, it was found that of the six students interviewed five thought that the lecturing staff were very friendly and supportive. These five thought that a relationship with the lecturers existed and that this was very important in supporting their learning. The one remaining student thought that the lecturers were very good but that no relationship existed. Although she did point out that she felt that approachability was very important to her and to her learning.

8.13   The Role of the Academic Advisor.

Although job titles varied from institution to institution, the individual referred to here is the one who had a guidance role with respect to the student. In one institution this person is called Academic Advisor, in another Course Co-ordinator.

A059 said that the academic advisor was someone who simply "got your sheet signed" and that was all that they did. The whole process lasted about 35 seconds. The advisor was demotivating and unhelpful and hence does not appear anywhere in the learning world map. A117 did not find that the advisor of studies was relevant at all. You only see him on the first day of the semester. "He is not a significant person in the learning experience". A026 stated that the advisor of studies was totally irrelevant. "You only see him at the start of each semester to fill in the registration form. And I don't see him at any other time". A087 referred to the advisor of studies, concerning whom

she said that he was an "utter waste of time". He was "a very nice man, but useless". He did not

give academic advice and when career path advice was sought, he did not seem able to help. She

had decided to wait till the next semester before requesting a change of advisor. A026 described

himself as a quite individualistic person who didn't bother much about support. He did however

admit that mature students did need more personal help in certain areas. In particular he felt that

more support in the area of ICT was necessary and this should have been addressed more in the

Access year.

A025 stated that the relationship with the academic advisor is very important. "He has been

brilliant and very helpful. I know this is an untapped source for many people but for me it was very

important in terms of applying for funding and discussing course choices and academic guidance".

So for this student though the course advisor does not appear on the learning map he clearly should

have done. For this student, the course advisor was very important. This was an exceptional

response. It would appear that the story for this institution is that for those students who for

whatever reason have occasion to seek out the academic advisor, that individual could play an

important role. However for those students who did not have some crisis that motivated them to

seek out the academic advisor then they did not think that individual relevant to learning at all.

There were also a couple of cases of people having need of the academic advisor and feeling that

the individual was not helpful or supportive.

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A069 stated that the academic advisor was not influential at all in his learning. He saw them once a semester to register choices "but that was all that he ever did for me". In terms of other important factors he mentioned work and finances. There was a financial imperative to work and this necessarily impinged on the learning process. From leaving his job to taking up employment in his chosen profession as a teacher he estimated would be seven years and this resulted in a financial pressure. The need to work "is a negative on learning".

C142 said that she had seen her "personal tutor" once in the third year of her studies when she was experiencing a difficult personal problem. He had listened to her at that time and had helped. But apart from that the personal tutor had had no appreciable affect on her learning. C156 spoke of the personal tutor as not being significant and was there as a kind of safety net if you need it. C083 stated that she had a good relationship with her personal tutor and that the tutor had been very helpful. She saw the tutor every six months and it was a resource that "was there if you needed it". She stated that she did get help from this individual. C200 spoke of having three different personal tutors, one for each semester he had studied thus far. All were described as "fantastic" and "very approachable". In direct contrast to this, C027 described this individual (which she referred to as "academic advisor") in very negative terms. She said they were "rude, stand-offish, the opposite of supportive, dissatisfied in their jobs". C088 stated that the personal tutor had no real effect. He hadn't approached the tutor for assistance and so there had been no real contact. There had been no meetings whatsoever, not even once per year.

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In College D, a further education college, guidance was handled differently from the way it is handled in the two universities. D028 said that she had a guidance "slot" every Monday afternoon and the tutor who took this was "one of the best. You could speak to her at any time". The student stated that this guidance tutor was important to her and she understood because she had been a mature student herself. This tutor also taught on the programme so she saw her on more than one occasion per week.

D100 also stated that the guidance tutor was important to her learning. This individual was named and it was stated also served as the course co-ordinator. "When she saw you really wanted to learn, there was encouragement all the way". D102 stated that she received three guidance interviews per year, which allowed her to discuss any problems she might have. Also there was the opportunity to drop in and see her guidance tutor at other times if she felt it necessary. She said that she had established a relationship with her guidance tutor and that she regarded that to be very helpful to her learning. D017 continued the same theme of the guidance tutor or course co-ordinator as being very helpful and a very important resource in learning. "He was a brilliant person to work with, a tutor and advisor".

D200 indicated that she did not have a personal tutor. "Someone was supposed to perform that role but didn't. And even if she had I wouldn't have gone to her because I had difficulty

communicating with her". She concluded by saying that the personal tutor was irrelevant to her learning.

D101 again spoke of a very positive relationship with the personal tutor. "At times I would want to pack it in but *** was very supportive. She suggested I should do the HN in the first place".

In summary, with reference to University A, the role of the academic advisor in the learning experience of students was seen by one student as very important. He had been "brilliant and very helpful". However the other five students described that individual as irrelevant. Epithets such as "useless" and "utter waste of time" were used freely.

With reference to University C, in referring to the academic advisor in the learning experience of students, four students described that role as not significant, one of these describing it as somewhat negative as those members of staff were not interested in fulfilling the role. Two students described the individual as approachable and helpful.

College D may be summarised by saying that five of the six students described that role as significant, explaining that a very supportive relationship was in place and that it had proved to be extremely important in terms of their learning experience. One of the six said that the role was not being fulfilled. This seemed to be in marked contrast to the picture presented in interviewing

university students on this matter. The further education college seemed to be fulfilling this support role much more effectively.

8.14   Scaling Questions.

Finally the questions in the interview schedule where the student is asked to supply a scaled answer with respect to each of the variables being discussed are addressed.

In considering the eighteen responses given it is possible to identify a mean answer of the scale of 1 through 5 answers. In some measure this was regarded as an indicative response from the eighteen interviewed students from the institutions.

8.14.1   Question 12 in the interview schedule sought to determine to what extent the relationship with fellow students was a positive or negative factor in the learning experience of the student.

The scale was set up as follows: "1" indicated that this was a negative effect. "2" would indicate more positive than negative. "3" was neutral or don't know. "4" was more positive than negative and "5" was a positive effect.

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Of the eighteen who were interviewed, one student recorded a score of "1" (indicating a negative affect on learning). Two students recorded a score of "3" (indicating a neutral effect). Eight students recorded a score of "4", which indicated a more positive than negative effect. The remaining seven students scored this as a "5" or a positive effect on learning.

The mean answer across the eighteen respondents was 4.1. This indicated that the effect of fellow students was in general viewed as positive.

8.14.2 Question 13 asked about the effect of the student's spouse or partner on the learning experience of the student. The same scale was used from negative (1) to positive (5).

Five of the eighteen had no partner and hence their responses were ignored. One respondent scored this as a "1" (negative effect). One student rated this as a "2" score (mostly negative). Two students rated the effect of partner as a "4" (mostly positive) and the remaining nine students rated this as a "5" (clear positive). This made a mean score of 4.3. On a scale of 1 to 5, 4.3 has to be regarded as a positive score indicating a strongly positive influence from partners on the learning experience.

8.14.3 Question 14 inquired of the effect of parents or children on the student's learning. One student rated this as a "2". Three students gave a score of "3". Five students rated this as a

"4" (mostly positive), and the remaining nine students rated this as a "5". This made a mean score of 4.2. Again this gave a score on the positive side of the scale between mostly positive and positive. The effect of children was seen as a very large motivational factor to drive the student to study in the first place. Though some level of ambivalence reflects the statements of some students that the demands of childcare were sometimes at odds with the demands of study.

8.14.4 Question 15 inquired about the student's relationship with the institution and sought to identify whether the student viewed that as positive or negative in its effect on the learning experience. Two students scored this as a "1" (negative). Three students graded this as a "2". Three rated this as a neutral "3". A further three students rated this at a score of "4". The remaining seven students rated this as a "5". It is noticeable that five of these seven came from one institution, the further education college, D. This gave a mean score of 3.5 which is a score close to neutral. Since there was a marked difference between the further and higher education sectors it is interesting to note the two means separately. The higher education mean was 3.1 and the further education mean was 4.5.

8.14.5 Question 16 investigated the effect of relationship (or lack of it) with teaching staff on the learning experience. One student scored this response as a "1". Two students rated this as a score of "2". Five students stated that this scored a "4". And the remaining ten students rated this as a "5". The mean score was 4.2. This made a mean score between mostly positive and positive.

8.14.6   Question 17 inquired as to the effect of the academic advisor or personal tutor on the learning process. Four of the eighteen students scored this as a "1" indicating a very negative effect. One student rated this at a score of "2" (mostly negative). Five students graded this with a score of "3" (neutral). One student responded with a score of "4". The remaining seven students scored this with "5". (Four of these it should be noted were in the further education college.) The mean score for this question was 3.3, which is a score close to neutral. However again this was a question that was answered differently by the further education college. The university mean was 2.75, and the further education college mean was 4.5. Hence the feeling about the academic advisor in the two universities lay between mostly negative and neutral, whereas the feeling at the further education college was between mostly positive and positive. This demonstrated that the guidance feature in the further education sector was perceived to be more proactive and hence more effective whereas in the universities it was reactive to problems presented to it and students did not always present their problems and hence did not receive the help and encouragement they felt they needed.

Chapter Nine.

Research Findings and Conclusions.

The findings of this research may be divided into findings from the quantitative and qualitative

phases.

9.1   Quantitative Phase Findings:

The quantitative phase itself was divided into three distinct studies represented by chapters 5, 6, and

7 of this thesis.

9.1.1   Findings from the Study of Institution A.

1. Access students were more likely to leave the university than would be the norm. In

    1992, they made up 4.7% of the population but 7.5% of the leavers. Similarly in

    1993 they had 6.8% of the population and 13.3% of the leavers. Thus they were

around twice as likely to leave the university as might have been predicted by their share of population.

2. With reference to other NTE's to this university, those who came from a SCOTVEC/BTEC background made up only 11.0% of the population but 24.9% of the leavers in 1992. In 1993, they made up 14.6% of the population but 27.6% of the leavers. It might be said that they are more than twice as likely to leave as other members of the student body.

3. It was also found that concerning A-level entrants, they are only half as likely to leave as other students.

4. In an evaluation of students who entered with A-levels, an examination was made of their A-level points on entry as a means of predicting performance. There is no obvious progression from low A-POINT to high A-POINT scores showing that the higher the A-POINT score the more likely it is that a student should pass a unit of university study. It might be predicted that the graph grow steadily from left to right with the rising A-Point score. But this obviously is not the case. The pass rate rises and falls, and the very high A-POINT score of 28 has one of the lower pass rates in the list. It may also be noted that the there is variation from cohort to cohort. It should be concluded that A-POINT

score is not a particularly reliable method of estimating the likelihood of a student passing a unit of university study.

5. In an evaluation of students who entered with SCE Highers, an examination was made of their H-level points on entry as a means of predicting performance. It is evident that 90+% of all SCE students, regardless of H-POINT score on entry, passed at this University in 1992, 1993 and 1994. Hence it is concluded that H-POINT scores are not a particularly sophisticated way of predicting either performance or progression in university study.

6. An examination of performance profiles of the various entry groups was made. In examining the 1992 profiles, it must be commented that the difference between A-level students and all others is a much more marked difference than any difference between Access and others. The A-level students scored many more A's, more B's and as a result fewer C's. They also had fewer fail grades overall and significantly fewer "X" grades which represent incompletes.

7. A comparative study of the reasons for leaving in the 1992 cohort was carried out on Access students, A level students and SCE students. For the Access student the most common reason for leaving was category 10, which was successful completion of

course. This made up 56.8% of the cases of leaving. A further 17.3% was accounted for by academic failure. In looking at the A-level students 36.5% of all cases of leaving were due to successful completion of course and a further 33.6% were due to transfers to another university. Hence with reference to the A-level students this should be noted as a major contribution to those students leaving. In an examination of the overall picture of all SCE students there were 741 cases leaving because of successful completion of course which amounted to 68.1% of all cases of leaving. 110 cases of leaving were due to academic failure (10.1%). The next most common reason for leaving was "other: reasons general or unspecified" which accounted for 45 cases or 4.1%. In 1993, the picture for leavers among the Access was different. In this cohort the highest incidence of leaving was 43 and this was for reason code 20, which represented academic failure. This was 48% of the cases amongst the Access. Amongst the A-level students the highest figure was 33 cases who left by transferring to another university. This represented 36.7% of all A-level leaving. It was noticeable that there were fewer cases of leaving amongst this student group than other student groups.

8. Although certain interesting trends were observable concerning comparative performance of students from various entry modes in Institution A, quantitative analysis did not present any coherent explanation of causal factors explaining the comparatively good performance and poor persistence rates of former Access students in this

institution. Nor did it suggest any explanation for differential performance across institution, across cohort, or across faculty or department.

9.1.2 Findings from the Study of Institution B.

In the study of Institution B, the data permitted only an examination of former Access students pursuing studies within that university. There was no opportunity to compare this with other classifications of entrants.

1. Summarising the findings of this phase of the study, it was found that 243 students received some kind of award (46.2%), whilst 138 had withdrawn from the university (26.2%). Of the remaining 145, 134 were on course (25.5%) and the few remaining were made up of those who had transferred to other universities or had had their studies suspended.

2. It was noticeable that the percentage of withdrawals (26.2%) was high for former Access students in this institution.

3. In the analysis of data for Institution B, some attention was given to the effect of age on performance of former Access students. It was decided that one possible measure, which

was obtainable was the age of the student at the time of their Access studies. By listing this, it would be possible to identify trends of performance in the various age groups concerned. The ages of students ranged from 17 to 56. Officially a student was supposed to be 21 years of age to be accepted as an Access student. In practice this was reduced to 20 years of age so that the student would be 21 years on entering university study and thus would be considered a mature student. Further as recruitment became a fundamental priority for the survival of certain programmes in FE, younger students were admitted onto Access programmes and subsequently accepted by a number of universities into degree study. It was found that the modal class was 21-25 years. However the median age was found to be 30 years and the mean age 30.9 years. There were relatively few students in the over 40 age-bracket.

It was noticed that the number of withdrawals fell with increasing age. For these students, increase in age seemed to signal increase in maturity for study. The optimum age for minimum withdrawals fell in the 30- 45 years categories.

4. Attainment of honours by age: It should be noted that the 16-20, 46-50 and 51-55 categories contained very small populations. In any examination of trends considerable care would require to be taken about making any generalisable observations using these categories. However looking at the other age groups it was noted that the optimum age

group for attaining honours degrees was the 36-40 age group. It was noticeable that the overall levels of success seemed low. Performance was also differential across curricular boundaries. The worst performance was in the area of Computing where the success rate was only 35 percent and the best performance was in the area of Business Studies which had a success rate of 63 percent. The other subject areas all had a similar level of success around the mid 40's percent.

5. The level of information available from Institution B is in sharp contrast with that available from institution A. In Institution B we were only given information on just over 500 former Access students.

6. As a general statement, it could be observed that pass rates amongst former Access students at Insitution B were much lower than they were in Institution A. There was no identifiable cause for this discrepancy.

7. There was clear evidence of lower performance amongst former Access students in Institution B when compared to Institution A. However no causal factors are identifiable in this phase of the research.

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9.1.3 Findings from the Study of Former Access Students in HN study in FECs.

1. Certain colleges seemed more likely to recruit Access students who subsequently went on to HN study rather than degree study. The full reasons for this were not entirely clear but may be associated with well defined articulation routes.

2. Further it was noted that certain subject areas were prevalent as subject areas where this kind of HN articulation proliferated. The largest sectors noted were the Built Environment, Science and Technology and Information Technology. These were followed by Hospitality Operations, Business and Food Technology.

3. It was found that in studying the success rates of the 650 students who studied over a period of some years some 42% were successful in achieving some group award.

4. It was found in comparing this with figures released by SCOTVEC before they began to consider such information restricted, and the more recent information derived from the Scottish Office that this was typically 20% less than the success rate for the global figure of all students in Scotland being entered for such awards.

5. Looking at the achievement of merits was one way in which performance could be examined rather than just progression in study. On making an examination of the achievement of merits in HN unit study, it was found that there were significant levels of attainment of merit amongst these students, 53% of those students about whom information was available achieved at least one merit. This included a substantial number of students who did not attain a group award.

6. It was possible to examine performance by cohort of these former Access students to search for any trend across the years. The success rates fluctuated from 85% successful (with very small numbers in 1989) down to 42% successful in 1993. There was however a figure of 11.4% success in 1994 which was greatly tempered by the large number of people who remained on course at the time of sampling. The only overall observation that might be made is that there is considerable fluctuation from year to year.

7. There was a notable finding with reference to performance, when considered with reference to the age of the Access students on entering into HN level study. The very youngest in the group (age less than 21) did not perform as well as their more mature counterparts. The figures for performance by age were, the under 21's were 20% successful in achieving a group award, whilst the 21-25 year old age group were 36.8% successful. The 26-30 year olds were 47% successful. The 31-35 year olds were 45.0%

successful whilst the 36-40 year olds were 42.5% successful. The 41-45 year olds had a success rate of 48.4% whilst the 46-50 year olds were 57% successful. (this was for a small sample). If we were to discount the 46-50 year olds since the sample was so small, we note that there is a peak level of performance after the age of 25, and those who were over the age of 30 made comparatively more successful students. It is clear that Access courses as a means of entry for lower age groupings was not as successful for students in this study, and of course, Access was never designed as an appropriate articulation route for such students.

8. The results of this phase of the research were not as anticipated. For a number of reasons we may have postulated that the results of this group of students may have been more successful than the cohort of former Access students operating in the HE environment, yet the opposite is true. The rationale for this assumption may be summarised by the following:

- These students were following an academically less demanding course of study.

- The assessment regime being experienced in HN study was similar to the assessment regime experienced in Access.

- The learning environment being experienced in HN was exactly the same environment experienced in the Access year.

- Thus there were good reasons for expecting a comparatively higher level of success when compared to those Access students who articulated directly into degree study in an HEI. Yet the opposite was found to be true.

- This suggests that underlying causal factors may not be easily identified by mass analysis of bulk data, but may be a more individualised effect. This naturally led to a qualitative phase in which interviewing of individual students sought to enter the learning world of the student and identify the factors which affected performance and perseverance.

9.2 Qualitative Phase Findings.

At the end of chapter two, following the literature review, a model was presented which was drawn partially from this research and partly from the review of literature. In essence this was a synthesis of the literature presented by many researchers, drawn together and amended by the findings of this research. The realm of this research was an approach to understanding the important affective dimension to mature adult learning. The investigative interviews engaged in were described in chapter eight.

Six pillars representing supportive relationships were postulated and thence examined in the research by means of a programme of interviews with mature learners who had emerged from an Access environment, usually in FE or in a small number of cases from in house Access courses in

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universities. Following the interview phase, the following observations may be made which come out of the final phase of the research.

9.2.1   Peer group support:

The importance of peer support for the new identity as a learner is confirmed by the student interviews. If the learner is to adjust to his/her new identity as a learner it will be with the assistance of a network of other learners. These will provide a social context in which the transformation of identity can take place. These peers will have a dramatic affect on the ability of the learner to feel comfortable with the new self-identity. This level of comfort is required if the learner is to be able to cope with the disjunction of the move into higher education. It is also necessary if the student is to become an integrated personality coping with the new identity and hence experiencing learning in the comfort zone of a new socially interactive environment. Friends are often drawn upon for support and assistance in handling situations and contingencies in life. This is also true of the student experience. Amongst mature students the most valuable friendships they develop are with other students who are in similar positions to themselves. This was noted with particular reference to mature women students in Edwards (1993). These were spoken of as "supportive" relationships. Packham and Miller (2000) examined the effects of peer-assisted learning support on students at the University of Glamorgan during the 1997-98 academic year. Their programme (Peer-Assisted Student Support) was a modification of the Supplemental

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Instruction scheme which has been in existence in the USA since the early 1970s. These schemes sought to promote the student verbalising their understanding to their peers and working together in groups at specially devised group tasks and projects. The result of this interaction between the student and his/her peers is to foster learning networks and supportive relationships which enhance the learning experience. As well as second year students assisting the learning of first year students (a predictable form of peer instruction), first year students are also encouraged to form self-help groups to assist each other in the learning process. Thus the cognitive process is assisted by these new relationships engendered. This is demonstrable in the form of enhanced performance and results. Interestingly, it was noted in this study that the attendance at PASS sessions was female dominated. The importance of peer relationships is stressed in a number of studies (McGivney 1996, Martinez & Munday 1998, Bloomer & Hodkinson 1999, Waters & Gibson 2001, Boylan 2004).

Almost without exception, students testified that other students had been vital to their survival. These supportive relationships included small informal groups set up within the cohort of learners. And this feeling of acceptance by others which reinforced the self identity which enhanced the likelihood of survival (West 1996 p 200). In a minority of cases these peer study groups were a top down arrangement and this was particularly so in certain subject disciplines and vocationally oriented degree situations. The majority of these study groups were bottom up arrangements. They were learning strategies devised to

help mature learners cope with the experience of higher education. Mostly these students were drawn to other mature learners who more readily understood their feelings of disjunction by making the transformation to learner. The mature were often insecure about their new identity. They saw themselves as interlopers, pretenders who did not truly deserve to be in this new environment, an environment designed for school leavers. And these school leavers were seen as the legitimate heirs.

The level of comfort experienced by the learner in this new identity may be seen as proportional to the number and depth of new relationships formed in the learning environment. These new relationships were seen as a network of therapeutic relationships which validate the new identity and lead to greater comfort, greater confidence in the alien environment.

9.2.2   Partner/spouse support:

The next pillar in the viaduct of learning was from the domestic affective environment of the learner. The significant others in the student's life made a huge difference to the learning experience. If the student's partner was antagonistic to this new identity, then grave difficulties would be experienced by the student and this resulted in a disruption either to the pattern of study, or to the relationship, or both. Merrill (1999, p 120) quotes the work of Leonard in 1994 in dealing with mature women students in saying that one third

of the mature women she interviewed in her study "met with considerable resistance from husbands over their decision to return to education". Later in p160 she commented that about half of the female participants in her study stated that they did not receive support towards their studies from their husbands/ partners. A small minority said that their husband/partner was obstructive, occasionally hostile and openly discouraged them from studying. Lack of support from partners cut across class boundaries and was a matter concerning the identity of the learner not of social class.

Bolam & Dodgson (2003) commented that personal issues relating to changing relationships with partners and family affected the retention of mature students in HE. Their conclusion following focus groups was that family responsibilities can and do impact on student success. Conversely they also noted that "mature students agree that the support of their partners and families is central to their success in HE". The point is well made that relationships with partners and other members of close family can become the greatest of incentives or disincentives depending on the nature of that relationship.

Clearly opposition from partners may be a huge negative influence on the learning environment of the student. The obverse of this is also true that a strong supportive attitude from significant others in the life of the student can provide a strong supportive influence for the learning process. West (1996) commented that many students enter into a pathway of learning because of a feeling of dissatisfaction with their lives. Either stated or implied is

the notion that they wished to create a new identity. There was a desire to create a new life from the fragments of the old. It is clear that partners or spouses may support or oppose such a search for a new identity. They may feel threatened by such a new departure or it may be a shared goal. However if the relationship is supportive this will become a great asset to the student in making the kind of adjustments that are necessary to get the most out of the learning experience.

Edwards (1993) described family and education as "greedy institutions" which demand so much from the student that there are bound to be conflicts between them. They seek exclusive and undivided loyalty, and they attempt to reduce the claims of competing roles. Their demands are rapacious. This competition is seen to be particularly fierce in the lives of mature women students. In our society men are expected to be out of the home pursuing economic activity and the greater responsibilities within the home are perceived to be the responsibility of women. Hence when men are absent for study reasons it is more accepted than if women are. Women spoke of going to sleep thinking about things and waking up in the middle of the night thinking about their essays. Education so occupied their minds that they spoke of it taking over their lives. Given that this competition takes place in mature students, then there will be competing demands in the life of the mature student (in both males and females though the problem is seen to be more exacerbated in mature female students). The relationship between the mature student and partners or spouses can either alleviate this struggle or intensify it. The struggle will be alleviated if the partner or spouse

is supportive of the educational aspirations of the student and intensified if there is a resentment of the time spent away from the responsibilities of home and family or relationship. Not only is this a matter of deciding on priorities and time allocations, the issues are clouded by qualitative belief systems which either motivated or piled on guilt. What kind of mother spends all her time dealing with reading lists and essays? What kind of student spends all her time bathing children and doesn't get her essays in on time?

Bolam & Dodgson (2003) commented that the first step in improving retention is for higher education institutions to recognise and acknowledge the needs of mature students. One suggestion quoted was to include partners in pre-entry activities in order that they might be more aware of the demands placed on the student by higher educational study.

Support from partners can take more than one form. There are practical levels of support which would involve taking share in domestic duties and responsibilities such as child care and housework. But further there are areas of emotional support. Mature students regarded their partner's emotional support and encouragement as very important. This support may be signalled in material ways, by partners taking the children out at weekends to allow the student solitude to study, or by helping with the housework etc. Yet it is also signalled in other ways which may include interest expressed in the processes and outcomes of study, a willingness to discuss the concepts engaged in the learning process, or pride in the partner's efforts, shared commitment to the learning endeavour. Some spoke of partners helping

them to revise, reading essays and dissertations before presentation, and listening to and commenting upon their seminar papers before presentation. Some of the most tangible evidences of such support would be the encouragement to continue when the student is discouraged and tempted to give up or felt doubtful about their own abilities to continue with the course.

To many students these evidences of support were seen as more valuable symbols of their partner's support. (Edwards, 1993, p107ff) And this was a theme which came out repeatedly in interviews in this research. To be able to share their learning experiences at home leads to their being able to unite their educational identity with their domestic identity and may lead to feelings of greater integration. To be left in the situation where this is not possible means that these two identities are left disjointed and disparate and this results in feelings of non-integration.

West (1996) mentioned the experience of several Access students who pursued their studies after seeing the experience of some significant other in their background who had made a success of their Access programme and subsequent degree study. In one case mentioned, it was a sister and in another, a daughter. In both instances these became role models for the learner, and put flesh and blood on the bones of an alternative identity which appealed greatly to the learner, becoming their chief motivation. Self belief followed on the back of

a concrete example of someone who had succeeded in the transformation. It was a question of self identity and whether the learner could believe in themselves in the role of learner.

The support of partner was among the most often cited and most highly valued support in the identity transformation in interviews. There was one student who spoke of a very negative response from a partner to the identity change, then commented that subsequently the relationship ended because of this transformation. In general those interviewed in this research who had a partner spoke very positively of a supportive relationship that was very important to them and helped them to some degree of integration, being a "together" sort of person. If this pillar is missing, if the student is not supported in this area, it means that the student is relying on institutional pillars being there to support the identity transformation and to support learning. As indicated several pieces of research have identified the area of partner support as a vital pillar in the viaduct of learning (Edwards 1993, Weil 1993, West 1996, Merrill 1999, Bolam & Dodgson 2003).

9.2.3   Children/parent support:

For the younger student in particular the area of parental support may be enormously important, financially, psychologically and emotionally. However an area which has largely been ignored is the affect on students who are themselves parents; the effect of their own children during the study experience. This is sometimes thought of in the negative sense. i.e. parents who are students will have a division of attention between their studies and the

needs of their children. Whilst this is true, several nursing students in one study cited encouragement from children, motivation because of children, as a major postitive factor encouraging them to complete their studies and be successful in their learning. Edwards in her study with mature women students said that children were spoken of generally as "supportive".

This support may have taken the form of domestic help given which allowed the women to devote themselves to study. Once again though, support was demonstrated in other ways. As with partners, their children's interest in what they were doing was spoken of as a tremendous positive encouragement. This interest might be shown in the child testifying to others with some pride what their mother was doing. The process of studying could be shared with some older children, and this was particularly so if these children were themselves studying for GCSE's or A-levels. In this case there is a mutual encouragement process. Of course, the opposite can also be true, as children may well resent time spent away from seeing to their needs to pursue educational goals and requirements. Some students saw the fulfilling of educational goals as becoming a good role model for the children. Becoming a good example to them in trying to better oneself educationally was showing them a way forward.

In this programme of interviewing former Access students there were also many examples of learners who were parents, citing their own children as a great positive element in their

motivations to learn. Learners spoke of wanting to be a good role model for their children and saw their identity as a learner as an immense step forward. Others spoke of the desire to provide a better standard of living for their children, and saw their degree study as a passport to a better job and a better standard of living, which would hence enhance the lives of their children. Those who spoke of the temporary financial deprivation during study as having a negative effect on their children were in a very small minority and generally saw the period of sacrifice as being worth it.

For the mature student, parental influence can also be a factor. It is possible for there to be either a positive or negative influence from parents who either approve or disapprove of the student attempting the course. The facility to discuss and share their experience with parents may well depend firstly on the educational experience of the parents and secondly on their attitude towards the learning endeavour.

For mature women students the parents may disapprove since it may be seen as challenging the importance of their family roles and responsibilities. This disapproval may be signalled by the parents refusing to acknowledge that they were doing the course at all, or discounting the importance of it in such a way as to dismiss it as a matter of no consequence. In Edwards (1993), half of the women studied said that they felt that their parents were pleased that they were doing something to improve their life chances and this would be signalled by

their willingness to tell people proudly about what the women were doing. This is reinforcing their new sense of identity as a learner. A negative parental experience will serve as yet another barrier to learning and an undermining of the new sense of identity.

In dealing with mature students, another dimension to this is the effect of a student's own children on the learning environment. In this study this was seen as a vitally important motivational factor, and positive support from children was perceived as having a beneficial effect on learners. This was also dealt with in the literature (Cuthbertson & Smith 2001).

9.2.4   Institutional support:

The concept of the creation of a true learning environment was discussed in the literature review in chapter 2. This included the idea of an institutional culture which is sympathetic and welcoming to the student, whether mature or non-mature, and thus supportive of the significant identity transformation required by the mature student.

Any examination of institutional culture has to take into account the significant external pressures acting on institutions. Institutional policies will have a radical effect on the learning environment and institutional polices themselves are radically affected by external pressures. Widening Participation agenda may be motivated by a number of factors such as

a concern for social justice, a commitment to vocational relevance, concerns about institutional competition and marketing, and concerns about institutional performance against performance indicators (Murphy et al 2002, p82). Whereas we might imagine the first two of these are the compelling sound educational reasons for WP, it appears that the second two are the more compelling in the current climate. Competition in the "educational market" cause institutions to worry about economic survival and redundancies. And incentivisation makes the recruitment of a wider range of students a necessity. Thus HEIs and FECs are compelled to join in the WP agenda. The argument for social justice however has been eclipsed by arguments over marketing and recruitment.

The intense competition has led to shifts in the market. Some FECs complain that the student body who were once their catchment are now being accepted by universities directly (particularly post 1992 institutions). Schools are tending to retain more pupils into fifth and sixth years with the availability of bursaries for children who will remain in school. This has tended to squeeze the FE market. This has resulted in their moving into more community based opportunities causing pressure in the Community Education sector. Institutional motivation, policy and practice is profoundly influenced by the structure of post compulsory educational provision, and the immense financial pressures placed on institutions in an ever increasingly competitive market-place.

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Murphy et al (2002) comment

"One of the main findings of the research is the impact on the widening participation agenda of more institutional concerns such as survival, recruitment, marketing and competition with other institutions. This is particularly the case for the FE sector and post-1992 universities." (op cit p113)

If there is an impact on recruitment from the institutional culture then this also must result in an impact on retention. When a student feels that they do not fit in, that there is not a good fit with their cultural and social practices this leads to a feeling of being undervalued, and that their knowledge base is inappropriate and a "fish out of water" syndrome results (Osborne et al 2004, p 146). It results in the student feeling that they have little in common with other students and radically affects their effectiveness in networking with other students and forming relationships which will support their learning.

With reference to the learners interface with the institution and its culture, any contact with the institution must be examined. It will involve library and computer support, administration in all of its manifestations, as well as accommodation and physical plant. This begins with the first contact between the student and the institution. A positive initial contact is important to adults returning to education as they are sensitive to the messages given out by institutions.

How was their initial inquiry dealt with? How were they treated when they approached the institution? These messages will be taken to heart by the prospective student as he/she wrestles with the identity transformation required. McGivney (1993) posed the question about whether the institution accepted that the learner can go through such an identity transformation, from housewife and carer to learner in the higher education context, from unemployed or redundant worker to higher education student?

Merrill (1999) and Dorman (2000) have commented on the importance of the quality of the learning environment in determining the quality of the learning achievable. Studies in secondary schools have shown that there are links between school environment, student cognitive outcomes, student personal growth and satisfaction. A very large body of evidence suggests that classroom environment is a potential predictor of student cognitive and affective outcomes. In its review of teaching in British universities, the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (1990) asserted that the ethos of the whole institution largely determined the student's experience and that this notion of institutional ethos is an important contributory factor to quality in higher education institutions.

West (1996) makes this assertion on the basis of his research,

> "Many of the Medway learners believed, post-Access, that the institution had failed to provide either the environment or the resources necessary for effective study".

And yet this dissatisfaction was not confined to a discussion of lecture or tutorial facilities but spoke of their distress at conflict and disagreement in their college and the impact on certain teachers.

Merrill (1999) commenting on the learning environment at Warwick University for mature students and particularly for female mature students said that adult students have only managed to change the institution's culture and practice by a small number of degrees. As a group they lack the power to challenge the core values, ideology and policy of the institution as a whole. Bolam & Dodgson (2003) stated further that "universities must become more pro-active and holistic in their approach to supporting mature students".

Learning is perceived as an enjoyable and motivating experience and knowledge as opening up new ways of viewing the world. However in the process, self is redefined and adult students become changed persons. Thus mature students make a change in the environment of higher education institutions and learning makes a change in the identity of the students themselves. Thus the identity of the student and the identity of the institution should not be viewed as fixed, but qualities in flux.

There can be little doubt that the student is changed, and this redefining of self is inextricably involved in the process of learning. It is this redefining of self identity which makes learning such a transforming experience, and as such, makes the formation and

sustenance of relationships so vital. The redefining of the identity of institutions is something which may be accomplished willingly and thus support new classifications of learners, or in some cases less willingly, with a certain dragging of the feet, to the detriment of mature learners.

Practices and policies vary across institutions and across faculties and even departments within any single institution. How departments react to and treat mature students are important factors in the experience and quality of university life for mature students. (Merrill, 1999 p168) She went on to say,

> "The ideas and actions of the faculty, residents and interns affect the students, first of all, by setting the conditions under which students' problems arise. The rules the faculty makes, the way the faculty organizes and defines the situations in which the students must perform, the way the faculty interprets and applies their rules and definitions- all these constitute a major part of the environment in which students act. The faculty and others in this way create the problems to which the perspectives of the student culture comprise some kind of solution".

Thus the ethos of the department, faculty or institution provides a vital part of the learning environment and the student's interaction with, and relationship to the institution will provide an important support structure in the learning experience.

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Osborne et al (2002 p142) commented that

> "the Scottish literature provides evidence that a range of difficulties are experienced by students transferring from FECs to HEIs and this is also reflected in international literature. Close attention should be given to academic, administrative and pastoral support systems, and these clearly would benefit from stronger inter-institutional support mechanisms than those that currently exist".

Having said all of this, it was not a concept that emerged with great clarity from the interview process. This may be because, when learners are asked to contemplate the ethos of the institution, it was rather an abstract concept. Students could readily understand what was meant by relationship with teaching staff, but how did they relate to the institution, through its ethos? The institutional ethos has an effect on the role of the teaching staff, but it goes beyond that.

However it became clear that students did identify that there was a different ethos operating in different departments within the same university which had a profound effect on the behaviour, and approachability of teaching staff. Thus the institutional context was a concept dealt with in the literature in chapter 2 (West 1996, Bloomer & Hodkinson 1997, Bloomer & Hodkinson 1999, Merrill 1999, Osborne et al 2002, Doyle & Cumberford 2003, Bolam & Dodgson 2003) and was investigated as a result in this research.

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Since Access students have a higher proportion of learners from lower social classes, it might be expected that the lack of social fit amongst them would present a greater problem in HEIs which in general represent a more elitist culture. The "fish out of water" syndrome might be expected to be more acute with such learners who experience a lack of fit due to both age and social background. Thus the culture of FECs and post 1992 HEIs might be expected to present a more welcoming cultural environment for Access entrants. And yet our research shows that although there was broad agreement in interview that an institutional or even departmental culture does exist it was not sufficient to mediate against the higher non acheivement rates amongst the HNC/D students. What does this reflect? It reflects that although it must be counted as a factor, it is not the most important pillar supporting learning, and other supportive relationships more manifestly affect the support of the learner. Hence this support pillar must not be regarded as bearing an equal weight with others in the Castlecary Viaduct analogy. Each pillar will carry a different amount of load. And that differential weighting will be different for different students as the individual networking and background support for each student must of necessity be an individual matter. Nevertheless there was some small degree of confirmation in terms of recognition of the existence of such cultures and subcultures and aggravation over their effect on the learning experience.

9.2.5   Staff tutors support:

Perhaps the most obvious interface between the student and learning is in lectures, seminars, tutorials, labs and the like. It is the interface between the student and the teaching staff. How much support is offered by the staff to the student in his/her learning? Over the years Access students have been schooled into accepting that in their Access year they will receive a very high level of personal support from teaching staff, but on arrival at university they will be expected to take ownership of their own learning programme. And yet, there is a need for the teaching staff to be supportive of the student.

To the extent that an institution will provide supportive tutors, to that extent will the learner feel this pillar of support in the learning experience. The relationship between the mature student and the lecturers is a vital one in terms of the conduit of learning.

The contrast between the findings of Merrill (1999) and Edwards (1993) is marked. Merrill spoke of the relationship being friendly and learners being satisfied with the support and contact that they had received from tutors. Whilst Ewards speaks of learners seeing lecturers as being different kinds of people from themselves and thus could only be approached for help purely on academic grounds, which was seen as the lecturers' only interest. That is, they were not interested in them as people, but as students. This presence or absence of a sense of a relationship existing between student and lecturing staff was seen as having an effect on the sense of acceptance and hence the sense of self-identity that

the student had. Acceptance leads to ease of identity transformation and non-acceptance to feelings of unease and disquiet that the identity transformation required has not been achieved and hence leads to a greater probability of non-progression and non-retention.

The qualities which Rogers referred to as core conditions are what leads to a good therapeutic relationship between learners and facilitators of learning. These qualities engender a sense of relationship, acceptance and fellow feeling. In this learners find a supportive relationship which promotes deep learning.

Several students in interview spoke of high numbers in classes particularly in year one and expressed the opinion that these high numbers precluded any sense of relationship. They expressed the feeling that this promoted distance and lack of relationship. These students said that the reduced numbers in later years lessened these problems, particularly in seminar groups and in those subject disciplines where clinical placements meant close working relationships with supervisory staff. This made them see staff as real people and promoted this sense of acceptance and relationship.

All agreed that this sense of relationship was immensely important to learning. This concept was embedded in the literature (Parry 1991, Bloomer & Hodkinson 1997, Matinez & Munday 1998, Rogers 2002, Gisbson & Waters 2002, Murphy 2003) and it was clear made a major impact on those interviewed in this research.

9.2.6   Personal Tutor support.

Finally Personal Tutor suppport was the sixth part of the postulated model of supportive relationships which enhance learning. The Castlecary Viaduct of Learning postulated that the personal tutor would be a vitally important pillar to support learning.

In Access courses, considerable emphasis is given to the role of the personal guidance tutor. This is a key individual who provides not just educational guidance in terms of information and assistance with form filling, but provides a personal supportive relationship which rescues the student from danger of falling and defecting when difficulties arise. It has been stated in the research that this close personal tutor relationship is not so prevalent in universities.

It is manifest that the mature student has a greater need for this kind of supportive relationship than does the traditional entrant. The traditional entrant has much fewer encumbrances and challenges to face. At the study in Warwick University (Merrill, 1999) it was noted that mature students were more likely to have the need to discuss situations with a personal tutor, and several of the mature students in the study underwent varying levels of personal and study problems. In all cases the problems were successfully solved either by personal tutors or in more serious cases by the Senior Tutor's Office. In all cases, the

relationship with the personal tutor was seen as immensely important in providing the kind of support that mature students need in dealing with the complex problems encountered by mature students. Because of age, life experiences, relationship or familial responsibilities, mature students' capacity for more complex personal problems is greater and higher than the younger students in their cohorts.

This highlights the higher level of need for supportive relationships with personal tutors which will sustain them through the stormy seasons to sail serenely to success in academia. Universities have learnt to cope reasonably well with their traditional entrants but are having to learn a new kind of support for mature entrants like Access students. Bolam & Dodgson (2003) state that mature students believe that the success of the personal tutor system in all institutions is very much dependent upon the attitude and knowledge of individual academic members of staff. They conclude,

> "In the context of widening participation and improving student success, staff
>
> development is required so that all staff, but in particular personal tutors, become
>
> more knowledgeable of the issues facing mature and other non-traditional students".

In the series of interviews conducted as an integral part of this research it was found that students who were studying HE courses in FE colleges in general continued to experience a much higher level of support from their guidance tutor. They spoke of being encouraged to continue by this individual who was "there for them" when times got difficult or problems

threatened to swamp them. Hence the supportive role that Access students describe as taking place in Access is continued at least to some degree in HN study in the FE environment.

This was in stark contrast to those students who were studying in the university sector. They spoke of the personal tutor as being irrelevant... about their role being to rubber stamp their course choices and that was the sum total of their contribution to their learning experience. One or two students described having a personal crisis and that the personal tutor did help them to overcome their difficulties. However the majority had nothing good to say about this role. Some emphasized that the guidance role in HE was more of a safety net and unless you had a major problem and sought out the tutor then you did not receive anything out of that provision. Others spoke of the tutor being asked to perform a role they were ill equipped, or disinterested in performing. The general verdict was that the role was wholly reactive, and seemed to work with varying degrees of effectiveness. The contrast between those learners in HE and those in FE environments was marked.

One exception to the above observation would be in the realm of nurse education, where the personal tutor is often placed in clinical situations with the student and their working together builds a strong relationship which has a profound beneficial effect on the support underpinning the student experience (Cuthbertson & Smith 2001).

9.2.7   The Missing Pillar:

The summary of the interview process indicated in chapter eight suggested a pillar of personal support that had not been postulated in the theoretical model. The theoretical model (Castlecary Viaduct of Learning) was the result of a synthesis of many pieces of research into adult education and brought together all of the various aspects of influences in the affective domain on the learning world of the student. There were six aspects suggested by the literature which when brought together in one coherent statement led to the six pillars in the viaduct.

In the summary of significant others dealt with in the Learning World Maps of students there was another category which had not been in the postulated model. The category was broadly described as other wider family and friends.

This included more extended family relationships. Among those mentioned were siblings, aunts and uncles, and cousins. In some circumstances it was found that they offered quite significant levels of support to the learner. In one case, a mature student who came from some distance away from the city in which she studied, lived with her cousins during the week and returned to her husband and child at the weekends. She stated that she could not

have functioned as a student without the support of this family. Others spoke more generally of moral or motivational support coming from this more extended view of family than originally suggested in the Castlecary Viaduct model.

Also in this broad category, there were a number of interviewees mentioning non university friends as a source of emotional or moral support. One student spoke of keeping in contact with former colleagues who worked on the factory floor with her, indicating that those friends were happy with her new identity and in her view wished that they could also have "escaped" as she had.

This led to a modification of the model to reflect the fact that one pillar had not been anticipated. Wider friendships, outside the institutional context were seen as a positive influence on learning. These were seen as a learning resource in the context of which the learner received positive affirmation and acceptance in their new identity and this had a positive effect on the learning experience.

9.3   Reflections on the Viaduct Model:

9.3.1   It was seen that some of the postulated pillars were in fact very important to these mature learners. Peer support groups were commonplace and they ranged from just meetings over coffee which offered support, to more formalised arrangements where students studied

before the group meeting and each presented to the group, enhancing the learning

experience for all members of the group.

This research suggests that institutions might consider doing more to encourage the

formation of such groups as a learning strategy. And in fact it could be argued that such

arrangements are more akin to working arrangements in the real world. In commerce and in

industry it is much more likely that employees will be asked to function as part of a team to

accomplish some prearranged task or project. Clearly the relationships formed in such

arrangements are seen to be valued by learners as contributing something to the whole

learning experience. In this study students were asked if relationships with one's peers was

important to facilitating learning and the verdict from the learners was positive. Mature

learners it seemed tended to gravitate towards other mature learners. But in at least one

situation, it was stated that the study group consisted of members across the age spectrum.

9.3.2   It was clear that partner support played a vital role for some students. Of course some

students had no partner, and some that did have a partner did not have a supportive one.

This does not immediately suggest a policy for institutions except that for those students

who had a negative influence from partner, or had no partner at all, those learners would

rely more on the other pillars which supported their learning. One HEI included partners of

mature students in the induction process to give partners a fuller appreciation of the

demands of study. For those with a non-supportive partner, the institutional support was more vital.

This also would include the category dealing with parental support and the motivational support of children. Some students, chiefly women, would have a difficult learning experience due to their parental duties with respect to children, or they may be troubled with feelings of guilt due to the "greedy" nature of both learning and parenthood in demanding their time and energy. In this study, those who experienced difficulties in this area seemed to be in a minority and others expressed that their parenthood was in general a positive thing. The policy that this suggests is a more proactive role for guidance and support of learners to compensate for those students who do not have a good domestic support system.

9.3.3 There was some evidence of an institutional and even a departmental culture which emerged from the interviews. Research has shown that the culture of the institution contributes to the student experience (Rosen in Thorpe et al 1993, Gremmo & Abe in Thorpe et al 1993, Betts et al 1995, McGivney 1996, Rogers 2002, Doyle & Cumberford 2003). There is a considerable difference in culture between FE and HE and this is seen in the differences in guidance provision (in FE the guidance provision tends to be more proactive and more hands on), relationships between staff and students (affected greatly by numbers- in FE the student numbers tend to be smaller leading to a greater degree of personal guidance and

support). This led to a greater feeling of acceptance in the FECs than in HEIs (Gallacher in Osborne et al 2002). This was keenly felt by Access students articulating from FE. It was clear that some departments in some universities offered more support than others.

In one university this emerged immediately from the interviews conducted. When asked questions which inquired about how the university worked, the ethos of the department was immediately obvious. One department, it was claimed by the student was "not interested... learning was the students' problem", and they were apparently more concerned with their own research than with the students. On the other hand, another department in the same university was stated to be much more open to the students and seemed to have a culture of student support.

Some students have greater needs for support, since they experience greater feelings of disjunction and consequently have greater needs for support, affirmation of the new identity. These needs are individual as well as institutional. It is seen that these experiences of disjunction or integration will vary greatly even within the same institution. They will depend on the individual psychosocial environment of the learner, their network of social support and/or acceptance of the significant others in their learning world. Of necessity this will vary across cohorts, institutions, faculties or even departments.

In other aspects of every day life, the human need to feel valued is perceived to be important. Rogers' (2002) core conditions of unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence were the very attitudes that were therapeutic in the counselling context and Rogers suggested that they were the very same qualities which were important in the learning context. Staff who displayed these qualities were approachable and more human, and students perceived that it was possible to have a therapeutic learning relationship with such staff. The negative downside of this was the increase in class sizes which was counterproductive. However seminar groups were the obvious location for such relationship building. This made learners believe that they were valued and accepted in their new identities. A policy of staff development which engendered these core conditions in staff, and training which assisted in developing such therapeutic learning relationships between staff and students would be likely to produce rich dividends amongst mature learners, such as those coming from an Access entry route.

9.3.4 It was clear that there was a significant difference between the level of guidance offered in the FEC to that which is commonly offered in the HEI according to the testimony of students interviewed. The chief difference seems to be that in FE the guidance system is more proactive. It does not wait for things to go wrong and then hope to patch things up, but consists of regular meetings and the offer of levels of personal encouragement. This metaphorical "hand-holding" is a characteristic of Access, and typically Access Guidance

tutors play a vital role in encouraging students to persevere in their course. The contrast is marked and was noticed by the mature students interviewed. Clearly a more proactive guidance role may be perceived as desirable.

All this would tend to suggest that a higher level of success in the FE environment might be expected. And yet the findings of this research found the opposite to be true. This confirms that the processes and environmental factors are clearly more individual and pertain to the individual social relationships of each student. i.e. if a student in either environment is not so well provided with integrating experiences in terms of supportive relationships then their performance in learning will be compromised.

9.3.5   In conclusion it may be observed that a more holistic consideration of the learner as a person with emotional, social and spiritual needs as well as intellectual and academic, may inform the processes of adult education. The suggestion of Bolam & Dodgson (2003) was that institutions may need in the future to consider taking greater recognition of time staff spend in tutorial responsibilities and may even need to consider the appointment of professional tutor-counsellors that are trained to deal with a wide range of pastoral and academic issues to offer support to learners of increasing diversity of background, age, ethnicity and positioning in the life cycle.

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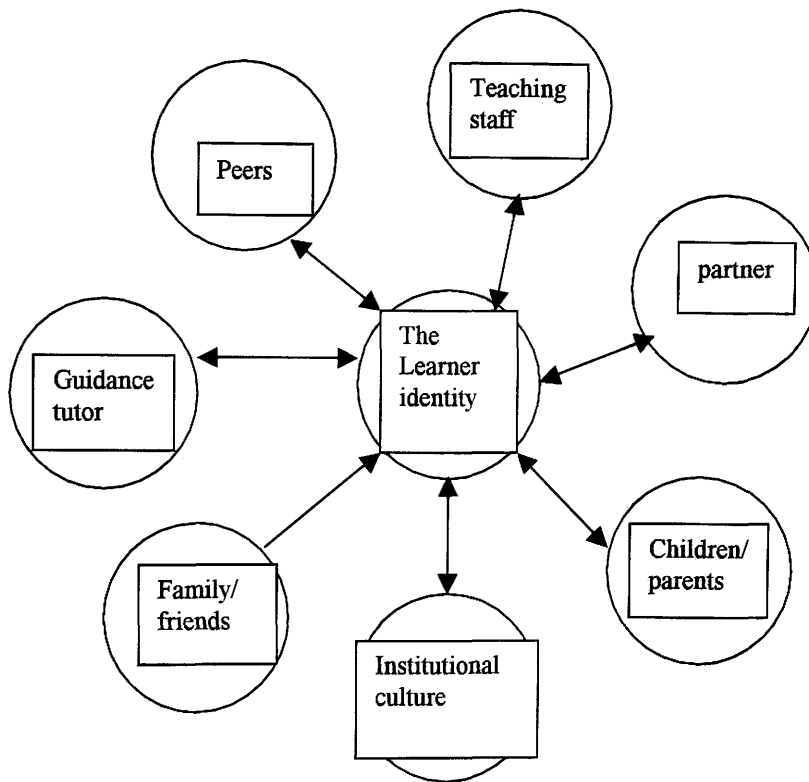
The learning environment consists of more than lecture theatres, libraries and computer labs but involves the social context also. Networks of relationships sustain learner identities and hence sustain learning. Since the identity transformation and the sense of self-identity was seen to be central to the whole process of integration or disjunction in the learning environment.

This research has confirmed that differential performance is a complex problem to analyse and there is no easy way to understand the varied forces at work in the learning world. It has suggested that the factors which affect performance are an amalgam of personal and social dynamics.

The Castlecary Viaduct Model synthesized the findings of a number of researchers on the substantial affect of relationships surrounding the learner. To this was added the extra dimension of friendships and extended family relationships which were identified in the interviews conducted.

It is suggested that the most appropriate model might look something like this:

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Figure 57:

The above diagram is a derivative of the earlier Castlecary Viaduct Model and the findings of student interviews conducted in this research. The institutional culture dimension has been retained though it was not overtly confirmed by the qualitative work carried out. However it was implicitly confirmed by the dissatisfaction with certain cultural

arrangements in HEIs and the contrast with arrangements in the FEC in which interviews were carried out. Thus there seems to be enough evidence to retain it in the model above. An additional dimension is that in which other wider friendships (not in the learning domain) were testified to be important to the affective well-being of the learner and formed a significant level of support, affirmation, confirmation of new learner identity, and practical levels of support at times.

It is noted that the learner identity is the centre of a network of relationships from which it derives its metacognition. The learner may have a sense of self, but that sense of self is informed, influenced, transformed, put through various stages of evolution and/or mutation by the relationships which surround and envelop the learner. It is constantly in a state of flux, and hence the concept of the learner identity fluctuates from day to day, lecture to lecture, seminar to seminar, affected by the perception of relationships which mould it.

Identity transformation, the assumption of a new learner identity, shall be either nurtured and brought to stability by supportive relationships which surround the learner, or, be undermined and strangled at birth by non-supportive relationships, or the absence of supportive ones. The fact that there are such good survival rates amongst mature learners in HE is testimony to the fortitude of the human spirit.

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Appendix One.

Research Questionnaire.

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Research into Access Routes.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. My name is Alastair Ferrie and I am a researcher from the University of Stirling working on research into factors which affect the progression of former Access students in Higher Education. I would ask for your help in completing this very short questionnaire which will only take a couple of minutes. If you would like to contact me about my research, please feel free to contact me on superally2@hotmail.com.

1.   Please indicate gender:

　　　　　　　　　　　☐ Male　　　　☐ Female

2.   Which year of your degree programme are you on?

_____ .

3.   What is the main subject area of your degree? (e.g. Science, Social Science, Arts etc)

_____ .

4.   Where did you complete your Access programme?

_____ .

5.   Would you be willing to participate in an interview to help with research into important factors which affect progression in former Access students?

　　　　　　　　　　☐ Yes　　　.　No ☐

If yes will you please supply the following information so I can make arrangements to meet with

you for the interview:

Name:　　　_____

Address:　　_____

　　　　　　　_____

　　　　　post code _____

Email address　　_____

Telephone No　　_____

Completed forms may be returned to Alastair Ferrie, Institute of Education, University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA. in the prepaid envelope provided.

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Appendix Two

Preliminary Version of Interview Guide.

The following issues will need to be addressed:

1. peer-group support

2. partner/spouse support

3. children/parental support

4. institutional support

5. staff tutors' support

6. personal/guidance tutor support

Hence the interview will need to address each of these issues in turn and hopefully give the student the opportunity of commenting on the effect of each of these areas on their learning environment

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and the effectiveness of the learning experience. This is a guide which steers the researcher as interviewer through the interview, rather than something which should be read out verbatim to the interviewee.

Suggested questions might be:

Introduction:

I would like to begin by assuring you that there will be absolute anonymity in anything you say. What you say may be quoted in research but there is no way that it will be attributable to you. However for the sake of balance in the research I would like if you would answer one or two demographic matters which will help in understanding your points of reference.

1. Gender: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Household postcode. _____
4. Household income: _____
5. racial background: _____
6. any disability: _____

I am interested in those things which have influenced you as a learner. We are going to go through a number of questions which I hope will help me to understand those things which you feel have influenced your ability to learn either for the better or for the worse.

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

1. If your fellow students had a positive or negative affect on your learning performance, how would you say that it affected it? In what ways did it contribute or diminish from your ability to learn? Were you part of a student study group? Was this formal, arranged by the University (a top down arrangement), or was it informal and a bottom up ad hoc device?

2. In what ways did your partner/spouse encourage or discourage your learning. Student may be prompted with suggestions such as: help in revision, listening to papers being presented or read, offering verbal encouragement, sharing in domestic duties to facilitate time for the student to study. Or the opposite of these may be suggested: refusal to discuss, verbal discouragement, resentment of time spent studying, refusal to share in domestic duties etc.

3. In what ways did your parents/children encourage or discourage your learning. Student may be prompted with suggestions such as: help in revision, listening to papers being presented or read, offering verbal encouragement, being publicly supportive and hence enhancing the student identity, sharing in domestic duties to facilitate time for the student to study. Or the opposite of these may be suggested: refusal to discuss, verbal discouragement, resentment of time spent studying, refusal to share in domestic duties etc.

4. Tell me something about your experience of coming into the university environment.

5. How did your initial impression of coming to university change after say the first month or the first three months of having been there?

6. If you were to describe yourself as a student, what sort of student would you say that you are? If you met someone you went to school with and had not seen since, how would you describe yourself?

7. What sort of things did the university provide, or do to help support you in your learning experience?

8. Can you think of contacts which you had with the university/college such as initial interview, correspondence, crèche facilities, etc or any other contact that you had? Did you view the effect of that contact as positive or negative? Was it encouraging or discouraging to you?

9. Tell me something about lecturing staff in the university. Did you find the lecturers distant and unhelpful, or friendly and approachable? Did you receive the impression that they were there to help you to learn? Was there a relationship established

which enhanced the learning experience or did a negative experience or lack of relationship greatly hinder the quality of learning?

10. Did you find that you had a supportive relationship with your guidance tutor that contributed positively to your motivation, and perseverance in the course? Were there other ways that this tutor assisted you? Or was the converse true that you had no relationship with any guidance tutor either because you did not know who your guidance tutor was, or that this person was unavailable or unapproachable. And if that is true what effect would you say that had on your learning?

11. I have been mentioning some factors that could have an effect on your learning, do you want to mention any others that I have not mentioned which you feel were of equal or greater importance.

12. To what extent was your relationship with the student peer group a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

13. To what extent was your relationship with your partner/spouse a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

14. To what extent was your relationship with your children or parents a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

15. To what extent was the culture of your learning institution and hence your relationship with that institution a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

Since this is a more abstract notion than any of the other questions, it may be necessary to explain this question somewhat by giving illustrations such as: how welcoming were the institution to you as a mature learner, did the policies and provisions of the institution help to engender your new sense of identity as a learner, were the support mechanisms of the institution such as library and computing facilities, learning support and tutorial etc underpin and assist your learning… was the timetabling such that it was beneficial for mature students with child care issues taken into account, was there an encouraging learning environment which was conducive to your learning experience.

1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

16. To what extent was your relationship with the teaching staff a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

17.   To what extent was your relationship with your guidance tutor in HE a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Appendix Three.

Final form
of
Interview Guide.

This should be viewed as a guide. It is a steering mechanism for the interviewer to assist in keeping on track through the interview. It is not something to be read out but prompting suggestions to keep the interviewee on track to reveal details about their learning world.

Introduction:

I would like to begin by assuring you that there will be absolute anonymity in anything you say. What you say may be quoted in research but there is no way that it will be attributable to you. However for the sake of balance in the research I would like if you would answer one or two demographic matters which will help in understanding your points of reference.

1. Gender:
2. Age:
3. Household post code.
4. Household income.
5. racial background.
6. any disability.
7. are you first person in your household to study in higher education?

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Phase One of Interview:

In this first phase the student is provided with a blank sheet of A3 paper and a sticker with the word "ME" written on it. The student is invited to place this in the middle of the blank sheet of A3. The student is then informed that this stands for the student in the centre of his/her learning world. This represents the learning environment.

The student is then invited to think about any other significant people who have had an effect on the student learning experience. This effect could be negative and discouraging or it could be positive and encouraging.

The student is then asked to think about who else should appear on this blank sheet as influencing the world of the learner. The student is then supplied with other stickers and invited to write on these the people who might have an influence on the learner and state whether that influence might be positive or negative. He/she is invited to record the strength of that influence by the proximity to the centre that the sticker is placed on the sheet to the centre. If a person or group of people had a very strong influence then they should be placed near to the centre. The interviewer is there to encourage the student to be bold about revealing influences whether positive or negative but to try to refrain from being too directive...and hence to allow the student to determine the agenda of the interview.

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After noting all of the influences on the learning experience of the student it is possible to proceed with the specific areas of influence which follow and to see to what extent the determined areas of attention match up with the student experience. These learning maps will be collated and referred to later.

I am interested in those things which have influenced you as a learner. We are going to go through a number of questions which I hope will help me to understand those things which you feel have influenced your ability to learn either for the better or for the worse.

1. If your fellow students had a positive or negative affect on your learning performance, how would you say that it affected it? In what ways did it contribute or diminish from your ability to learn? Were you part of a student study group? Was this formal, arranged by the University (a top down arrangement), or was it informal and a bottom up ad hoc device?

2. In what ways did your partner/spouse encourage or discourage your learning. Student may be prompted with suggestions such as: help in revision, listening to papers being presented or read, offering verbal encouragement, sharing in domestic duties to facilitate time for the student to study. Or the opposite of these may be suggested: refusal to discuss, verbal discouragement, resentment of time spent studying, refusal to share in domestic duties etc.

3. In what ways did your parents/children encourage or discourage your learning.

   Student may be prompted with suggestions such as: help in revision, listening to papers being presented or read, offering verbal encouragement, being publicly supportive and hence enhancing the student identity, sharing in domestic duties to facilitate time for the student to study. Or the opposite of these may be suggested: refusal to discuss, verbal discouragement, resentment of time spent studying, refusal to share in domestic duties etc.

4. Tell me something about your experience of coming into the university environment.

5. How did your initial impression of coming to university change after say the first month or the first three months of having been there?

6. If you were to describe yourself as a student, what sort of student would you say that you are? If you met someone you had gone to school with and they asked what you were doing now, how would you answer?

7. What sort of things did the university provide, or do to help support you in your learning experience?

8. Can you think of contacts which you had with the university/college such as initial interview, correspondence, crèche facilities, etc or any other contact that you had. Did you view the effect of that contact as positive or negative? Was it encouraging or discouraging to you?

9. Tell me something about lecturing staff in the University. Did you find the lecturers distant and unhelpful, or friendly and approachable. Did you receive the impression that they were there to help you to learn? Was there a relationship established which enhanced the learning experience or did a negative experience or lack of relationship greatly hinder the quality of learning?

10. Did you find that you had a supportive relationship with your guidance tutor which contributed positively to your motivation, and perseverance in the course? Were there other ways that this tutor assisted you? Or was the converse true that you had no relationship with any guidance tutor either because you did not know who your guidance tutor was, or that this person was unavailable or unapproachable. And if that were true what effect would you say that had on your learning?

11. I have been mentioning some factors that could have an effect on your learning, do you want to mention any others that I have not mentioned which you feel were of equal or greater importance.

12. To what extent was your relationship with the student peer group a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

13. To what extent was your relationship with your partner/spouse a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

| 1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

14. To what extent was your relationship with your children or parents a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

15. To what extent was the culture of your learning institution and hence your relationship with that institution a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

It may be necessary to explain this question somewhat by giving illustrations such as: how welcoming were the institution to you as a mature learner, did the policies and provisions of the institution help to engender your new sense of identity as a learner, were the support mechanisms of the institution such as library and computing facilities, learning support and tutorial etc underpin and assist your learning... was the timetabling such that it was beneficial for mature students with child care issues taken into account, was there an encouraging learning environment which was conducive to your learning experience.
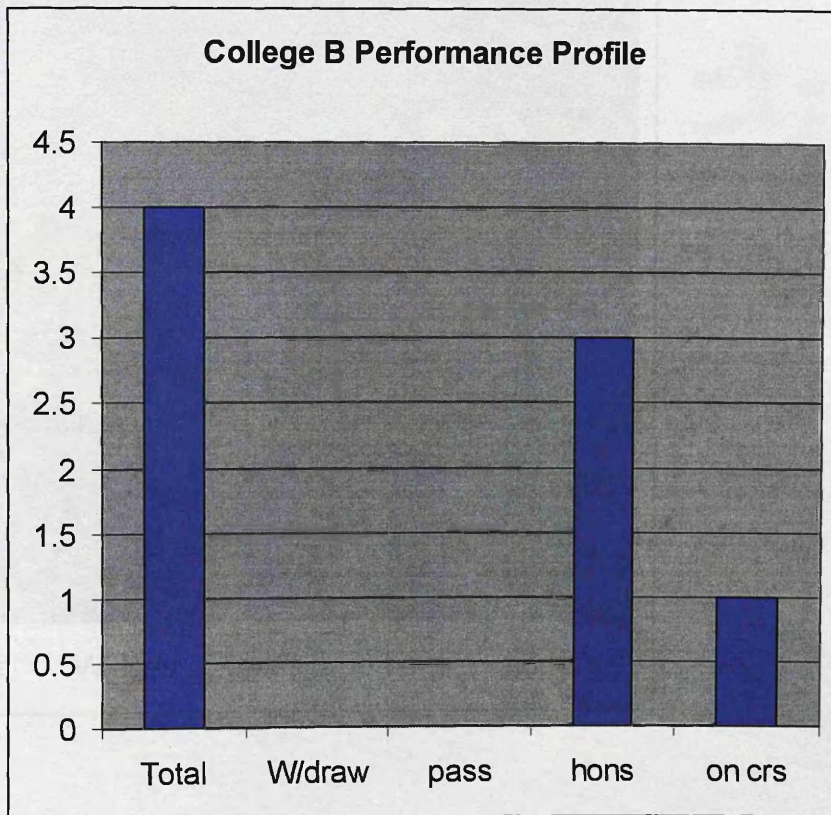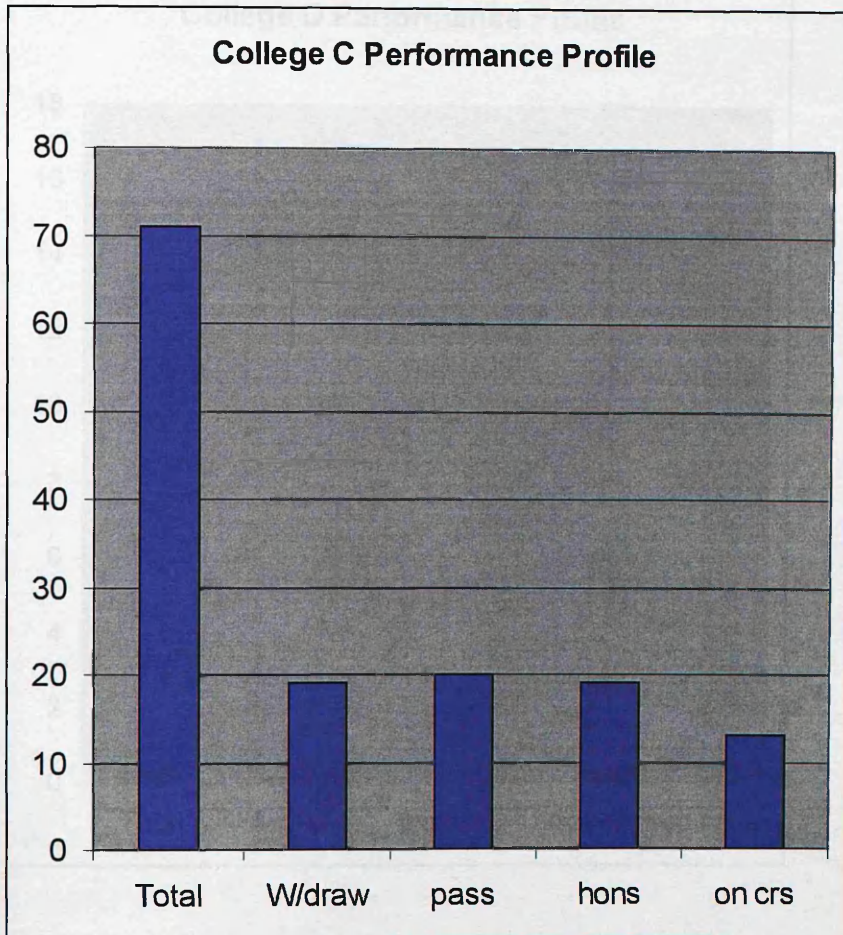
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1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

16. To what extent was your relationship with the teaching staff a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

17.   To what extent was your relationship with your guidance tutor in HE a factor in affecting the quality of your learning experience?

| 1	2	3	4	5
negative	more negative than positive	neutral/ don't know	more positive than negative	positive

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Appendix Four.

The performance profiles of colleges feeding Access students into the university known as University B were noted and brought the following results.

Figure 58:
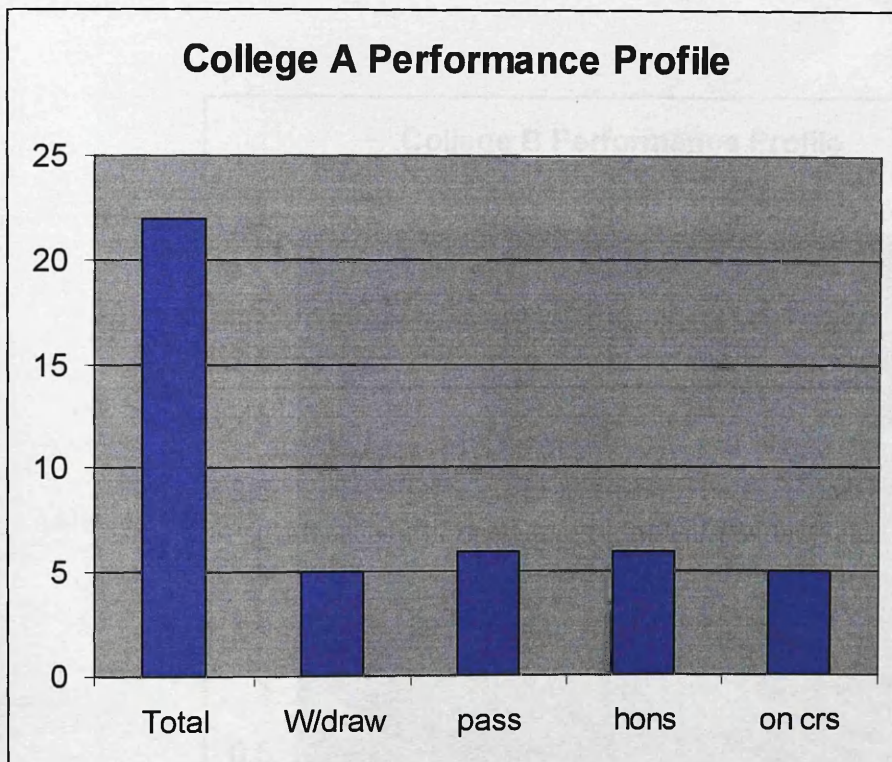
College A Performance Profile
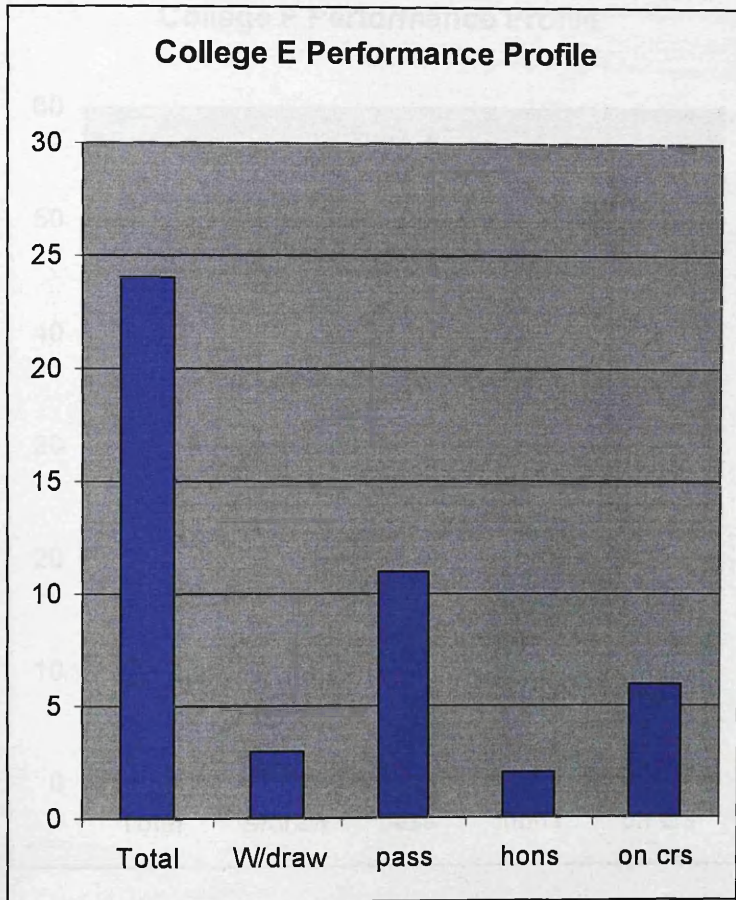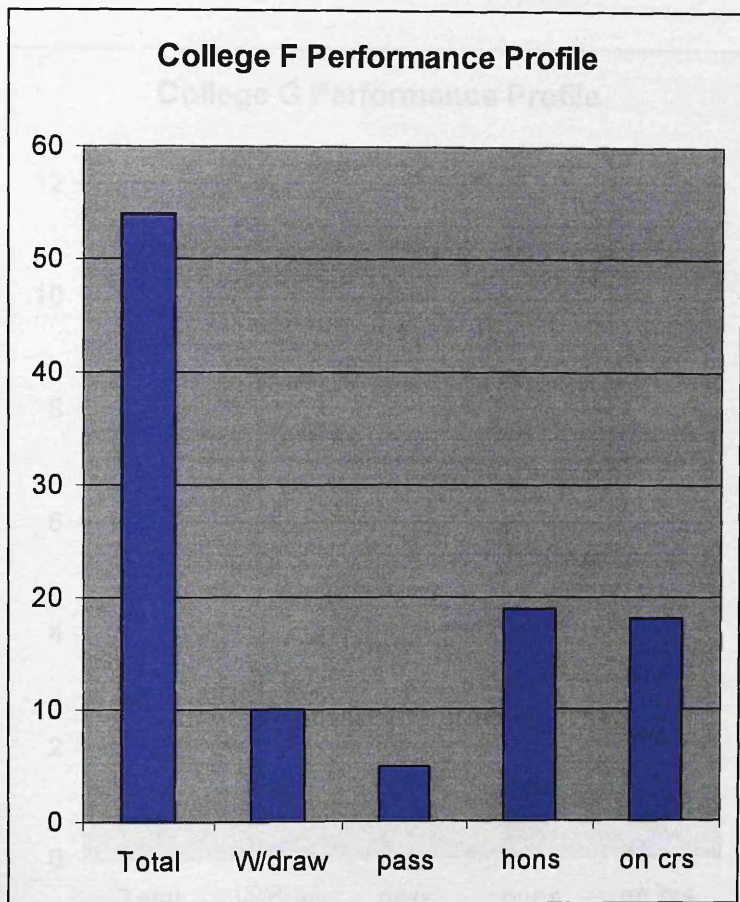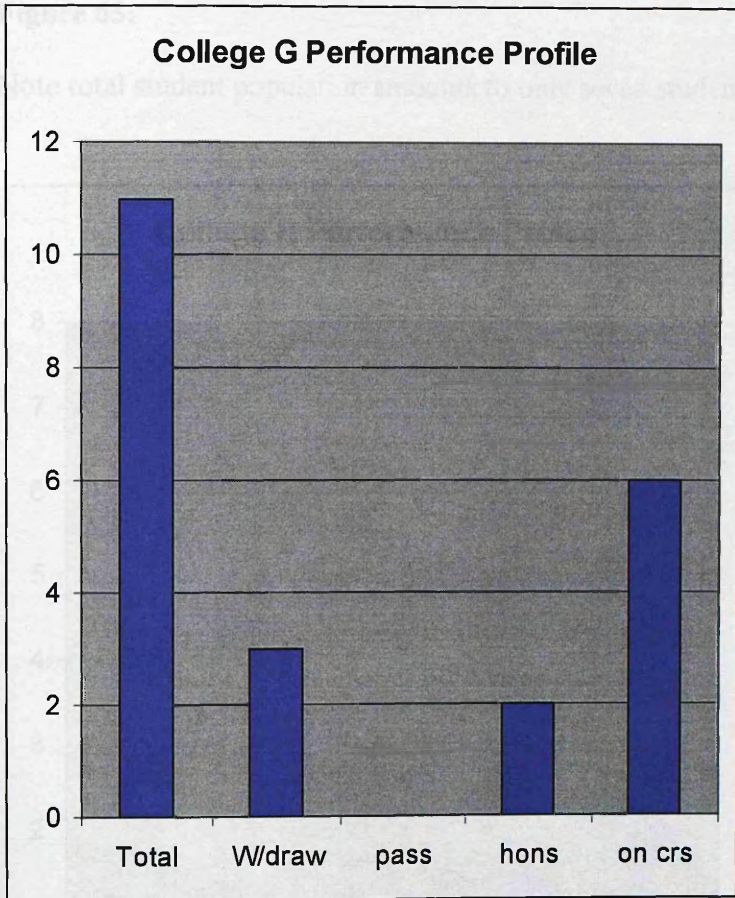
Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 59:

It should be noted for this graph that it is based on only four students and hence does not provide any basis for statistical treatment or prediction.
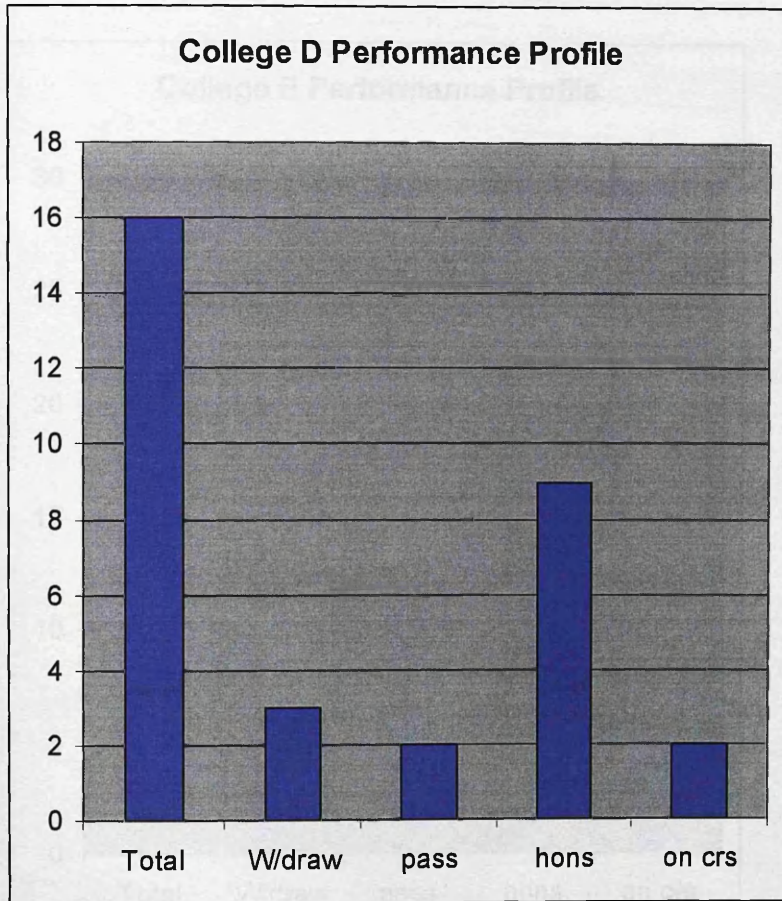
College B Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.
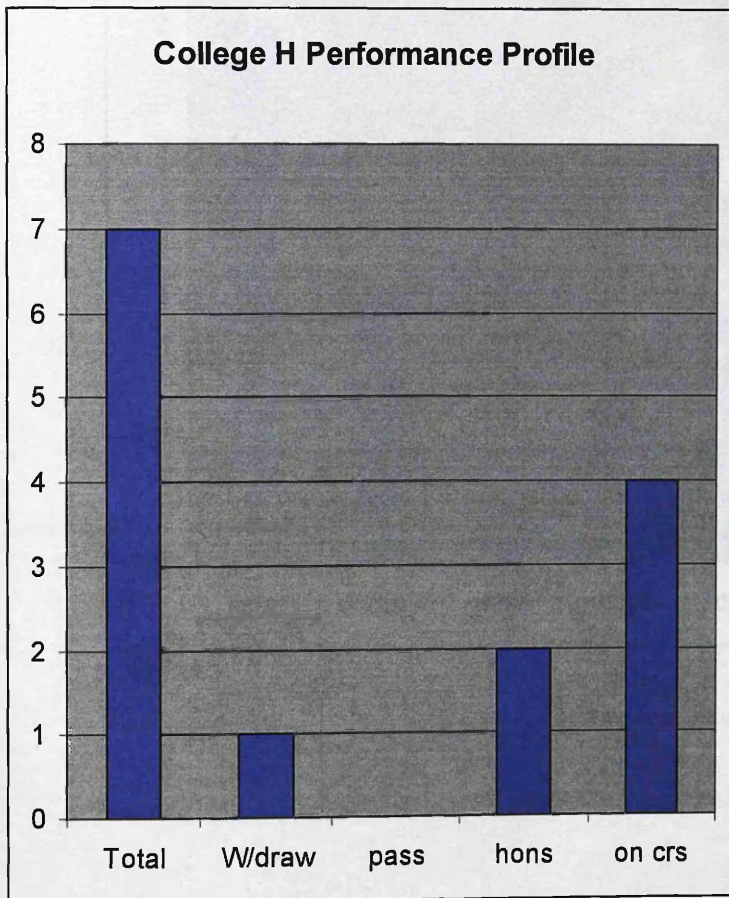
Figure 60:

College C Performance Profile

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Figure 61:

College D Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.
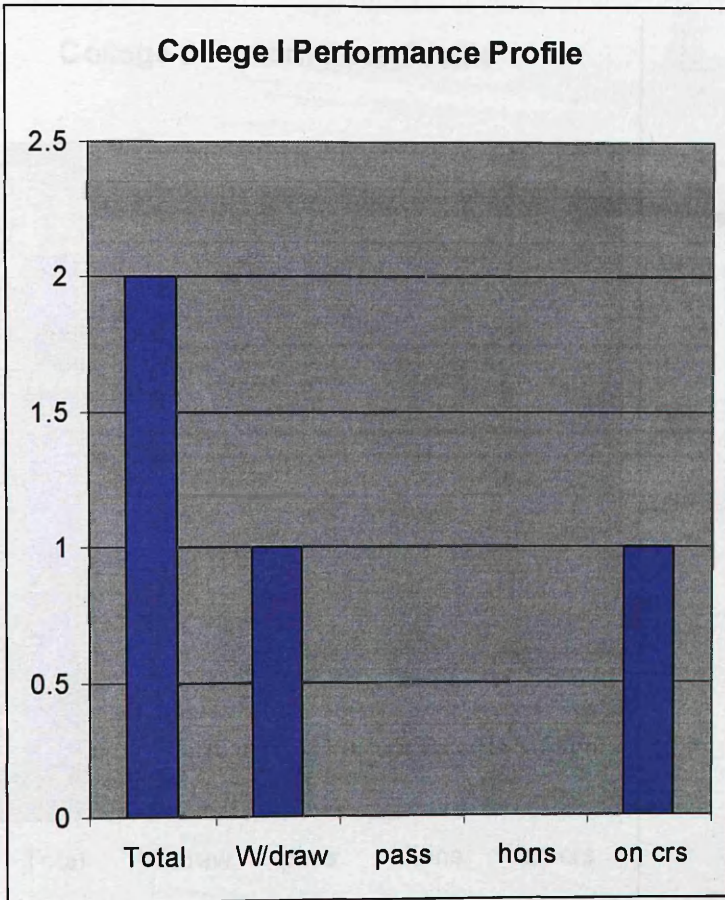
Figure 62:

College E Performance Profile

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Figure 63:

College F Performance Profile

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Figure 64:
Note again that this graph represents a population of only eleven students.

College G Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 65:

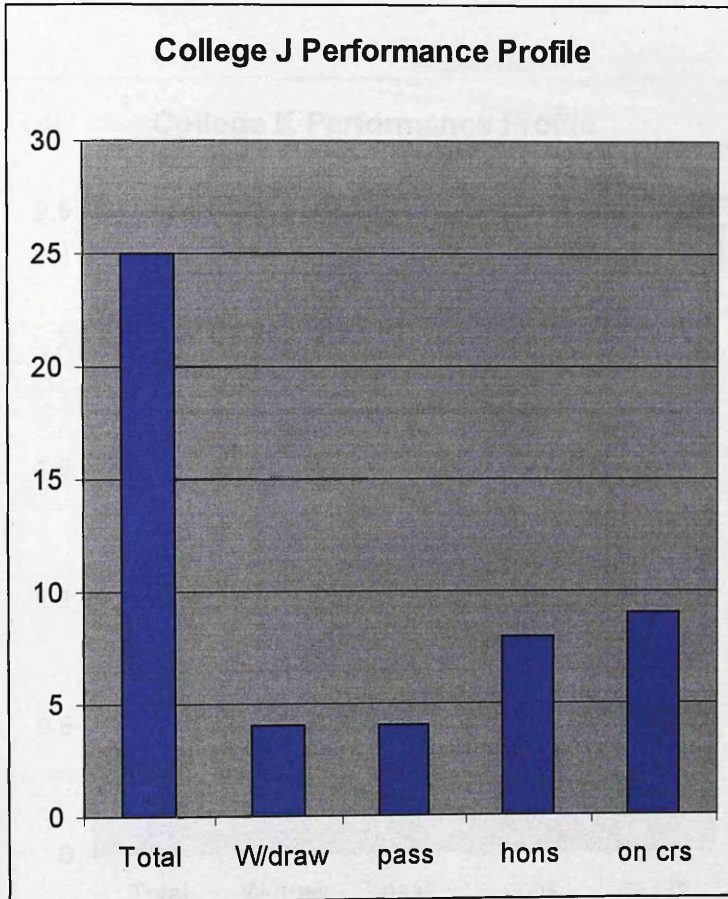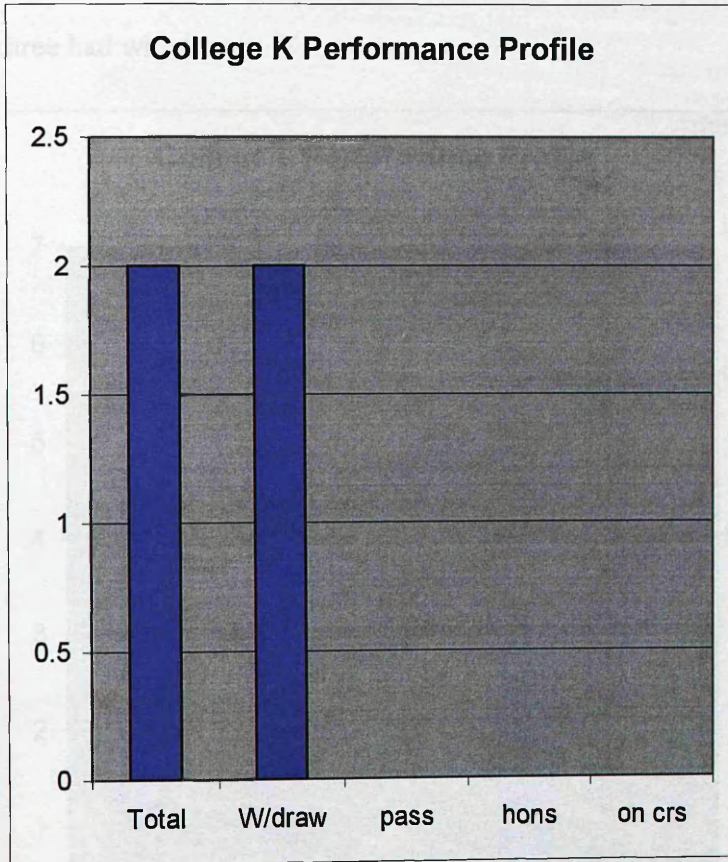Note total student population amounts to only seven students.

College H Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.
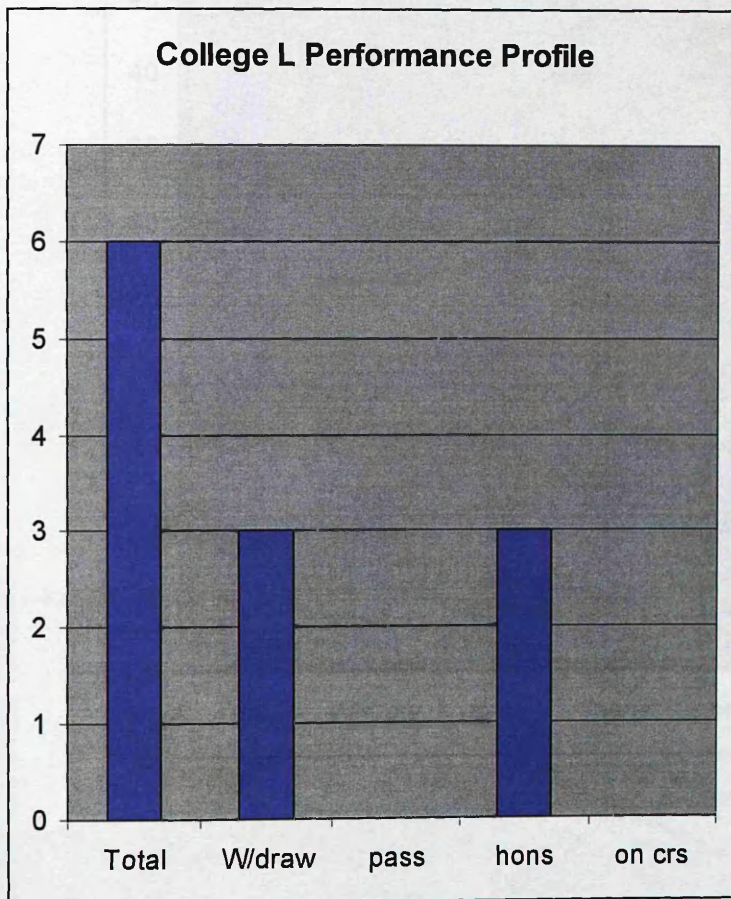
Figure 66:

College I Performance Profile

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Institutions.

Figure 67:

College J Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 68:

College K Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.
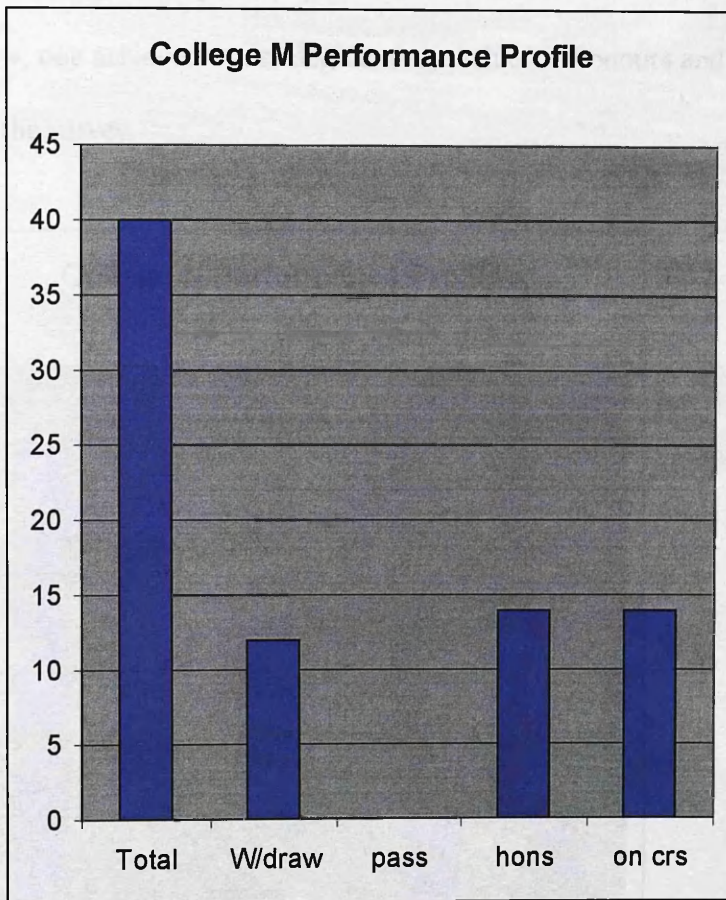
Figure 69:

Only six students entered from College L. Three of these had achieved an honours degree, and three had withdrawn.

College L Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 70:

College M Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 71:

Only 8 students made up this population and it is seen that they are almost evenly distributed. One withdrew, one achieved a pass degree, three achieved honours and three were still on course at the time of the survey.
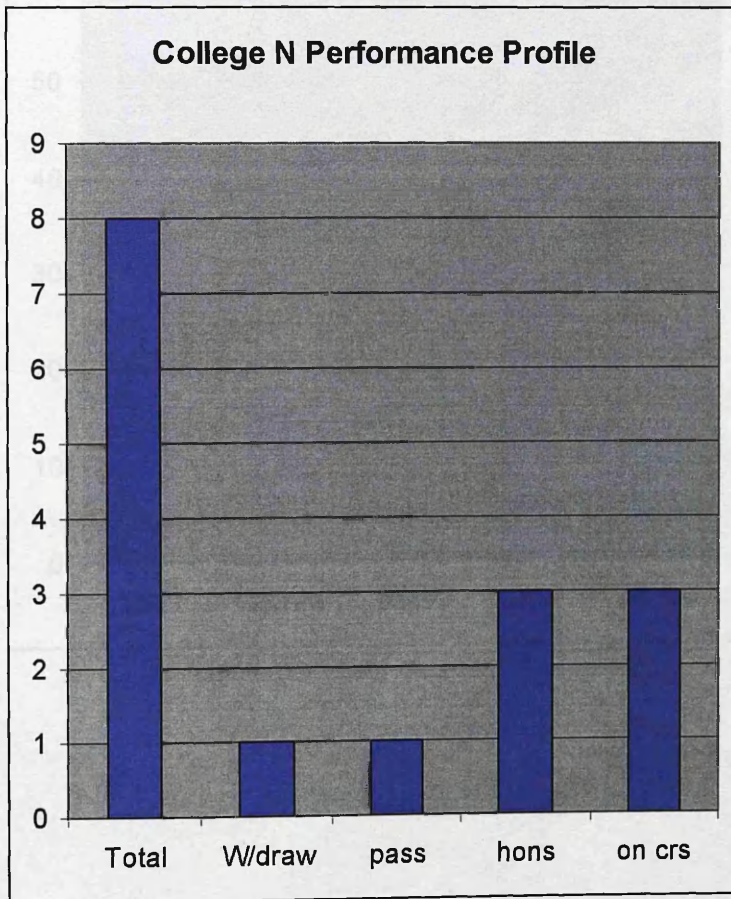
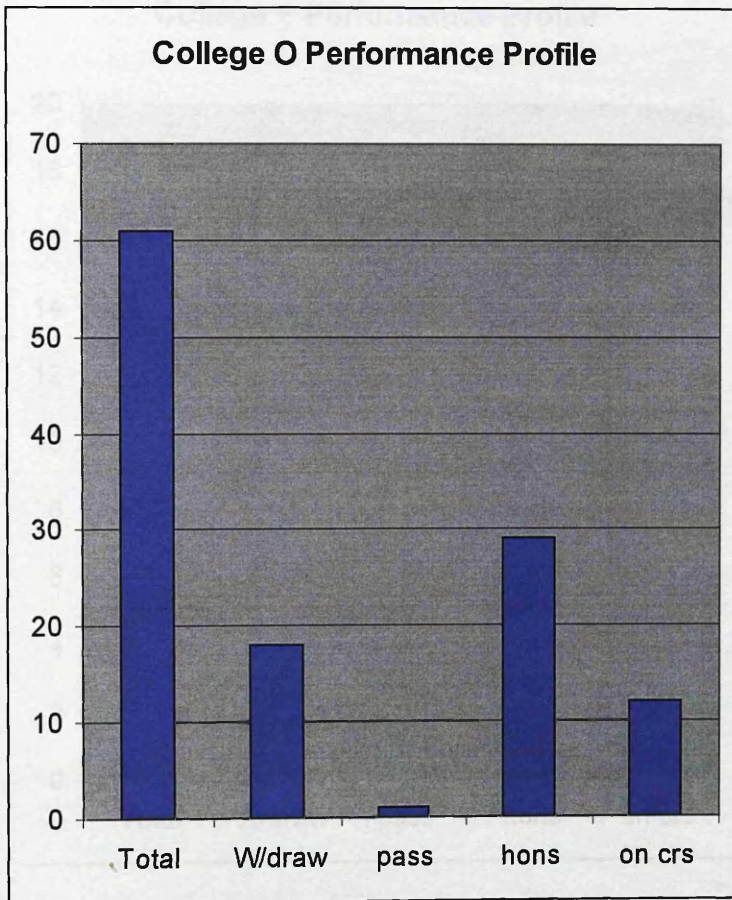### College N Performance Profile
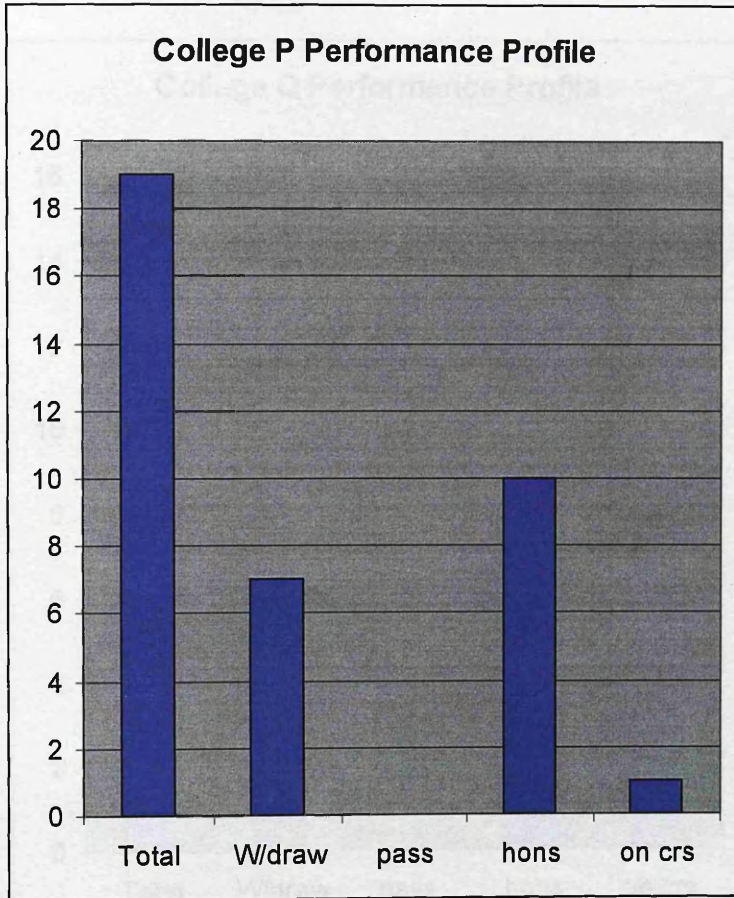
Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 72:

College O Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 73:

College P Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.
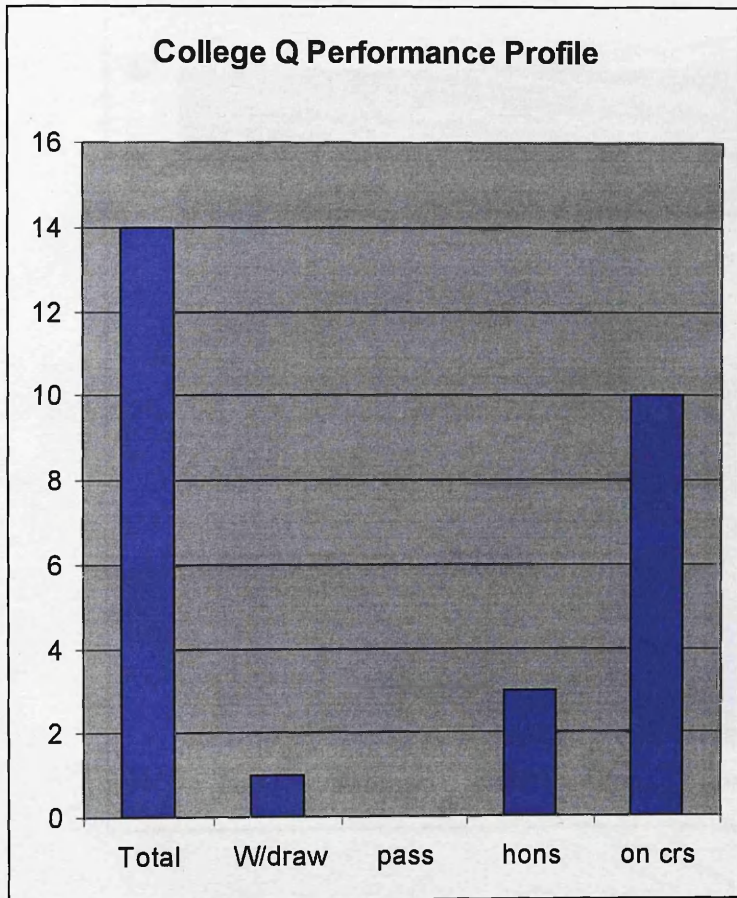
Figure 74:

College Q Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 75:

College R Performance Profile

Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 76:

College S Performance Profile
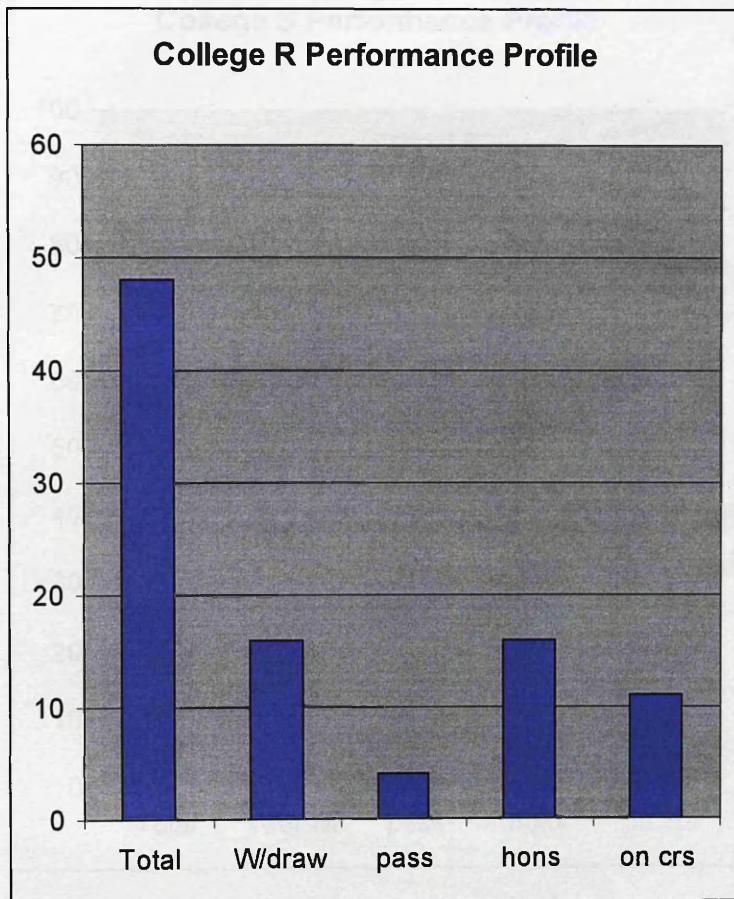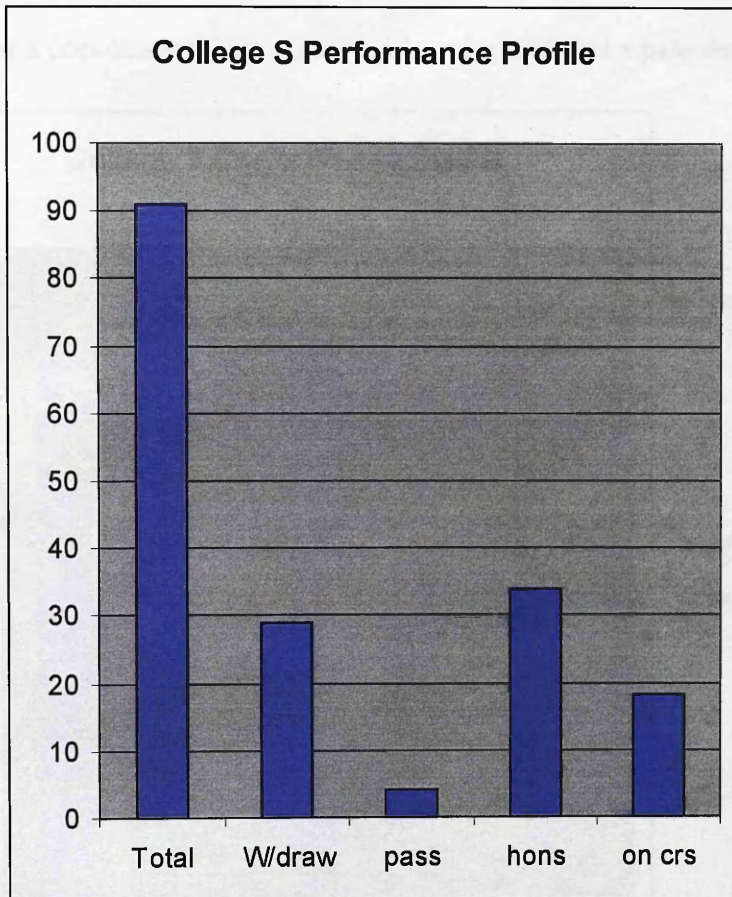
Factors Affecting Performance of Former Access Students Within Selected Scottish Educational Institutions.

Figure 77:

This was a population of one student only, who achieved a pass degree.

College T Performance Profile