

National Student Survey Summary Report: Part-time Students

1. This summary report draws on analysis from section 13 of 'The National Student Survey 2005-2007: Findings and Trends'¹, which focuses on part-time students in higher education. It addresses three key issues, first whether part-time students have different experiences depending on their mode of study, second whether the student, course and institution characteristics have the same effect on student experiences among part-time students as among full-time students and finally whether there are differences between full-time and part-time students studying on the same courses.

2. There are a number of data quality issues when dealing with part-time students. Part-time students have an especially high proportion of missing data for declared disability; this affects one large provider of part-time courses in particular. In order to take this into account, declared disability has not been included in the models for part-time students. The nature of provision of part-time study in the UK also renders the measure of average A levels on entrance meaningless for some institutions, therefore this measure is also excluded from the models for part-time students. In addition, whilst the measure of term-time accommodation remains in the models it is likely that the 'other' category used to contrast with 'living with parent or guardian' may have a substantially different meaning for many part-time students than for full-time students, where this category will usually mean the student is living in some form of student accommodation. Finally, the category 'not first degree' is likely to contain a greater variety of courses at levels below first degree than is the case for full-time students.

3. Turning to the first question relating to part-time students, are the experiences of part-time students different depending on their type of course, specifically are there differences between part-time students studying by distance learning or by traditional face-to-face methods?

4. Table 1 summarises the 'distance learning' effect from multi-variate models which also contain the student, course and institutional characteristics used throughout analyses of the National Student Survey (NSS)².

¹ The full report is available on the HEFCE web-site, www.hefce.ac.uk, under Publications/Research & evaluation.

² For full details of the characteristics in the models see the full report.

Table 1: The effect of distance learning, part-time students only

	2006	2007
Teaching and Learning	ns	ns
Assessment and Feedback	+	ns
Academic Support	+	ns
Organisation and Management	+	ns
Learning Resources	ns	ns
Personal Development	ns	ns
Overall Satisfaction	ns	ns

5. Table 1 shows that there are no consistent effects of distance learning on the NSS analytical scales or on Overall Satisfaction, once student, course and institutional characteristics have been taken into account. Students on distance learning courses were more positive than other part-time students about Assessment and Feedback, and Organisation and Management in 2006, but these effects are not present in 2007. Therefore, there is no evidence that part-time students on distance learning courses are different from those studying part-time by other means, in terms of their experiences as measured by the NSS.

6. The second key issue to be considered is whether the effect of the student, course and institutional characteristics differs for full-time and part-time students. Across all the analytical scales and Overall Satisfaction there are far more similarities in the effects of student, course and institutional characteristics for full-time and part-time students than there are differences. However, two areas seem particularly worthy of note. First, the differences in the effect of studying for qualifications other than first degrees. It appears that in two key areas – Teaching and Learning and Organisation and Management – those on part-time, non-first degree courses are more positive than those on first degree courses, while for full-time students this effect is not significant, or in some cases negative. This suggests there may be features of part-time provision of non-first degree courses which could be usefully integrated into full-time provision.

7. Second, the Personal Development scale shows key differences according to age and ethnicity for part-time students. Among part-time students, older students and those from Black or Asian ethnic backgrounds were more positive about Personal Development, whilst among full-time students these effects were not significant or were less positive. These differences are present after differences in entry qualifications are taken into account and therefore may offer valuable insights into the processes by which some groups of non-traditional students experience Personal Development within higher education (HE).

Non-distance learning part-time provision

8. The final question to be addressed with regards to part-time students is whether there are differences between part-time and full-time students studying by traditional, face-to-face methods. To assess this models are fitted which include all full-time students and part-time students *not* studying by distance learning. The difference between full-time and part-time students is measured by a part-time indicator variable and is after all the above student, course and institutional characteristics have been taken into account. Table 2 summarises the effect of this part-time indicator variable; a '+' in this context indicates that part-time students were more positive than full-time students, a '-' indicates that part-time students were less positive and 'ns' indicates there was no statistically significant difference.

Table 2: Effect of part-time study, full-time and part-time students (excluding distance-learning)

	2006	2007
Teaching and Learning	ns	ns
Assessment and Feedback	+	+
Academic Support	-	ns
Organisation and Management	+	ns
Learning Resources	ns	ns
Personal Development	-	-
Overall Satisfaction	+	ns

9. The effects of part-time study vary between 2006 and 2007. However, in both years part-time students were more positive about Assessment and Feedback than their full-time counterparts, while in both years those studying part-time (non-distance learning) were less positive about Personal Development than were full-time students.

10. Table 2 suggests that there is no simple pattern for part-time students, it is perhaps surprising to find that there is a difference on the Assessment and Feedback scale, bearing in mind that the sub-group of part-time students considered here are studying via the same methods as full-time students. This may warrant further research as Assessment and Feedback has been an area of concern within the NSS.