COLLEGE HIGHER EDUCATION: MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF PART TIME STUDENTS

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This paper draws on findings from a study on College Higher Education in England. Further Education (FE) Colleges deliver higher education (HE) to about 8 percent of the total population of HE students and a majority of College HE students study on a part-time basis. Part time HE is noted to be vital to meet the changing skills needs and for economic growth. The recent patterns of an overall decline in the part-time HE enrolments across the HE and FE sectors have been of concern to the institutions as well as policy makers.

This paper offers insights into the reasons for decline in part time HE student enrolments at FE colleges. It offers an understanding of the motivations and experiences of part time students and sheds light on any impact of the introduction of student loans on student decision making and choices. The paper also presents recommendations on how the part time student experience may be enriched and developed.

As part of the research, 30 FE colleges are being studied. Of these 30, 10 colleges have experienced an increase, 10 colleges experienced a decline and 10 colleges experienced no change in part time student numbers. The study uses a mixed method approach which includes conducting focus groups with part time students at selected colleges as well as questionnaires that are completed by students at all the participating colleges. Staff and managers at the 30 colleges are also being interviewed.

The College Higher Education project has been funded by the Association of Colleges and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The project also involves identification of barriers and constraints in expanding college higher education and to provide recommendations to facilitate expansion.