



The Open
University

What makes Lifelong Learning Attractive?

Perspectives from The Open University, UK
Professor Alan Tait

The Open University

- Single mode distance teaching university founded 1969
- 277,000 part time undergraduate students
- 6770 Masters students on 15 programmes
- 433 Doctoral students
- 16,252 students outside of the UK

UK and OU Masters Student Numbers



Since 1997-98, the total number of enrolments in postgraduate study has grown by 36%, so that by 2008-09, there were over 470,000 postgraduates in UK HEIs. This is higher than the growth in undergraduates over the same period but much of the growth in postgraduates can be accounted for by the rise in students coming to the UK from overseas.

**Table 2: Enrolments by level, domicile and mode
– UK HEIs, 1997-98 to 2008-09**

	UK Postgraduate		
	1997/8	2008/9	% change
Total	347,005	472,415	36%
UK	277,350	315,335	14%
EU	23,840	40,255	69%
Non EU	45,815	116,825	155%
Full-time	143,520	236,800	65%
Part-time	203,458	235,615	16%

	OU		
	2007/8	2009/10	Total current
Total OU	239,529	277,549	
UK OU		262,515	
International OU		15,034	
Total OU PGT	7141	6770	
Full-time			
Part-time			
OU MBA Germany			595

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Figures are based on a snapshot basis as at 1st December and have been rounded to the nearest five.

3 Broad Categories of Masters Degrees



- **Extension:** courses that are designed to extend an individual's knowledge beyond that which could be gained from an undergraduate degree.
- **Conversion:** courses that offer the opportunity to convert to a new discipline.
- **Vocational:** courses which prepare the individual for employment in a particular profession.
Smith report 2010 "One step beyond, making the most of postgraduate education, p17.
- 3 most popular Masters subject areas in UK are: Business & Administrative studies; Social Sciences & Engineering
- "Over half of all taught Masters courses are now taken on a part-time basis". (Smith report para 45, p25)

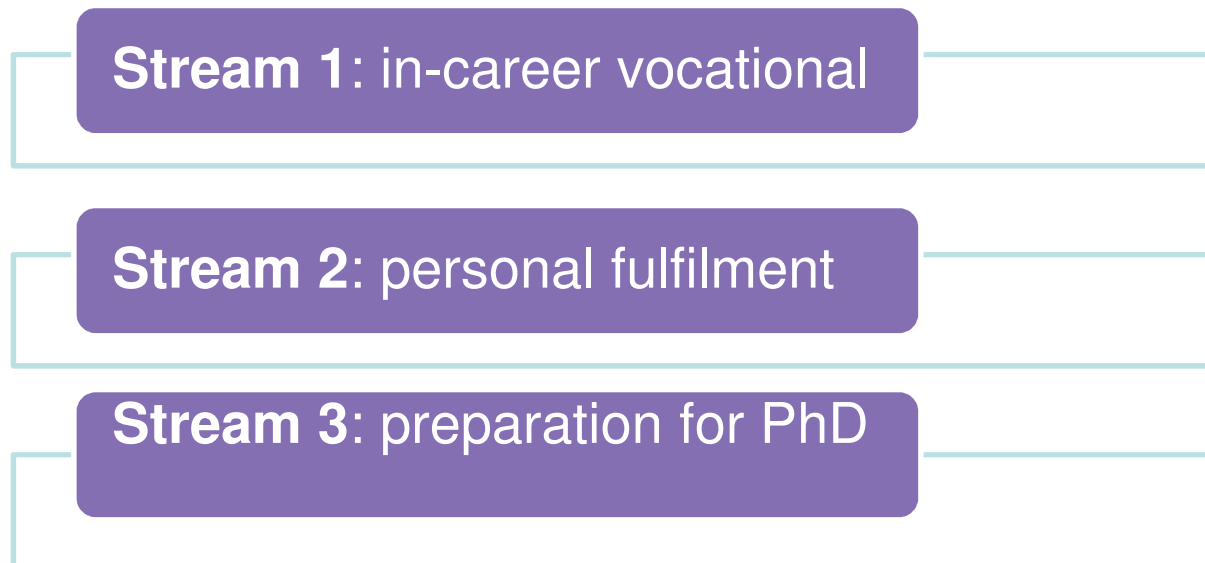
International Students in PG Study

2000-01		2007-08	
Greece	12,605	China	22,790
China	6,135	India	20,085
US	4,635	US	8,105
Germany	4,150	Greece	7,295
Irish Republic	3,615	Nigeria	7,235
France	3,400	Pakistan	6,030
India	3,060	Ireland	5,965
Taiwan	2,850	Germany	5,500
Hong Kong	2,820	Taiwan	4,625
Malaysia	2,720	France	4,115

Ten years ago, the main country of origin for postgraduate students in the UK was Greece. But between 2000-01 and 2007-08, the number of postgraduate students coming from Greece fell significantly, whilst the number of students coming from China almost quadrupled. By 2007-08, the largest number of international postgraduate students came from China, followed by India and the United States, and these countries provided over half of postgraduates coming to the UK. The number of postgraduate students coming from Nigeria and Pakistan has also increased rapidly in recent years, as has that from some of the new EU member states.

(Smith Report, para 57, p28)

Market Research re. motivation



Hierarchy in terms of numbers is 1, 2, 3

The Issues

- Mass Higher Education: Masters as job sorting function
- Graduate unemployment : Masters defers unemployment
- Masters provides pre-experience link to professional life

Why is The Open University finding Masters recruitment difficult?

- Curriculum built from academic interest/bottom up
- Fragmented curriculum, low student numbers by OU standard.
- Bologna: UK Masters take 1 year FT = 12 months not 2 years.

In Career Vocational

- *“with the exception of some vocational niches, there is not a very well defined employment market in the UK for Masters degrees, as there is for first degrees or doctorates ... this works to the advantage of those with more experience in the UK employment market, and to those already in post”.*

Artes, Ball and Mok

Postgraduate study in the UK 2000/01-2005/6, p5-6

Higher Education Careers Service Unit,

Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills

Does a Masters degree provide discrimination in workplace with mass undergraduate education?

- Does a Masters provide ROI for students?
- What weight do employers give to holders of Masters in recruitment & promotion?

On average, both taught and research postgraduates earn more than undergraduates six months and three and a half years after graduating – although individual returns vary by subject and institution attended. Postgraduates are also more likely to be in employment six months after graduation and to be employed in higher managerial and professional occupations three and a half years on.

(Smith Report p36, para 3)

Barriers

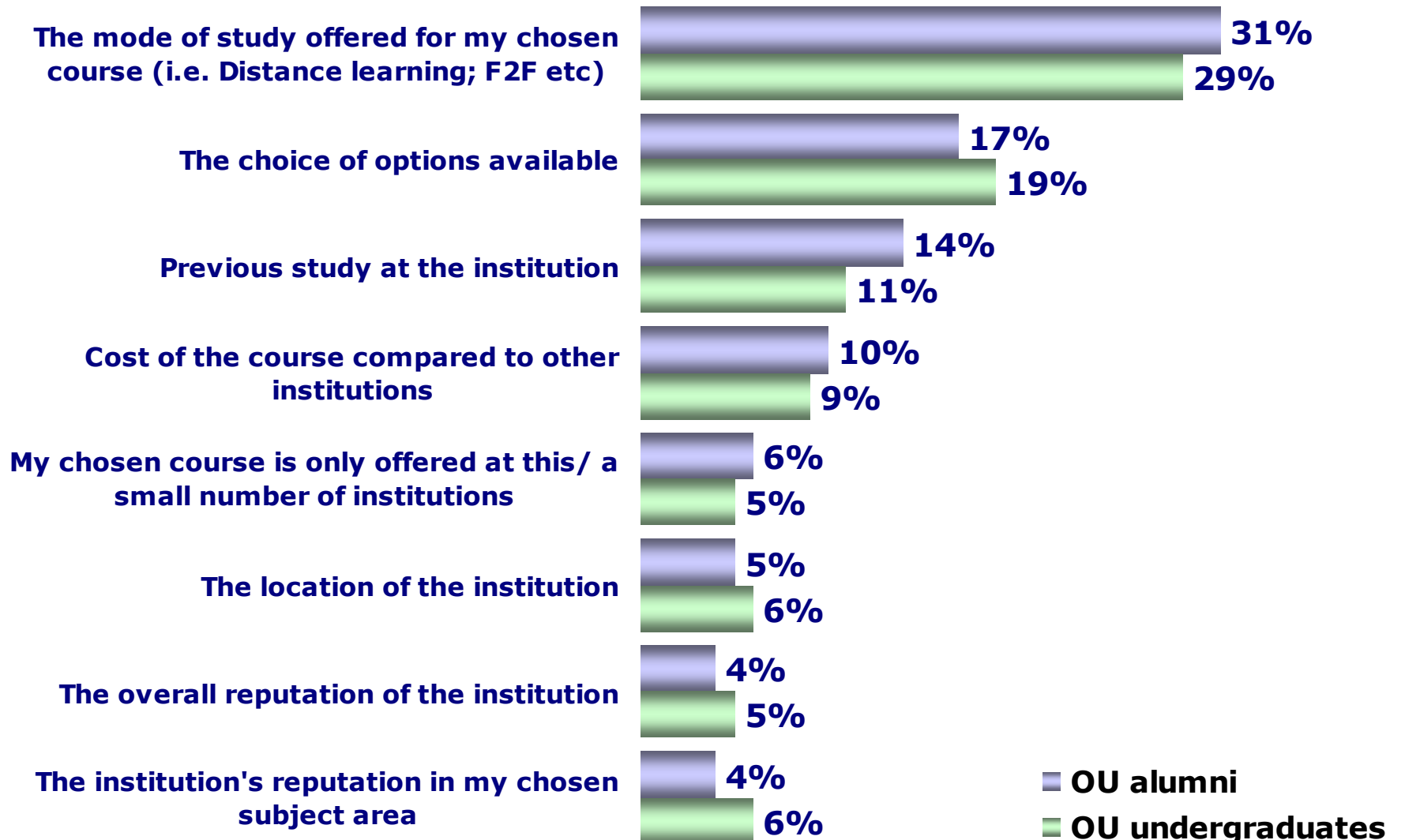
- Is a Masters degree the right vehicle?
- Is a shorter CPD module more attractive with intermediate PG qualifications certificate and diploma as outcomes?

e.g. CPD modules in clinical management that can be built to Open University PG Certificate.

Importance of Mode of Study in Institutional Choice



Mentions of 5% or more



Lifelong Learning & Fees in England

- Undergraduate fees from Oct 2012 c £8,300 p/a (€9300) average
- Threat from debt to Masters outside sponsorship e.g. for personal development, in support of citizenship, etc
- Visa restrictions

Although less easy to quantify, there are social and cultural benefits attached to a strong postgraduate sector. By encouraging people to question established knowledge, postgraduate education promotes a culture of open and intelligent debate which stimulates innovation and new approaches to tackling difficult challenges.

(Smith Report, p35 para 13)

Issues



- Issues re. composition of PG student body in terms of class & ethnicity (on gender 55/45 women/men).

So major avenue for development is:

- For professional contexts
- Access & equality in participation
- Delivered flexibly through part-time & distance learning
- But threatened by ROI understanding and debt in England