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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OU</th>
<th>2007/8</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
<th>Total current</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total OU</td>
<td>239,529</td>
<td>277,549</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK OU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>262,515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International OU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total OU PGT</td>
<td>7141</td>
<td>6770</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OU MBA Germany</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>595</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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)
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)
Major Review at The Open University

Market Research re. motivation

- **Stream 1**: in-career vocational
- **Stream 2**: personal fulfilment
- **Stream 3**: preparation for PhD

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”.

Artess, 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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>OU alumni</th>
<th>OU undergraduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The mode of study offered for my chosen course (i.e. Distance learning; F2F etc)</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The choice of options available</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous study at the institution</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of the course compared to other institutions</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My chosen course is only offered at this/ a small number of institutions</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The location of the institution</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The overall reputation of the institution</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The institution's reputation in my chosen subject area</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mentions of 5% or more

Source: Motivation for Postgraduate Study, June 2008

Base: OU alumni (428), OU undergraduates (276)
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