

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNERS

Where are you now?





Introduction

Four years ago, the OCN North East Region began to collect information from learners who were registered onto the Access to Higher Education course (within the Data Protection Act) to enable a study to be undertaken of their educational or professional destination. The first cohort of 1499 learners who were registered during the 03/04 academic year has now had the time to complete their degree courses. A small, predominantly quantitative, research project was set up to follow the progress of those learners and find out where they are now.

The aims of this project were to:

- Discover the progression and final destination of the learners
- Find out whether achieving the QAA Access to Higher Education award enabled their acceptance onto their chosen degree course
- Find out whether or not it affected their ability to gain entry into their chosen profession if they have gone into employment

The Research

Information was collected from OCN North East Region registration data and by postal questionnaires sent to the learners' last known address.

The following questions were posed:

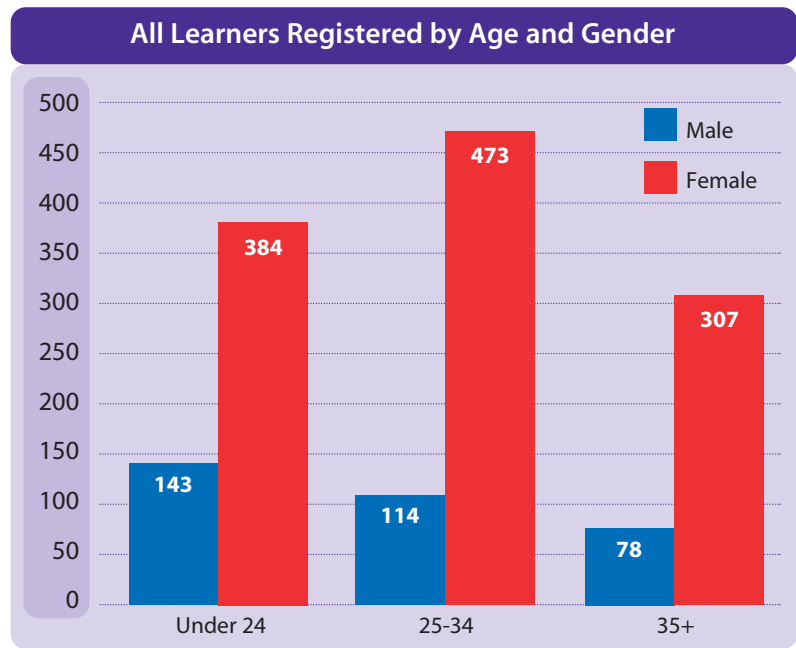
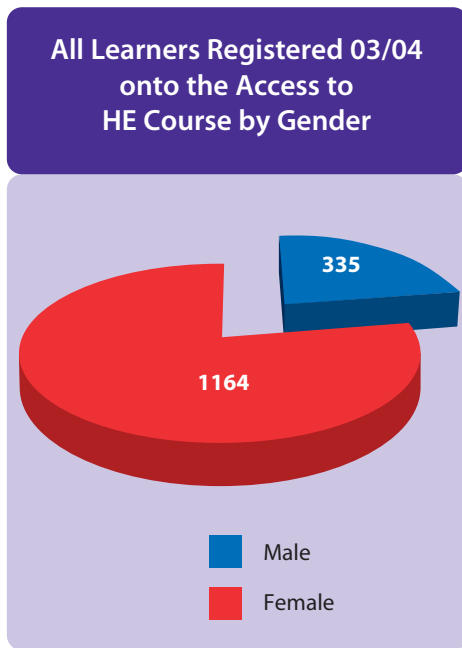
- What were the characteristics of a typical Access to Higher Education learner?
- Had learners done any recent learning before the Access to Higher Education course?
- Did they complete the course?
- Did they apply for the same degree course that they intended to when starting the Access to Higher Education course?
- Were they accepted on their first choice course?
- If they didn't go on to Higher Education, what other career choices did they make?
- Were they adequately prepared for their degree course?
- What are they doing now?
- Is this where they wanted to be when they started their Access to Higher Education course?
- How do they now feel about the experience of studying on an Access to Higher Education course?

Sample Size

All 1499 Access to Higher Education learners from the selected year were contacted using the details available. Just over 10% of these were completed and returned. A further 8% were returned as undeliverable, indicating that these learners had relocated.

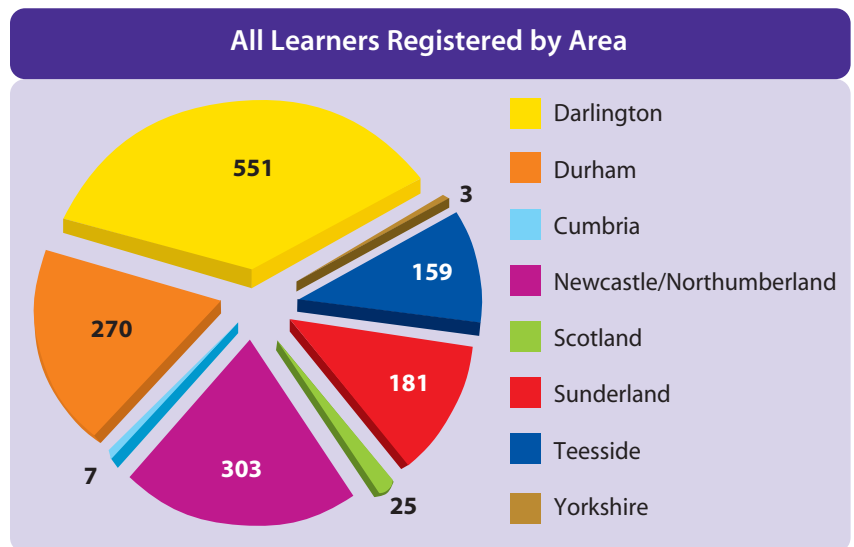
The Access to Higher Education learner

An initial assessment identified the gender, age and location profile of the total number of learners who were registered onto the Access to Higher Education courses as follows:



Location

A high number of learners lived in the area with a Teesside postcode, followed closely by Northumberland/Newcastle and Sunderland. These figures are affected by the fact that OCN North East Region does not currently have Access to Higher Education provision at Tyne Metropolitan College or Northumberland College.



Prior Learning

The learners were asked about any qualifications they had completed before their Access to Higher Education course:

- **56% had undertaken prior learning**
- **43% had not**
- **1% did not answer**

From the 93% of learners that achieved the QAA Award, 57% had undertaken learning prior to enrolling on the Access to Higher Education Course. The majority of courses were GCSE's, NVQ's and BTEC Diplomas. There is only a marginal difference in achieving the full QAA Access to Higher Education award for those who had completed any prior learning compared to those who had not.

Motivation

The factors which motivated learners to enrol on the Access to Higher Education course were: (respondents could give multiple answers to this question):

- 73% said that it was to progress to Higher Education
- 64% said that it was to enable them to go into their chosen profession
- 44% said that it was to improve qualifications
- 21% said that this was to get a high level qualification
- 13% said that they liked the look of the course
- 5% said that it was for another reason

The Access to Higher Education Course

Choice of Pathway

The most popular choice of pathway was Humanities, followed closely by Health and then Education. Two of the newer pathways, ICT and Music, were more popular with the younger age category, but otherwise choices seemed generally unaffected by age.

Gender did seem to affect the choice of pathway in a more significant way, however. The table adjacent shows pathways studied by learners registered onto the Access to Higher Education course during 2003/04. It is sorted into the most popular pathway studied by each gender.

Although Humanities was the most popular for both genders, Music was far more popular with men and the engagement of women in Engineering and Aerospace, Music and Computing and Business was minimal.

All Learners Registered by Age and Pathway 03/04

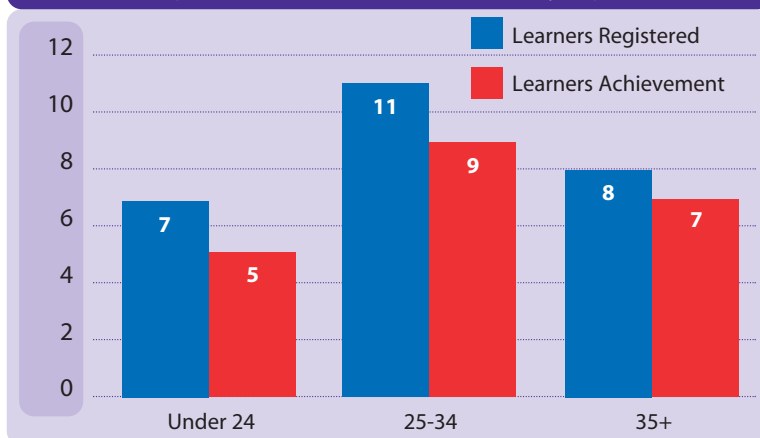
Pathway	Under 24	25-34	35+
Art and Design	6	5	8
Business & Management	5	3	0
Combined Studies	62	81	70
Computing & Business Studies	2	1	0
Core	10	11	13
Educational, Social Care and Health Studies	98	128	49
Educational Studies	1	3	0
Engineering & Aerospace	7	1	0
Health	76	107	81
Humanities	177	200	139
ICT	24	13	10
Music	39	10	3
Nursing and Health Studies	20	24	12
Totals	527	587	385

Pathway	Female	Male	Pathway
Humanities	423	92	Humanities
Education, Social Care and Health Studies	235	51	Music
Health	225	48	Combined Studies
Combined Studies	165	40	Education, Social Care and Health Studies
Nursing and Health Studies	52	39	Health
Core	30	29	ICT
ICT	18	10	Art and Design
Art and Design	9	7	Engineering & Aerospace
Business & Management	3	5	Business & Management
Educational Studies	2	4	Core
Engineering & Aerospace	1	4	Nursing and Health Studies
Music	1	3	Computing & Business
Computing & Business	0	2	Educational Studies
Grand Total Female	1164	334	Grand Total Male

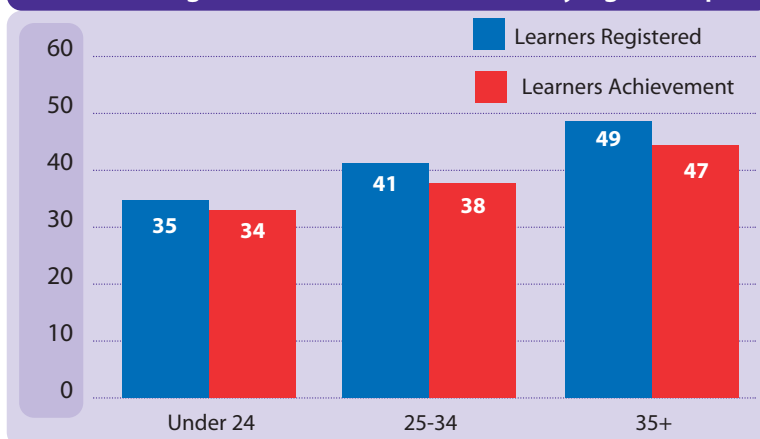
Achievement of the QAA Access to Higher Education Award

Access to Higher Education courses are designed as unit based, flexible learning programmes. The QAA Access to Higher Education Award is achieved when the required credits have been completed from the specified unit combinations. From the surveyed learners, achievement of the QAA Access to Higher Education Award was high, with a 93% completion rate.

Male Registration and Achievement by Age Group



Female Registration and Achievement by Age Group



What now?

Progression after the Access to Higher Education Award

Of the sample who achieved the full QAA Award, the following answers were given as to what they did upon completion of the Access to HE course:

- 87% went onto HE
- 21% went onto further study
- 11% went into employment
- 3% become unwaged
- 3% stated other

(multiple answers could be given)

Higher Education

Of the 87% of respondents who went onto higher education, 92% were accepted onto their first choice degree:

- 79% studied the same degree that they had intended at the start of the Access to Higher Education course
- 16% did not study the same degree course that they had intended to at the beginning of the Access to Higher Education Course
- 5% did not answer the question

The learners were asked to identify the degree that they intended to study upon completion of the Access to Higher Education course. The three commonly mentioned choices of Degree subjects were Nursing, Midwifery and Education. The actual degree courses studied were Nursing, Education, Business Studies and other Health oriented subjects.

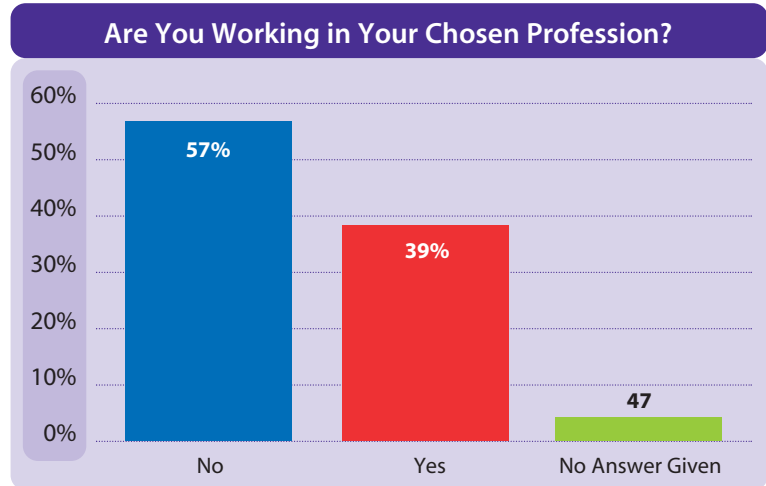
Where did they go?

As might be expected from Access learner, many stayed within the region:

- 44% studied at Teesside
- 17% studied at Northumbria
- 16% studied at Sunderland
- 9% studied at Other
- 7% studied at Durham
- 3% studied at New College Durham
- 2% studied at Newcastle
- 2% did not give an answer

Final Destination

The learners were asked if they were working in their chosen profession at the time of the research.



Learners who did not achieve the QAA Award

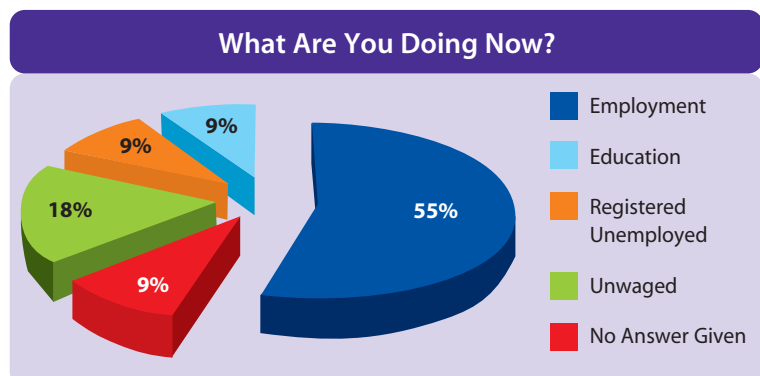
For those 7% of the sample who did not achieve the full QAA Access to Higher Education Award, the following answers were given as to what they did upon completion of the Access to Higher Education course:

- 36% said that they had another outcome
- 27% said that they went onto HE without gaining the full QAA Award
- 27% said that they went into employment
- None said that they had become unwaged
- 10% did not answer the question

Other outcomes included a learner starting their own business, continuing with their current employment, or leaving the course for personal reasons. One learner was only able to do the Access course part-time and could not complete one of the modules, but was subsequently accepted into University on the evidence of what had been achieved over the years study.

Final Destination if Full QAA Access to HE Award not achieved

This shows that the majority of learners from the sample who did not achieve the full QAA Award had gone into employment.



Learning from Access to Higher Education: Conclusions

Although the sample size was relatively small, some interesting conclusions can be drawn:

- **Access to Higher Education course achievement and progression rates are high. 93% of the sample learners completed their course, with 79% of them applying for the same degree that they intended to when starting the Access to HE Course**
- **87% of respondents went on to take up a place in Higher Education**
- **In the vocational areas covered, Access to Higher Education courses gave learners an excellent chance of being accepted onto a degree course. All learners who achieved the QAA Award were accepted on their first choice degree**
- **Access to Higher Education courses are an effective preparation for university for people without qualifications. Almost half of the respondents had no qualifications on starting the Access to Higher Education course. This had no impact on their likelihood of achieving the Access to Higher Education award**
- **The majority of Access to HE learners opted to continue their studies within the region**
- **A small number of learners (11) did not achieve the QAA Award and subsequently did not continue into Higher Education. However, six of these learners are in employment in their chosen industry or profession. This might indicate that simply undertaking some appropriate study can significantly increase a learner's ability to achieve employment. However, it is not known if the relevant learners had achieved the occupational level that they had anticipated when they first enrolled on the Access Programme**
- **Course structure and delivery meets the needs of the majority of learners. Satisfaction rates were very high, with the course meeting the expectations of 93% of respondents**

Access to Higher Education courses can be confidently promoted as a high quality and flexible route to university study, helping people from all backgrounds to Prepare for Success!

Please note

The data presented within this document provides a summary of OCN North East Region Access to Higher Education statistics in the North East of England. It is not intended that the data will be used by any organisations for setting any internal performance targets or benchmarking purposes.

Research undertaken by Andrea Henry, Ann-Marie Box, Keith Maternaghan, Lorraine Tunney, September 2008. For more information about this research, or to find out about the OCNER Regional Programme in Access to Higher Education.



Available in an alternative format

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