

Preparing to succeed: the impact of an Access module on mature students from disadvantaged backgrounds

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Research Aims

1. Impact on confidence, personal development and learning how to learn (dispositional barriers).
2. Impact on time management and opportunities to engage with digital learning (situational barriers).
3. Engagement with tutor support for progression (mitigating institutional barriers)

Methodology

1. **Desk research** included members of the research team analysing internal 'pre-data'.-longitudinal achievement, completion and progression scores of students on Y032 over the previous five years, alongside evaluative data produced for recent Access Programme institutional review
2. **focus group discussions**
3. **An online survey** administered to a sample of students who had begun their studies with the Y032 Access module and had since progressed to studying undergraduate modules

Conclusions

Framed around second chances to learn, an effective access offer should identify needs (which may be articulated or not), wants and interests, helping students understand both the benefits of learning and their own strengths.

Such 'supported aspirations' link to personal passions and may help address institutional barriers and acknowledge the sustained impact of such programmes.

The provision of flexible opportunities via well-paced and relevant preparatory curriculum, alongside pro-active empathetic 1-1 support, may offer some ideas to address sector concerns about attrition.

"Access Effect" in Overcoming Barriers

Impact on dispositional barriers

Preparatory starting point to increase the likelihood of success
Symbiotic relationship between enhanced learner confidence and the improvement of academic writing.

'Having never studied at HE level, [People, work and society] incredibly helpful before starting UG'.

"There's a lot of things happening...not only are you learning about what really turns you on in the academic world, there's also those little academic skills which are so precious if you are going to do a degree".

Impact on situational barriers

improvements in time management, including finding the time to write more efficiently.

For mature students new to the OU aspiring to progress to UG study, the support to become a competent online learner

'I was able to study and work at the same time – writing and time management'.

'Managing time – first time being self-disciplined'.

'Helped to learn how online portal worked and use of Word for academic purposes'

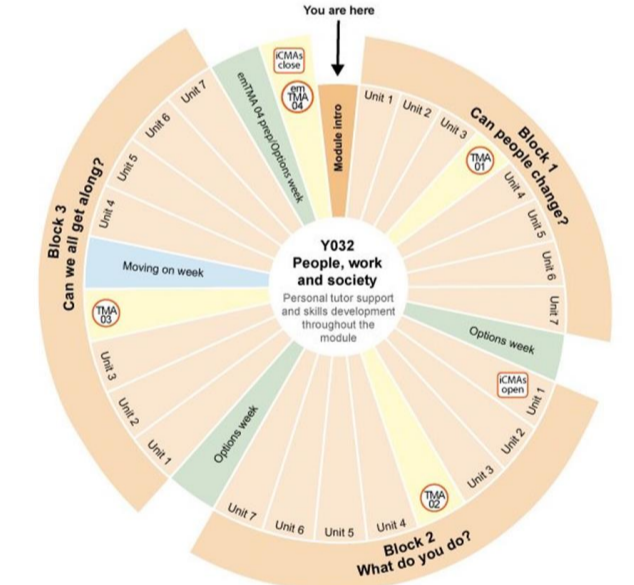
'Allowed me to gain understanding of how learning worked remotely with the computer and internet'.

Impact on Institutional barriers

Access learning experience which were within the team's control, like the pace of the module, were highly praised

'the phone call identifies any sort of anxieties, and barriers they face, because generally they are worried at that point about starting the module. If they mention something, I can go back to them and say 'is it OK if I refer you and see what support the university can give you'.

'...having a timetable, meeting deadlines, understanding the questions, really getting into studying and really understanding what the brief is. I think that's very important for a lot of students'.



Review of literature

Life' transition, recording academic culture shock – a loss of identity and belonging leading to reduced self-esteem. (Younger, 2019)

Time pressures mature students experience when having to 'fit-in' studying by juggling work (often involving a number of part-time jobs) alongside financial and caring commitments for both children and older relatives. Butcher (2015a, 2015b, 2020)

In a Scottish context collaborative teaching partnerships across FE and HE in the social sciences Cole (2018)

Impact and Dissemination

Fed into new access modules aligned to the four faculties- Two new modules – Y034 and Y035.

Dissemination on different platforms

- The European Conference on Education ECE-2024, London , July 2024
- Neon Conference – University of West London-June 2024
- ISSTOL, 2024

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2024.2381530>

