

A5 Caerphilly Wednesday 5 December 12.00 - 12.30

Do you need to have all the prerequisites to be successful in HE or can you make it work with what you have? (0378)

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Introduction

Open University UK (OU) is the largest single distance education and part-time education provider in the UK. OU has another defining characteristic and that it has an open access entry policy meaning that there are no entry requirements to enrol into the 1st year degree module. The university prides itself on its ability to provide education to people who want to study for a degree but for whatever reason cannot attend traditional face-to-face university either due to the time commitment or location or prior educational attainment. As such, OU stands for equal opportunities and widening access to HE education for all and is known as university of “second chance”.

In the past three years number of studies were done on trying to understand students’ learning trajectories and learning gains and see what the main contributors to students’ academic progress are (Rogaten & Rienties 2018, Rogaten, Rienties and Whitelock, 2017; Rogaten et al., 2017a, 2017b; Rogaten et al., 2016). The main findings of those studies indicated that students’ progression through the course is affected by the course and assessment characteristics and also by demographic-variables with prior educational qualifications and ethnicity being the strongest socio-demographic predictors. Most of those studies looked at the learning trajectories with this a module spanning over one or two semesters of in the traditional university spanning over the three years. However, it is still unclear what the trajectories of part-time students are as those students can take seven or more years to complete their degree. This is the question this paper aims to answer and also to explore if widening access to HE and accepted students who are not usually considered as “university material” is worth it.

Method

The data was retrieved for 2,173 students who have graduated with the OU degree in summer 2017 from across 10 BSc and BA programmes. All students were subdivided into groups based on how long it took them to obtain a degree qualification. The overall majority of students stayed within the expected length of a part-time degree i.e., it took up to 7 years to complete a degree (60.7%), few of them took up to 14 years to complete a degree (31%) and a small percentage of students took more than 14 years to complete a degree (8.4%). 19.4% of students who have graduated with the BA or BSc degree had below A levels prior educational qualifications and as such would not be able to study at any other university in the UK. The distribution of entrance qualifications by the 10 degree qualifications are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Highest education qualification at enrolment.

BA & BSc	Highest Education at enrolment	Frequenc	%
		y	

Q1	A levels or Equivalent	222	38.0
	UG or PG qualification	242	41.4
	Bellow A levels and No qualification	119	20.4
	Unknown	1	0.2
Q2	A levels or Equivalent	124	40.5
	UG or PG qualification	111	36.3
	Bellow A levels and No qualification	71	23.2
Q3	A levels or Equivalent	115	39.1
	UG or PG qualification	132	44.9
	Bellow A levels and No qualification	47	16.0
Q4	A levels or Equivalent	60	30.9
	UG or PG qualification	103	53.1
	Bellow A levels and No qualification	31	16.0
Q5	A levels or Equivalent	83	37.9
	UG or PG qualification	93	42.5
	Bellow A levels and No qualification	43	19.6
Q6	A levels or Equivalent	18	8.7
	UG or PG qualification	163	79.1
	Bellow A levels and No qualification	25	12.1
Q7	A levels or Equivalent	58	50.0
	UG or PG qualification	28	24.1
	Bellow A levels and No qualification	30	25.9
Q8	A levels or Equivalent	40	51.9
	UG or PG qualification	15	19.5
	Bellow A levels and No qualification	22	28.6
Q9	A levels or Equivalent	39	34.8
	UG or PG qualification	58	51.8
	Bellow A levels and No qualification	15	13.4
Q10	A levels or Equivalent	32	49.2
	UG or PG qualification	15	23.1
	Bellow A levels and No qualification	18	27.7

Results

Students' progression in the module was analysed using multilevel growth curve modelling where students module grades were entered at level 1, students were entered at level 2 and qualification was entered at level 3. Students' socio-demographic characteristics were entered as predictors in the model. The result of the analysis are presented in a Table 2 below.

Table 2: Results of multilevel modelling

Variables	Main effect		Interaction	
	Beta	SE	Beta	SE
Intercept	69.19	1.72	69.05	1.75
Slope	0.10	0.19	0.14	0.20
Black	-8.48**	1.07	-7.46	1.49
Asian	-3.45**	0.92	-2.86	1.29
Other or Mixed	-3.26**	1.05	-2.69	1.45
Ethnicity Unknown	5.09	9.31	10.25	12.75
UG or PG qualification	1.13**	0.42	1.66	0.59
Bellow A levels or No qualification	-2.95*	0.50	-3.67	0.71
Qualification Unknown	-7.82	8.41	-2.72	12.07
Black*Time			-0.28	0.28
Asian*Time			-0.16	0.23
Other or Mixed*Time			-0.16	0.27
Ethnicity Unknown*Time			-2.24	3.68
UG or PG qualification*Time			-0.13	0.10
Bellow A levels and No Qualification*Time			0.17	0.12
Qualification Unknown*Time			-1.41	2.40

*p<0.01; **p<0.001

Reference groups are: Ethnicity – White; Qualification - A levels or equivalent

Discussion

The results of this study are in line with the results of the within module studies conducted on a first year modules (Rogaten & Rienties, 2018; Rogaten, Reinties and Whitelock, 2017). One noticeable difference between within module analyses and within qualification analyses is the lack of interaction with time. On a module level there was increase or decrease in the gap between students with different educational backgrounds depending on a subject are. At the qualification level the initial gap reduction was not observed. But most importantly, in this study we could see that although the gap in attainment across the degree between students who had A levels or equivalent or those who already had some degree qualification prior to the start of the course and those who had below A level qualification or no formal qualification, remained the same throughout the degree and the percentage of students who were enrolled for the degree programs with different prior educational qualifications and the percentage of students who graduated remained comparatively the same. These findings are rather optimistic and illustrate that OU courses are fit for presenting equal opportunities and widening access and participation among the students who may otherwise not have a possibility to obtain HE degree.

References:

Rogaten, J., Jugariu, M., Hitchings, C., Scott, I., Kinchin, I., Sharpe, R., Lygo-Baker, S., & Rienties, B. (2017) Longitudinal analysis of students' learning gains in Higher Education across two UK institutions. Symposium Presentation. SRHE conference, Celtic Manor, UK.

Rogaten, J., Mittelmeier, J., Cin, M., Long, D., Rienties, B., and Raghuram, P. (2017). Learning gains of international students in South African distance education. Symposium Presentation. SRHE conference, Celtic Manor, UK.

Rogaten, J. & Rienties, B. (in press) Which first-year students are making most learning gains in STEM subjects? *Higher Education Pedagogies*. Special issue on learning gains.

Rogaten, J., Rienties, B., Whitelock, D., Cross, S.J., & Littlejohn, A. (2017). Using big data to understand learning gains in knowledge and understanding in Social Science and Science. Paper presentation at European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction Biennial Conference (EARLI 2017).

Rogaten, J., Whitelock, D., & Rienties, B. (2016). Assessing learning gains. Paper Presentation. Technology Enhanced Assessment Conference 2016, Tallinn, Estonia.