



Fees increase contributes to decline in part-time students, report finds

The 2012 increase in tuition fees in England has resulted in more than 40,000 'lost' potential part-time students, according to research by the Sutton Trust.

While the number of part-time undergraduate students has been declining over the past decade, the research shows that the funding reforms in 2012 may have caused the decline to increase.

According to *The Last Part-timers*, by Professor Claire Callender from Birkbeck, University of London and John Thompson, between 2010 and 2015, the number of part-time students in England declined by 51%, from 216,000 in 2010 to 106,000 in 2015 (with the Open University experiencing an even bigger fall of 63%, which the OU says is because it offered many courses below degree level

that are not eligible for loans).

The biggest drop has been among students aged over 35, whose numbers have fallen from 95,000 in 2010 to 39,000 in 2015. Consequently, the part-time sector is not only smaller, it is different. The 2012 reforms have changed both the part-time

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undergraduate student body and the qualifications they study.

The 2012 student funding changes – which saw fees increase and grants abolished, replaced by new tuition fee loans for part-timers – have resulted in average fees of £5,000 (per full-time equivalent) for degree students at universities, with many institutions charging up to the equivalent of the

full-time cap of £9,250. Between 2011 and 2012 the Open University had to increase its fees 2.5-fold for students studying in England.

While recent trends show that the number of part-time students would have declined even without these fee hikes,

the report finds that if entrant numbers for those living in England had fallen by the same proportion as for those living in Wales – who were unaffected by the tuition fee increases – in 2015 there would have been 149,000 part-time students living in England instead of 106,000.

This suggests that around 40% of the decline in English part-time student numbers since 2010 has been caused by the increase in fees, and that

there were over 40,000 fewer part-time students in 2015 than there would have been without the fee increases.

Sir Peter Lampl, Founder of the Sutton Trust and Chairman of the Education Endowment Foundation, said: "Part-time study is a crucial second chance for many people. This report shows that it has been decimated. Numbers between 2010 and 2015 collapsed by over half from 216,000 in 2010 to 106,000 in 2015. The major reason for this dramatic decline is the introduction of big increases in tuition fees. Mature and part-time students have a better understanding of the consequences of taking on debt than young full-time undergraduates.

"The Review of Post-18 Education should acknowledge there is no 'one-size-fits-all'

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approach to student finance, and recognise that the mature and part-time sector requires tailored solutions. Opportunities to get on in life should not be restricted to a one-off decision at age 18. Genuine social mobility would empower all those in society to gain the skills they need to succeed, regardless of age or background. Part-time and mature education is key to this.”
