

Investigation into the Motivation of Mature Learners to  
Engage and Sustain Engagement with Part-Time Higher  
Education Degree Programmes

By

Sinéad O’Dea

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for MA in Education, Learning and  
Development (*QQI*)

Faculty of Teaching and Learning

Griffith College Dublin

July 2022

## DECLARATION PAGE

*I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Education, Learning and Development is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation.*

*I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other learners.*

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sinéad O'Dea". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

**Signed: Sinéad O'Dea**

**Dated: 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022**

## ABSTRACT

The Irish National Skills Strategy 2015 – 2025 committed to an educational goal of developing highly skilled people with higher order capabilities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. Mature learners are a growing cohort of learners at Griffith College Cork in recent years. Griffith College is a privately-owned, third level, higher education institution with campuses in Dublin, Cork and Limerick. In order to align with the Irish National Skills Strategy 2015 -2025 and to improve supports for mature learners, this research aims to understand the motivational drivers of mature learners in part-time higher education.

The research objectives for this case study are:

- 1) To examine the motivational factors that influenced the mature learners' decision to apply for their respective part-time degree courses.
- 2) To analyse the motivational factors that engaged and sustained the mature learner allowing them to complete their studies.
- 3) To consider additional educational initiatives and innovations that Faculty members can implement in order to enhance and support the learning experience for mature learners.

The participants in this research were all mature learners who successfully completed part-time, undergraduate degrees at Griffith College Cork. Through a sequential explanatory mixed methods research approach using a literature review, a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative interviews, the study identified that the key motivational factors to start an undergraduate part-time degree include: Self-esteem/ Worthiness, Life-Stage/ Timing, Career Change/ Promotion, Admissions Process, Love of Learning.

In order to sustain motivation to completion of the degree, the study revealed the following motivational factors play an integral role: Lecturers/ Lecture Style, Intrinsic Motivation, Peer Support, Extrinsic Motivation and Fear of Failure.

Drawing on two social cognitive motivation theories of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), the study makes recommendations for higher education institutions to enhance the learning experience for mature learners by including: Time Management Clarity, Testimonial Advertising, Opportunities to Experience Higher Education, Elective Choices, Social/ Study Space and Physical Supports for Learning.

Areas worthy of further study would be to examine the motivational factors for full-time undergraduate learners and a comparative study of mature learners in a larger university setting in order to fully understand all the learning supports and initiatives that could be deployed in a private, higher education college setting for an optimal learning experience.

**Keyword Phrases:** Part-time Mature Learners in Higher Education; Intrinsic Motivation in Higher Education; Extrinsic Motivation in Higher Education; Andragogy.

## Contents

DECLARATION PAGE.....	2
ABSTRACT.....	3
LIST OF APPENDICES .....	8
LIST OF FIGURES.....	9
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	10
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	11
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION.....	12
<b>1.1 Overview</b> .....	12
<b>1.2 Research Questions</b> .....	13
<b>1.3 Research Aims and Objectives</b> .....	13
<b>1.4 Structure of the Study</b> .....	14
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW .....	15
<b>2.1 Introduction</b> .....	15
<b>2.2 Keyword Phrases for the Study</b> .....	15
<b>2.3 Motivation</b> .....	16
<b>2.4 Motivation Theories in Higher Education</b> .....	17
<b>2.4.1 Self-Determination Theory (SDT) - Extrinsic Motivation</b> .....	17
<b>2.4.2 Self-Determination Theory (SDT) - Intrinsic Motivation</b> .....	18
<b>2.4.3 Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation (EVT)</b> .....	19
<b>2.5 Andragogy – Adult Learning Theory</b> .....	20
<b>2.6 Motivation to Engage in a Higher Education Degree Programme</b> .....	21
<b>2.6.1 Demotivating factors when engaging in a higher education degree programme</b> .....	24
<b>2.7 Motivation to Sustain Engagement in a Higher Education Degree Programme</b> .....	26
<b>2.7.1 Influence of Lecturer</b> .....	26
<b>2.7.2 Orientation to Learning</b> .....	27
<b>2.7.3 Demotivating Factors in Sustaining Motivation</b> .....	28
<b>2.8 Conclusion</b> .....	30
CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	32
<b>3.1 Introduction</b> .....	32
<b>3.2 Research Philosophy</b> .....	32
<b>3.2.1 Positivism - Quantitative Survey Method</b> .....	33
<b>3.2.2 Interpretivism - Qualitative Interview Method</b> .....	34
<b>3.3 Research Objectives</b> .....	34
<b>3.4 Research Design</b> .....	35
<b>3.5 Data Collection Methods</b> .....	36

3.5.1	Pilot Study.....	36
3.5.2	The Sample Group .....	36
3.5.3	Quantitative Survey Method .....	37
3.5.4	Qualitative Method - Semi-structured interviews .....	37
3.6	Data Analysis .....	38
3.6.1	Data Analysis of Literature Review.....	38
3.6.2	Data Analysis of Quantitative Questionnaires .....	38
3.6.3	Data Analysis of Qualitative Interviews and Questionnaires .....	39
3.7	Dependability and Reliability in Mixed Methods Research.....	39
3.7.1	Validity.....	40
3.8	Ethical Issues.....	41
3.9	Limitations of this Study .....	42
3.10	Conclusion .....	43
CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS, DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....		44
4.1	Introduction.....	44
4.2	Research Analysis Population .....	45
4.3	Research Question 1: Motivation to Start a Part-time Honours Degree Programme .....	45
Findings, Data Analysis and Discussion .....		45
4.3.1	Theme 1 – Self-Esteem/ Worthiness .....	46
4.3.2	Theme 2 – Life Stage/ Timing.....	47
4.3.3	Theme 3 – Career Change/ Promotion .....	49
4.3.4	Theme 4 – Admissions Process .....	50
4.3.5	Theme 5 – Love of Learning .....	52
4.4	Research Question 2 - Motivation to Sustain a Part-time Honours Degree Programme ..	53
Findings, Data Analysis and Discussion .....		53
4.4.1	Theme 1 – Lecturers/ Lecture Style.....	53
4.4.2	Theme 2 – Intrinsic Motivation.....	54
4.4.3	Theme 3 – Peer Support.....	56
4.4.4	Theme 4 – Extrinsic Motivation .....	57
4.4.5	Theme 5 – Fear of Failure.....	59
4.5	Research Question 3 – Additional Educational Initiatives and Innovations to Support the Learning Experience for Mature Learners .....	60
Findings, Data Analysis and Discussion .....		60
4.5.1	Time Management Clarity.....	60
4.5.2	Testimonial Advertising.....	61
4.5.3	Opportunity to Experience Higher Education .....	61

<b>4.5.4</b>	<b>Elective Choices</b> .....	62
<b>4.5.5</b>	<b>Social/ Study Space</b> .....	62
<b>4.5.6</b>	<b>Physical Support for Learning</b> .....	63
<b>4.6</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	63
CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....		64
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	64
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Research Objectives</b> .....	64
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Recommendations</b> .....	65
<b>5.3.1</b>	<b>Recommendations to enhance Competence, Autonomy and Relatedness in the learner experience at Griffith College</b> .....	65
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Areas for Further Research</b> .....	67
<b>5.5</b>	<b>Contribution to the Study</b> .....	67
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....		68
APPENDIX 1 – Griffith College Cork Learner Numbers – 2014-2020 .....		74
APPENDIX 2 - Breakdown of full-time and part-time registered learners at Griffith College Cork as at 31st October 2020 .....		75
APPENDIX 3 - Quantitative Research Questionnaire .....		76
APPENDIX 4 – Thematic Analysis of Literature .....		77
APPENDIX 5 – Graphical Representation of Quantitative Data .....		79
APPENDIX 6 – Thematic Analysis of Quantitative Findings from Coding Process .....		94
APPENDIX 7 – Ethical Approval .....		100
APPENDIX 8 – Participant Information Sheets .....		101
APPENDIX 9 – Participant Consent Form – Interview Candidates .....		103
APPENDIX 10 – Semi-structured Interview Questions .....		105
APPENDIX 11 – Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Research .....		106

## LIST OF APPENDICES

- APPENDIX 1 – Griffith College Cork Learner Numbers – 2014-2020.....	74
- APPENDIX 2 – Breakdown of full-time and part-time registered learners at Griffith College Cork – October 2020.....	75
- APPENDIX 3 – Quantitative Research Questionnaire.....	76
- APPENDIX 4 – Thematic Analysis of Literature.....	77
- APPENDIX 5 – Graphical Representation of Quantitative Data.....	79
- APPENDIX 6 – Thematic Analysis of Quantitative Findings.....	94
- APPENDIX 7 – Ethical Approval Form – Griffith College.....	100
- APPENDIX 8 – Participant Information Sheet.....	101
- APPENDIX 9 – Participant Consent Form.....	103
- APPENDIX 10 – Semi-structured Interview Questions.....	105
- APPENDIX 11 – Thematic Data Analysis from Qualitative Research.....	106

## LIST OF FIGURES

- <b>Figure 1:</b> Taxonomy of Human Motivation, Ryan and Deci (2017).....	17
- <b>Figure 2:</b> Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) – Eccles and Wigfield (2002).....	19
- <b>Figure 3:</b> Prism-T Model for Predicting Enrolment, Stein, Wanstreet and Trinko (2011).....	27
- <b>Figure 4:</b> Sequential Mixed Methods Design, Creswell and Plano Clark (2007).....	32
- <b>Figure 5:</b> Motivation to Start – Theme 1: Self-Esteem/ Worthiness.....	45
- <b>Figure 6:</b> Motivation to Start – Theme 2: Life Stage/ Timing.....	46
- <b>Figure 7:</b> Motivation to Start – Theme 3: Career Change/ Promotion.....	48
- <b>Figure 8:</b> Motivation to Start – Theme 4: Admissions Process.....	49
- <b>Figure 9:</b> Motivation to Start – Theme 5: Love of Learning.....	51
- <b>Figure 10:</b> Motivation to Sustain – Theme 1: Lecturers/ Lecture Style.....	52
- <b>Figure 11:</b> Motivation to Sustain – Theme 2: Intrinsic Motivation.....	54
- <b>Figure 12:</b> Motivation to Sustain – Theme 3: Peer Support.....	56
- <b>Figure 13:</b> Motivation to Sustain – Theme 4: Extrinsic Motivation.....	57
- <b>Figure 14:</b> Motivation to Sustain – Theme 5: Fear of Failure.....	58
- <b>Figure 15:</b> Research Aims and Objectives – Core Themes.....	64
- <b>Figure 16:</b> Self-Determination Theory, Ryan and Deci (2000).....	65

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

- **BA – Bachelor of Arts**
- **CPD – Continuous Professional Development**
- **EVT – Expectancy-Value Theory**
- **GCC – Griffith College Cork**
- **LLB – Legum Baccalaureus – Bachelor of Laws**
- **MA – Master of Arts**
- **QQI – Quality Qualifications Ireland**
- **SDT – Self-Determination Theory**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all who assisted in the development and completion of this dissertation.

In particular, I would like to thank Mr Peter Gillis, Dissertation Module Lead, for agreeing to be my supervisor, for pushing me to do my best work, for training me to think “So what?” with every paragraph and for guiding me on every step of this rewarding but challenging journey.

Thank you to the Head of Faculty, Ms Mary O’Driscoll, for believing in me and encouraging me to complete the full Master of Education, Development and Learning qualification. Thank you for pushing me outside my comfort zone.

To my classmates, thank you for all your energy and commitment with the group projects and for all your support through the tough parts of the course, you made the experience less daunting, more fun and an experience I will always cherish.

To all the Griffith College Cork graduates who so willingly assisted in the primary research for this study. Your learning experience was the inspiration for this research so your support and participation was greatly appreciated.

To my ‘work wives’ Christine and Joanne, for their support and encouragement throughout the journey. To Griffith College for providing me with the opportunity to undertake this Masters qualification.

Last but by no means least, my wonderful family, especially my husband, Patrick and daughter, Ava, for their unwavering support, for keeping the coffee flowing, for their encouragement, kindness and love, from start to finish. It would not have been possible without you.

Thank you.

## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

Mature learner participation in part-time higher education degree programmes in Griffith College Cork has been growing consistently over the last six years in the faculties of Business, Accounting and Law. (See Appendix 1). In October 2020, 82.5% of the registered mature learners chose to study their respective degree programmes on a part-time/blended basis at Griffith College Cork. (See Appendix 2)

There are three undergraduate Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI) – Level 8, part-time honours degree programmes currently available in Griffith College Cork; the BA (Hons) in Business Studies, the BA (Hons) in Accounting and Finance and the LLB (Hons) in Law.

The overall aim of this research is to investigate potential additional quality educational innovations and initiatives to support these mature learners. It is hoped this research can inform further Griffith College supports to create an improved environment that will effectively attract, retain and produce mature learner graduates who will bring their educational experience and knowledge into their employment and personal lives. This aim is consistent with the Lisbon Strategy 2000, the Irish Government Strategy, Enterprise 2025 and the National Skills Strategy 2015-2025:

*“Our ambition is that Ireland will be internationally renowned for its talent, for its highly skilled and adaptive people, equipped with higher order capabilities required in the 21st century workplace and for its openness to continuous learning.”*

(Ireland, National Skills Strategy, 2015, p.6)

The vision of the Lisbon Strategy launched in 2000 was to make Europe, *“the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.”*

(Europe, Lisbon Strategy, 2000)

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The purpose of this research proposal is to examine mature graduates' extrinsic and intrinsic motivations to register on an honours degree programme at Griffith College Cork and the motivational factors that contributed to sustaining engagement with their studies until completion.

All participants in this research have successfully graduated from undergraduate degree programmes at Griffith College Cork. All are 'Mature Learners' - over 23 years of age on the 1st of January of the chosen year of study, and chose the part-time delivery mode of study, two to three evenings per week for three years, while in full-time employment.

The research questions for this study are:

- What were the principle motivations and drivers that led the learners to apply for their respective part-time programmes?
- What were the factors that engaged the learners and sustained their motivation to complete the programme?
- What additional educational initiatives and innovations can Faculty members implement in order to enhance and support the learning experience for mature learners?

## **1.3 Research Aims and Objectives**

The aims and objectives of this research are:

- 1) To examine the motivational factors that influenced the mature learners' decision to apply for their respective part-time degree courses;
- 2) To analyse the motivational factors that engaged and sustained the mature learner allowing them to complete their studies;
- 3) Drawing on the primary research findings and the literature review, to consider additional educational initiatives and innovations that Faculty members can implement in order to enhance and support the learning experience for mature learners.

## 1.4 Structure of the Study

The five chapters of this study will contribute to addressing and answering the research questions.

- Chapter one introduces the research topic, outlines the research questions, the aims and objectives and synopsis the structure of the study.
- By way of a literature review, chapter two informs the reader on the meaning of motivation and the existing academic motivational theories which engage and sustain mature learning in higher education. It also informs the background to the investigation and recommendations.
- Chapter three provides a detailed account of the research philosophy which underpins the design, data collection and analysis techniques used to address the research questions.
- Chapter four presents the findings generated from the collection and analysis of primary data and discusses the relevance of the findings in the context of the original research objectives.
- Chapter five presents the main conclusions and recommendations and suggests areas for further research. This chapter also considers new findings the research has brought to the current body of knowledge on motivation and evaluates what the study has achieved in terms of contributions and outcomes.

## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

The Ireland, Adult Education Survey 2017 (2018) found that of the 55% of those engaged in formal education, 38% were pursuing honours degree level courses or higher. Business, Administration and Law were the highest ranked courses in order of preference. For 62% of those surveyed, “*Improving career prospects*” was the main motivation, followed by “*Increase my possibilities of getting/ changing a job*” (41%). However, how do these figures reflect the motivation to undertake and sustain an honours degree by those attending a private, third level, higher education college?

This chapter will examine the meaning of motivation and motivation theories in the context of higher education. In order to understand and include the perspective of a mature learner, adult learning theory will be explored. This will be followed by a detailed examination of the existing academic theory on the motivational factors that engage and sustain engagement for mature learners in higher education.

### 2.2 Keyword Phrases for the Study

The searches for this Literature Review were conducted using the Griffith College Library, Google Scholar, SAGE and EBSCO Online database.

Keyword phrases used in this research included:

- Mature learners in part-time higher education;
- Andragogy;
- Intrinsic motivation in higher education;
- Extrinsic motivation in higher education;
- Motivating factors for effective learning in higher education for part-time mature learners.

## 2.3 Motivation

The word “motivation” originates from the Latin verb *movere*, meaning *to move*, Beck (2004). According to Green and Kelso, (2006, p.1), motivation is “*an internal force that energises the individual for action and determines the direction of that action.*” Schunk, Pintrick and Meese, (2008, p.4) define motivation as “*the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained*”, which correlates with the two core questions of this research study. According to Wlodkowski, (1985, p.2) motivation is described as processes that can “*(a) arouse and instigate behaviour, (b) give direction or purpose to behaviour, (c) continue to allow behaviour to persist, and (d) lead to choosing or preferring a particular behaviour.*”

Wlodkowski, (1999, p.3) explains the causal relationship between motivation and performance “*if we match two people of identical ability and give them identical opportunity and conditions to achieve, the motivated person will surpass the unmotivated person in performance and outcome. The higher the level of motivation, the more learning takes place.*”

Maslow (1954) espoused that human behaviour is motivated by the desire of each individual to reach the highest level of his or her capability. Maslow developed a pyramid hierarchy of needs that consisted of five levels of motivational needs, with the most basic biological human needs at the bottom, such as oxygen, food, water, safety and the higher-level needs at the top, such as belonging, self-worth and self-fulfilment. Maslow’s model contends that the motivational needs at each level, starting at the lowest level, are required to be met before the individual can progress upwards to higher levels. According to Kember, Hong and Ho (2008) whilst Maslow’s theory has been difficult to measure, it has provided a model for understanding personal growth. Learners that are struggling with basic human needs of safety and survival are less likely to be motivated to register for a part-time honours degree.

## 2.4 Motivation Theories in Higher Education

Two of the most prominent theories on motivation are the social cognitive theories of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT). According to Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier and Ryan (1991), rather than solely focusing on the processes that direct behaviour towards desired outcomes, Self-Determination Theory addresses both the direction of behaviour and why certain outcomes are desired. It describes the various types of motivation based on the different reasons or goals that give rise to an action. The simplest distinction of the types of motivation is “*intrinsic motivation, which relates to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome*” Ryan and Deci, (2000, p.55). Their theory focused primarily on the innate human psychological needs for *competence, autonomy and relatedness*.

### 2.4.1 Self-Determination Theory (SDT) - Extrinsic Motivation

Within extrinsic motivation, Ryan and Deci (2000) concluded that learners can perform motivated actions with varying degrees of autonomy. For adult learners, they may resent having to undertake a higher education degree programme in order to secure a promotion in work – Ryan and Deci (2000) define this as *externally regulated extrinsic motivation*. Similarly, adult learners with many competing demands and responsibilities, may be extrinsically motivated through *introjected regulation* where they feel a strong sense of pressure to perform at a high level for pride and self-esteem reasons at work and with family or to avoid the anxiety and guilt of not having a higher education degree qualification.

Ryan and Deci (2000) define the more autonomous and self-determined extrinsic motivations as *identified regulation* whereby the mature learner has identified with the personal importance of their behaviour towards achieving their degree and the most autonomous extrinsic motivation, *integrated regulation*, the mature learner *has fully internalised the reasons for an action and assimilates them to the self*, Ryan and Deci, (2000, p.62). Their research found that the taxonomy of human motivation – see Figure 1 - is not a developmental continuum where learners progress through stages of extrinsic motivation. Depending on the situational factors of the learner and their previous experience, learners can adopt a new behavioural regulation at any point along the continuum.

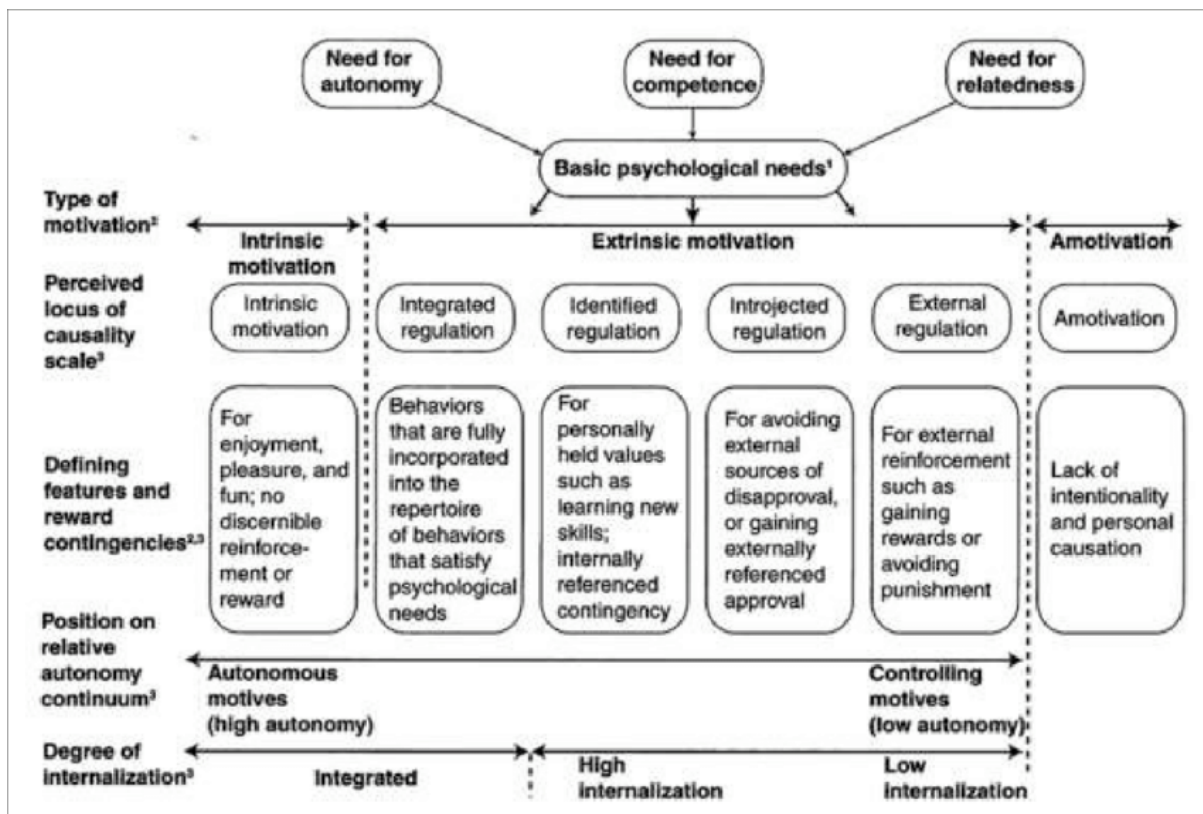


Figure 1: Taxonomy of Human Motivation - Ryan & Deci, (2017)

Deckers (2005) claims that the source of motivation is what defines whether a behaviour is intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Adult learners may seek an honours undergraduate qualification out of extrinsic motivational factors such as higher pay, higher status, external reward, high grades or the approval of others. However, some undertake a higher education qualification with intrinsic motives, the motivation may be inherent, freely chosen by the learner with no particular goal or reward in mind, something that is intrinsically pleasurable to the individual.

## 2.4.2 Self-Determination Theory (SDT) - Intrinsic Motivation

Ryan and Deci, (2000, p.56) defined intrinsic motivation as *“the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence.”* The learner is motivated to take action out of free choice, interest and enjoyment. Framed in terms of social and environmental factors which facilitate intrinsic motivation, Self Determination Theory, posits that interpersonal structures such as feedback and rewards towards the learner lead to feelings of competence and a higher sense of autonomy. The theory also purports that the more intrinsically motivated or extrinsically

integrated the learner is about achieving their goals, the stronger the feeling of belonging and connection they feel among their peers, family and society. In SDT this is defined as a sense of relatedness.

Donaldson and Graham (1999) state that non-traditional mature students are more likely than traditional students to approach their college experiences with a clearer purpose in mind, take instructors' advice more seriously, and have hopes of gaining something useful from their education, suggesting a more integrated regulatory style or intrinsic motivation. Deckers, (2005, p.277) concludes that *"behaviour that began for extrinsic reasons later can be performed for its own sake – that is for intrinsic reasons."*

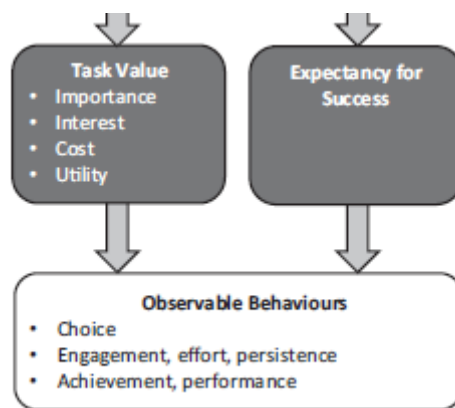
As noted by Elliott, Dweck and Yeager (2017), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation assist in the internalisation and integration of self-directed learning and goal-oriented behaviour, resulting in professional competence, autonomy and personal growth.

Goleman's (2020) research in emotional intelligence has demonstrated that the degree to which learners are intrinsically motivated by feelings of enthusiasm and pleasure in what they do, the sense of optimism and belief that they can commit to a higher degree programme and successfully complete it, propels them to accomplishment. His theory purports that emotional intelligence is *"a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them"*, Goleman, (2020, p.72).

### **2.4.3 Expectancy-Value Theory of Motivation (EVT)**

A second social cognitive motivational theory that relates to mature learner motivation is Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), developed by Eccles and Wigfield (2002). The theory contends that learners are motivated when they believe they will do well, they have efficacy expectations and/ or when they view a task as worthwhile or of value. Eccles and Wigfield (2002) categorised the task values into four distinct types, namely; utility value (finding a task useful), attainment value (finding a task to be important to confirming salient aspects of one's self-schema), intrinsic value (find a task to be interesting) and cost value (the task is not valued because it requires giving up other valued tasks (Flake, 2012)).

Mature learners studying on a part-time basis who commit to a higher education programme for three years have a high expectation that the investment of time and money will result in a worthwhile and valuable return. Geiger, Weinstein and Jones (2004) found that mature learners are more likely than traditional learners to possess higher self-efficacy academic ratings. Similarly, Johnson, Edwards and Dai (2014) report positive relationships between self-efficacy and task values.



**Figure 2:** Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) – Eccles and Wigfield (2002) – Simplified from Cook and Artino (2016)

## 2.5 Andragogy – Adult Learning Theory

Knowles (1980) developed the theory of andragogy, *“the art and science of helping adults learn”*, Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, (2015, p. 61), which conceptualises why and how mature learners learn. For the purpose of this research, mature or adult learners are defined as persons 23 years of age or older who delay registering on a third level programme after completing secondary school or who *“begin their education, leave, and then resume their education, often several times”*, Spanard, (1990, p. 312).

Unlike the practice of pedagogy where the focus is on the teacher, the practice of andragogy places the focus on the learner and the process of teaching rather than the curriculum. The andragogical model presented developed by Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) presents the six principles of motivation for learning that differentiate mature learners from children/ adolescent learners.

- 1) **The learner’s need to know** – Mature learners need to have a reason for learning something. From personal interest, to a change in technology or to solve a current problem in their lives, skills and knowledge that relate to adulthood need to be learned and understood regardless of occupation or lifestyle, (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2015)
- 2) **Self-concept of the learner** – Mature learners need to be responsible for their own education and be involved in the creation of it. They decide when and how to undertake the learning either formally in an educational environment or informally from published authors and credible sources.

- 3) **Prior Experience of the learner** – This principle recognises that all previous adult experiences, both positive and negative, provide the basis for learning activities.
- 4) **Readiness to Learn** – Mature learners are most interested in learning material that has immediate relevance to them. They decide that they have a need for increased competency, knowledge and skills in a particular subject area. Houle (1961) identified that learning orientated adults are continuously ready to learn, driven by an intrinsic motivational need for knowledge.
- 5) **Orientation to Learn** – Houle (1961) categorised the mature learner dispositions as either goal-orientated, activity orientated or learning orientated. Ryan and Deci (2017) concluded that a disposition to learning is necessary for mature learners to commence and complete an educational programme, which will result in competency in the subject matter, autonomy in their lives and a relatedness with others.
- 6) **Motivation to Learn** – Mature learners are motivated by a psychological need to learn. The need may be intrinsic, for the pleasure of learning or may be extrinsic, for improved career opportunities or higher remuneration. Often the actual motivation is a combination of both types of motivation such as a need to learn for learning's sake, but within a field of personal and professional interest, Ryan & Deci (2017).

## 2.6 Motivation to Engage in a Higher Education Degree Programme

Research studies into the motivational driving forces of mature learners to voluntarily decide to return to higher education began over 50 years ago in the USA with Houle's (1961) three-factor motivational typology of the mature learner - goal-orientated, activity-orientated and learning-orientated. Subsequently, Johnstone and Riviera (1965) concluded that the core motivational driver of higher education for mature learners was to improve one's occupational standing by learning a new occupation and making a living. Houle (1961) revealed similar findings, however he also purported that there were two key additional motivational drivers for adult learners: the desire to socialise with others and the desire to be intellectually challenged.

Subsequent researchers explored these findings in greater depth by taking into consideration the social, environmental, institutional and situational factors that shape the complex process of mature student decision-making. Various models emerged as a result, which proposed additional influencing variables. Cross (1981) suggested a Chain of Response Model, which considered five key variables in adults becoming registered learners, namely, 1) attitudes towards education 2) assessment of the ability to succeed 3) the cost of studies versus the benefit 4) timing of the decision and 5) availability

of information relating to the programme of study and the availability of support services. The model considered the institutional, dispositional and situational factors relative to the added value of registering on a degree programme as a mature learner. Similarly in the research of Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007), it was noted that life transitions and institutional barriers feature highly in an adults' decision to register. Smart and Pascarella (1987) added to these findings with three additional motivational variables: undergraduate experience, characteristics of the adults' employers, and career experiences.

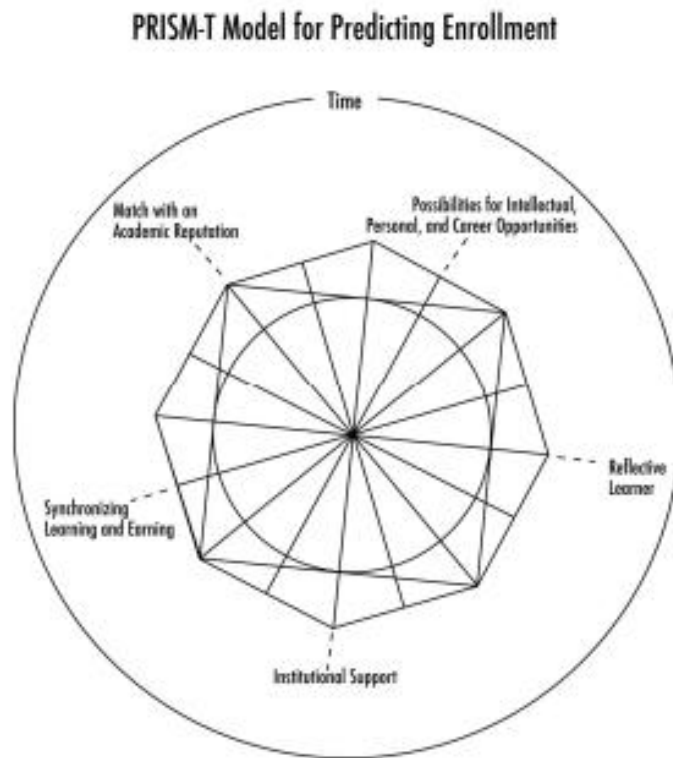
Kasworm's (2003) research focused on the adult learner as one who represents various statuses, namely the status of age, the status of maturity and developmental complexity and the status of responsible and often competing sets of adult roles in work, family, community and college. The research found that adults who were motivated to register on higher education programmes could be categorised into three distinct groups: 1) those that are going through an internal life change such as divorce, grown-up children, job or promotion loss; 2) those that are proactively life planning to create a difference future life in their adult world. 3) those that are responding to both life transitions and proactively planning for goals and life priorities through higher education.

In the UK, Osborne, Marks and Turner (2004) conducted a large-scale UK-wide research study of adult learners in the process of deciding whether to commit to a higher education degree programme. They categorised the applicants into six distinct groupings, not mutually exclusive, depending on their individual circumstances at the time of making the decision: 'Late Starters', 'Single Parents', 'Careerists', 'Delayed Traditional Students', 'Escapees' and 'Personal Growers'. Questionnaires, focus groups and interviews revealed the core advantages and disadvantages of becoming a mature student in higher education, which were common to all groupings: interest in the subject, enhanced career prospects, improved qualifications, the chance to change direction and a chance to take an opportunity that was not available earlier in life.

Jarvis', (2010, p.235) research into adult education and lifelong learning aligned with Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy whereby *"adults' self-concept is of being responsible for their own lives; adults bring greater quality and quantity to their new learning; adults are ready to learn what they need to know; their learning is life-centred; and adults have intrinsic motivations to learn."*

Stein, Wanstreet and Trinko (2011) suggested that the adult learner is a constant information seeker and gatherer who evaluates multiple variables including the impact on family, job circumstances, role expectations, perceived benefits and costs. They asserted that the decision to register and complete a degree programme of study is a complex cognitive, emotional and relational decision that is made over a period of time within a web of family, work, social, finances, gender and

programme delivery and support considerations. As a consequence of their research in this area, they expanded the findings of previous studies by developing a new perspective: the PRISM-T framework for predicting enrolment.



**Figure 3:** PRISM-T Model for Predicting Enrolment

Stein, Wanstreet and Trinko (2011) identified six variables that adults consider when registering on a higher education programme: time out of school, possibilities for intellectual, personal and career opportunities, institutional support; synchronising learning and earning; reflective learner; and match with an academic reputation.

*“The PRISM-T framework also suggests that the decision to enrol in a long-term commitment is a negotiated activity in which self-interests are balanced about various other interests, including the employer, family, friends and identity as a learner.”*

Stein, Wanstreet and Trinko, (2011, p.73)

A national survey in the USA on perceptions, attitudes and preferences of adult learners in higher education by Stevens (2014) found that regardless of whether the topic surrounds critical thinking, ethical awareness, or problem solving, the mature learner wants practical skills combined with theoretical concepts. Mature learners want to know that the material they learn in class is something they can incorporate the next day at work.

### **2.6.1 Demotivating factors when engaging in a higher education degree programme**

In endeavouring to understand the behaviours of mature learners in relation to engaging in higher education degree programmes, exploring the demotivating factors and barriers are equally as revealing as understanding the motivational factors. In contrast to the many motivating drivers towards personal improvement, Osborne, Marks and Turner (2004) also uncovered a series of shared demotivating factors – cost of study, the need to work, responsibilities of job, family and professional responsibilities, lack of childcare, lack of confidence and fear of long-term debt.

These findings compare with the results of the Schuller et al. (1999) study into the motivations of 556 part-time learners from four Scottish universities and the Callender et al. (2006a) study of undergraduate part-time learners who gave their reasons for study as overwhelmingly (82%) financial. They were defending a job under threat or a qualification was a way out of unemployment.

Murray, Smith and Nielson (2011) also found that the largest barrier to post-secondary education that existed, regardless of age, was the financial burden placed upon the learner, in addition to time spent away from their families.

In an investigation of mature learners' experience of higher education in relation to motivation, expectations and outcomes, Walters' (2000) formulated a framework consisting of three main concepts – *redundancy, recognition and regeneration – the three Rs*. Under the 'redundancy' category, the study found that existential questioning about the learner's role and skills in life provided a trigger for entering higher education, a reaction to a life event such as divorce, bereavement, redundancy or the youngest child leaving home.

Davies and Williams (2001) focused their research on trying to understand the motivations of mature students to study at higher education level and the translation of that motivation into action. The concepts of fragility and risk emerged as two central themes in their research. The sources of the concept of fragility stemmed from the complexity of the cost, the new identity as a learner in higher education and the confidence to access the programme and the available supports.

The concept of risk encapsulated five broad categories; the risk that the investment would not pay off in the future, the risk of failure, the risk of not being able to live or support their families due to the additional costs, the risk of sacrificing time away from family and the risk of not having support from the academic institution.

The concepts of fragility and risk can vary depending on gender, age and life-stage, however, according to Hardin (2008) all mature students face one universal challenge. Whatever their circumstances or motivational drivers, they all face a personal or career transition, which can occur as a result of a positive or negative life experience.

Bird and Morgan (2003) explored a range of issues and questions that confront mature learners contemplating enrolment in third level education, and why they persist. Six core themes were identified in their research including fears, motivation to succeed, support from home, academic preparedness, suitability of programme and identity change.

Hardin (2008) reviewed the literature from the position of the barriers that mature students face when transitioning into higher education. The institutional and situational barriers encompass the practical considerations such as the proximity to home, programme timetable, faculty office hours, childcare, admissions and academic advice, time management, role conflicts, finance and the quality of the content, whereas the psychological and educational barriers were considered less tangible and more difficult to overcome. In her research Hardin (2008) cites (Kerka, 1989) when summarising the types of psychological and educational barriers that mature learners face, namely; inadequate coping skills, lack of self-confidence, poor self-image, anxiety about schooling based on previous experiences, negative beliefs about outcomes and feeling academically ill-prepared.

## 2.7 Motivation to Sustain Engagement in a Higher Education Degree Programme

Securing a place in a higher education institution is a highly progressive step for adult learners however, sustaining the motivation to achieve academic success requires a distinct set of motivating factors.

When considering motivation in the context of a registered learner in higher education, where concentration, participation, attention, effort, perseverance and resilience are required, motivation is defined by Mc Millan and Forsyth, (1991, p.39) as *“purposeful engagement in classroom tasks and study, to master concepts or skills.”* They describe motivated learners as *“those that take learning seriously and try to get the maximum benefits rather than merely getting by or doing the minimum amount of work necessary.”*

Sogunro’s (2015) study on the motivating factors for adult learners in higher education brought to light eight factors that contribute to high performance and academic success. These factors include quality of instruction, quality of curriculum, relevance and pragmatism, interactive classrooms and effective management practices, progressive assessment and timely feedback, self-directedness, conducive learning environment and effective academic advising practices.

Shepherd and Mullins Nelson (2012) research into how mature learners successfully complete their studies in spite of the situational, institutional and dispositional barriers as described by Cross (1981), found that the situational barriers were the most evident in their lives. The three main themes that emerged as key factors in ensuring success for the mature learner were: 1) the importance of family support; 2) the ability to prioritise activities and tasks; and 3) the initial unforeseen benefit of attending third level education as an adult learner resulting in higher sense of purpose as a learner and higher results.

### 2.7.1 Influence of Lecturer

A dominant theme coming through from the literature is the influence of the lecturer or tutor. Motivation research conducted by Green and Kelso (2006) on 563 adult learners of Business, Education and Arts and Sciences in the USA found that the single-most influential factor affecting motivation was *“Personal pride in my efforts and success”* followed closely by *“Intellectual gain or knowledge”* and *“Increased marketability and employability”*. The study also found that while personal pride in one’s success was a powerful source of motivation, the influence of the lecturer plays a critical role. With so many competing demands on their time, the *“fragile and tenuous motivation of mature learners”*, Green and Kelso, (2006, p.71) means that they have high

expectations of their lecturers, they expect them to be competent, to be working in the field they are teaching, to care about their learners and to manage the lecture effectively. In order to help the learner to sustain their motivation, it is the role of the lecturer therefore to have a clear personal and andragogical understanding of how to stimulate the intrinsic desire to learn in his or her learners. The research found that the relationship dynamic that is built between lecturer and learner has a fundamental impact on learner motivation. Similarly, Tennant and Pogson, (1995, p.197) concluded the importance of the lecturer being aware that *“the nature, timing and processes of adult learning development will vary according to the experiences and opportunities of individuals and the circumstances in their lives.”*

Bamber and Tett’s (2000) research into the learning experiences of *“non-traditional”* or mature learners pointed out that for many learners higher education is an alien environment. Mature learners have to negotiate a series of *“transformations”* regarding, *“their entitlement to participate in higher education, their disposition towards the course; their approach to theory-practice; and their attitude to becoming a professional”*, Bamber and Tett, (2000, p.57). The role of the lecturer is to support the learner in navigating these uncomfortable changes and sustain their motivation to continue. Mature learners who bring their previous work experience to their academic studies have the added challenge of learning how to embed their experience in academic theory. Their research in this area found that lecturers *“face a delicate, dual challenge – to develop students’ self-confidence by accepting and valuing their experience and to develop students’ understanding by encouraging them to venture beyond the safety of their own experience.”*

Bamber and Tett (2000) concluded that appropriate and sufficient lecturer support, through respect, concern and care for individuals, can help to sustain motivation and can enable the mature learner to steer through the sense of confusion and fragmentation generated by the higher education experience leading to significant learning and change.

### **2.7.2 Orientation to Learning**

*“Individuals are constantly in the process of ‘becoming’. Put simply, people are making their worlds at the same time as their worlds are making them”*, Watson, (2001, p.223)

To gain insights into the complexities of learner motivation and how it influences learning behaviour, Webber (2004) devised a social cognitive framework entitled - *Orientations to Learning* – which analysed the processes by which orientations to learning develop and the importance of the learning intentions, the purpose of the higher education qualification at a particular time in the individual’s life. His theory was based on Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive model in which the individual’s

cognition and other personal factors, his or her behaviour and the environmental factors act reciprocally as determinants of each other. Five orientations to learning emerged from the research including; 1) the development of confidence and self-esteem, 2) the development of personal competence, 3) the development of managerial performance, 4) orientation towards organisational politics and power and 5) the development of intellectual capability and endeavour. Webber (2004) found that the learner's voice has a key part to play in academic success. Awareness of the strength and influence of the learner's own purposes or orientations for learning provide a key insight for both the institution and the learner in understanding the complexities of learner motivations and making the most of learning opportunities.

Kember, Hong and Ho (2008) expanded on motivational learning orientations and discovered six continua which shift, as the learner progresses through their studies according to their perception of the teaching and learning environment and the learner's personal goals. The six continua were: compliance with exams and assignments, individual goal setting, the sense of belonging, interest in the modules, career motivation and university lifestyle. As the positions shift for the learner as they progress through the degree, motivation, therefore, needs to be considered as a multifaceted phenomenon that is dynamic and can be influenced by curriculum design and the nature of the teaching and learning environment, Kember, Hong and Ho, (2008, p.327).

### **2.7.3 Demotivating Factors in Sustaining Motivation**

Cross', (1981, p.98) research into the "*encore career*", Shepherd and Nelson, (2012, p.1) of mature learners found that "*there is enough consistency in the findings to give a generalised picture of what people say deters them from participating in adult learning activities.*" She categorised them into *situational, institutional and dispositional barriers*.

*Situational barriers* describe the deterrent circumstances of the individual that impact learning and motivation. They include lack of time, lack of money, home responsibilities, lack of childcare and lack of transport. *Institutional barriers* to motivation are how the education provider designs the programme and how it impacts the learner, namely; inconvenient schedules, inconvenient locations, fees, inappropriate modules. *Dispositional barriers* are linked to the learner's self-perception, some mature learners feel they are too old or lack confidence in their ability to learn.

A follow-up study by Shepherd and Nelson (2012) aimed to determine if Cross' (1981) barriers to adult learning were still relevant and to uncover a better understanding of how adults successfully complete their studies in spite of the barriers. Situational issues such as multiple off-campus responsibilities and family commitments mean that mature learners do not have the time to socially

integrate on campus with fellow learners. The lack of social integration has been demonstrated to have a negative effect on academic persistence, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005). Similarly, Powell (1999) found that the primary reason mature learners fail to persist or sustain motivation is as a result of their inability to balance life activities and not due to their academic abilities. Kasworm's (2003) findings point to the fact that situationally mature learners are unable to separate from their other lives, instead they must continue with their complex lives with the added challenging role of being a learner again.

With the advent of many new innovations and the ubiquitous nature of educational technology, Shepherd and Nelson (2012) found that the institutional barriers have lessened with online delivery of lectures, live-streaming, recordings, online learning platforms and libraries. With regard to dispositional barriers, the study found that mature learners continue to struggle academically and psychologically if they do not feel supported by their lecturers, Polson (2003). The ability to sustain motivation, persist through intense periods and stay focused is also highly contingent on the quality of the informal relationships that mature learners build with their peers, Roberts and Plakhotnik, (2009).

## 2.8 Conclusion

Against a post-COVID backdrop of remote work, soaring e-commerce and digital interactions and accelerated automation and AI, McKinsey Global Institute (2021) stresses that *“COVID-19 has accelerated the adoption of automation and digital technologies, which will affect labour demand and the mix of occupations over the next decade.”* Therefore in recent years, many mature learners may have found themselves in an extrinsically-driven position where they have had to find the motivation to up-skill and secure an honours degree qualification on a part-time basis.

However, a review of the literature on the motivation of mature learners in higher education has revealed that the motivational factors to start and sustain a long-term commitment to study runs deeper than just the practical need of improving the learners’ current employment circumstances. It is a complex, negotiated decision where self-interests have to be balanced with employers, family members, friends, the individual’s own identity as a learner and all the psychological, physical and financial demands that a higher education programme of study can bring.

Analysing the educational motivations and fears of mature learners provides the opportunity for higher education providers to incorporate the perspective of the mature learner and develop a more supportive and inclusive learning culture.

Lecturers and support services play a fundamental role in encouraging mature learners to start and sustain a higher degree programme of study. Understanding the various types of extrinsic motivation and how they apply to each learner is an important issue for higher education institutions to consider as intrinsic motivation is more challenging for mature learners to sustain with many competing demands on their time. Introducing more active and engaging forms of extrinsic motivation in the lecture room is a key strategy for successful teaching, Ryan and Deci (2000).

Equally, it is worth noting that although intrinsic motivation relieves the instructor of the task of constant supervision and reinforcement and reiterates motivation theorists’ contention that if extrinsic motivation is provided for a behaviour that was initially already intrinsically motivating, the tendency is high to kill the intrinsic motivation and thereby leave the learner dependent on the extrinsic motivator, Svinicki (2004)

McMillan and Forsyth, (1991, p.40), proposed five assumptions on how motivation theories can apply to higher education teaching: *“First, with appropriate instructional behaviours and course structures, learners can be motivated to greater involvement and higher achievement. Second, motivation concerns three fundamental questions: What initiates students’ arousal or activity? What*

*causes a student to move toward a goal? What causes a student to persist in striving toward a goal? Third, motivational theories tend to emphasize factors within individuals or factors in the environment. Fourth, the assumption that no one motivational theory can be applied to every situation. Fifth, most theories of classroom motivation focus on learning needs or cognition of students.”*

The objective of this research is to examine the motivational factors that influenced the mature learners' decision to apply for their respective part-time degree course, to analyse the motivational factors that engaged and sustained the mature learner in order to complete their studies and finally to consider additional educational initiatives and innovations that Faculty members can implement in order to enhance and support the learning experience for mature learners.

## CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This research is a sequential explanatory, mixed methods, case study. This chapter examines the research philosophy which underpins the design, data collection and analysis techniques used to address the research questions. This chapter also highlights the dependability and validity of the research in addition to the ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

According to Crotty (1998), in order to guide the research questions, it is essential in educational research to establish what methodologies and methods will be used and to justify why they were chosen. Hammersley (2012) distinguishes between four methodological philosophies; positivist/ post-positivist, interpretivist/ hermeneutic, critical and constructionist. The methodological assumptions, which guided this research, were in accordance with the positivist/ post-positivist philosophy, closely associated with the quantitative approach; and the interpretivist philosophy, closely associated with the qualitative approach. The rationale for selecting these assumptions will be examined in greater detail in section 3.2 of this chapter.

In order to combine the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods whilst also overcoming the limitations of each research method, Creswell and Creswell (2017), a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design was adopted for this study. It was a combination of a literature review, quantitative questionnaire results and qualitative interviews, allowing for triangulation of data sources and consequently more robust data analysis and a deeper understanding of results, Creswell (2008).

### 3.2 Research Philosophy

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the research questions posed, a mixed methods case study approach was considered appropriate for this research. The mixed methods approach taken was Pragmatism as it supports the use of more than one method within the same inquiry allowing the researcher to delve into a dataset to understand its meaning and to use a second method to verify the findings, (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). As noted by Madey (1982), quantitative research is typically motivated by the researcher's concerns, whereas qualitative research is often driven by a desire to capture the participant's voice, hence pragmatic researchers are able to merge these two emphases within a single investigation.

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative data helps to explain or clarify the quantitative results by providing individual perspectives on the general data trends. As noted by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie

(2004), both quantitative and qualitative research techniques are needed to gain a more complete understanding of phenomena. With regard to the selection of a case study methodology approach, Yin (1989) defined a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence. According to Patton (1987), the use of a case study to probe an area of interest in depth is particularly appropriate, motivation in mature students in part-time higher education at Griffith College Cork, in this case. Through case study methods, the researcher is able to go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioural conditions through the participant’s perspective, examining data at the micro level, Zainal (2017).

Hence, this investigation was conducted using a two-phase sequential explanatory mixed methods design, Ivankova, Creswell and Stick (2006). This design consists of two distinct phases: quantitative followed by qualitative. Firstly, the researcher collects and analyses the quantitative data, subsequently, in the second phase, the researcher collects and analyses the qualitative data which helps to explain, or elaborate on, the quantitative results obtained in the first phase, Creswell et al. (2003), discussed further in the next two sections. The rationale for this approach is that the qualitative data and analysis refine and explain the numeric results by exploring participants’ views in more depth, Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998).



**Figure 4:** Sequential Mixed Methods Design, Creswell and Plano Clark (2007).

### 3.2.1 Positivism - Quantitative Survey Method

The positivist/ post-positivist assumptions are based on the methodological approach that science is the only reliable source of knowledge and evidence must be in some sense empirically given by means of direct observation or questionnaire, Hammersly (2012). Collis and Hussey (2014) claim that positivists/ post-positivists endeavour to maintain an objective stance as they suggest that only phenomena which are observable and measurable can be deemed as valid knowledge. Rovai et al., (2014, p.4) contend that there is “*an objective reality independent of any observations*” and that by subdividing this reality into smaller, manageable pieces, for the purposes of study, that this reality can be understood.

### 3.2.2 Interpretivism - Qualitative Interview Method

The interpretivist assumptions are based on the methodological approach that in order to understand why people do what they do, the researcher *“must grasp how those involved interpret and make sense of their world and understand the distinctive nature of their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes”*, Hammersley, (2012, p.8). Mason, (2002, p.27) defines interpretivism as *“data collected in order to develop explanations, arguments and generalisations based on people’s knowledge, views, understanding and experiences of the social reality being explored.”* Swain et al. (2007) posit that the relationship between the motivations, engagement and outcomes of mature student learning can only be fully understood in the context of life course. The prevailing circumstances in which a learner lives has an impact on educational participation and motivation.

West’s, (1996, p.1) biographical analysis on adults, motivation and higher education claimed that *“while quantitative surveys methods can ask large and diverse samples of people why they participate in education, they are unable to explore, in all their complexity, the reasons and meanings people themselves give for and to their actions and how these might change over time.”* His research found that in quantitative research, the potential insights of the learners are often ignored and those who lack confidence in themselves, their understandings can be silenced. *“People may repress or exclude aspects of lived experience, because this is either threatening or considered inconsequential and of little interest to others”*, West, (1996, p.10).

### 3.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- 1) To examine the motivational factors that influenced the mature learners’ decision to register for their respective part-time degree courses;
- 2) To analyse the motivational factors that engaged and sustained the mature learner allowing them to complete their studies;
- 3) Drawing on the primary research findings and the literature review, to consider additional educational initiatives and innovations that Faculty members can implement in order to enhance and support the learning experience for mature learners.

### 3.4 Research Design

The research design stages were as follows:

- A review of the literature was conducted in order to investigate the motivating and demotivating factors that part-time mature learners must face when they consider registering for an honours degree and how they sustain their motivation until the end of the programme.
- The literature underpinning the core themes of the research was mapped to two complementary core motivation theories, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) – Intrinsic and Extrinsic, Ryan and Deci (2000) and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) – Attainment, Intrinsic, Utility and Cost, Eccles and Wigfield (2002).
- From the literature review and associated mapping to motivation theories, the researcher was able to build the core themes into the quantitative survey questions and qualitative interview questions.
- The accessible population of this research was graduates of the part-time BA (Hons) in Business Studies, the BA (Hons) in Accounting and Finance and the LLB (Hons) in Law at Griffith College Cork from 2014 to 2020. When they commenced their studies, the participants were all ‘mature learners’, over 23 years of age and were all either self-funded or sponsored by their employers to complete their programme of study. The participants all voluntarily chose to study a three-year degree programme on a part-time basis.
- 104 graduates were emailed to request their voluntary participation in the survey. 66 graduates responded positively to the request and 58 participants followed through to complete the questionnaire.
- Of the 58 graduates that confirmed they had completed the questionnaire, 6 were asked if they would be willing to participate in the qualitative research stage of the study.
- Once the participants responded and confirmed their consent to take part in the study, one-to-one interviews with participants were scheduled at a convenient time and location. The interviews took place online to collect qualitative data in response to the research questions. Each interview was transcribed and through a process of open, axial and selective thematic coding, the data was synthesised into categories and themes, in order to construct the narrative and provide the research findings.
- Through an analysis of the survey and interview findings, the researcher identified additional educational initiatives and innovations, aligned to student motivation to be

considered for implementation in order to enhance and support the learning experience for mature learners.

- The data generated as part of this research study may lead to further studies looking in more detail at ways to improve the learning experience for current and future learners in Griffith College.

### **3.5 Data Collection Methods**

The methods used in this research included a quantitative online survey and semi-structured interviews. A quantitative survey allowed the researcher to “*put a numeric description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population*”, Fowler, (2013, p.13). It also provided a clear indication of data that required further analysis in the semi-structured interview stage. Themes and perspectives gathered during the questionnaire survey phase were used in the final design of the interview questions.

#### **3.5.1 Pilot Study**

A pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted to examine the readability and functionality of the instrument. Eight participants who had recently completed higher education part-time undergraduate and postgraduate studies in other universities in Ireland were sent a modified version of the questionnaire. Pilot participants were asked to identify unclear statements or points of confusion. One of the participants noted that the questionnaire lacked a statement which reflected the expectation on the part of the employer that the employee would be expected to upskill as part of the company’s CPD policy. In order to test Self-Determination intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theory, this statement was added to the first section of the questionnaire – “*My employer wanted me to upskill*”. Additional readability feedback from the participants was considered and incorporated in the final questionnaire design before being released by email to the sample group.

#### **3.5.2 The Sample Group**

The sample group was comprised of 104 recent part-time mature graduates of the BA (Hons) in Business Studies, BA (Hons) in Accounting and Finance and LLB (Hons) in Law. Of the 104 emails distributed asking the graduates if they would like to voluntarily participate in the survey, 2 bounce-backs were received as a result of out-of-date or incorrect email addresses being used. 66 graduates responded positively to the request and were subsequently sent guidance and instruction details

about the research and an embedded link to anonymously complete the questionnaire. This provided the researcher with a 63% commitment rate from the sample group of graduates. Of the 63% that committed to completing the questionnaire, 58 participants followed through on the commitment, giving the researcher a 55% response rate to bring forward to the data analysis stage.

### **3.5.3 Quantitative Survey Method**

An instrument was developed for the purpose of collecting data for the research. The questionnaire was designed in Google Forms and comprised of two separate sections (See Appendix 3). Part one of the questionnaire posed twenty-four questions related to the first research question – *What were the principal motivations and drivers that led the learners to register for their respective part-time programmes?*

Part two of the questionnaire posed twenty questions related to the second research question – *What were the factors that engaged the learners and sustained their motivation over three years to complete the programme?*

The instrument utilised a 5-point Likert scale as follows; *strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree.*

The advantage of this method for the researcher was that it *“measured the responses of a number of participants to a limited set of questions, thereby facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data”*, Yilmaz, (2013, p.3).

With one question type, the 5-point Likert scale, the questionnaire was designed to be completed within 7 - 10 minutes. As it was an online questionnaire, the participants were able to complete it at their convenience and as the email addresses were not required in the Google Forms settings, the participants' identity and anonymity were protected throughout the research process.

### **3.5.4 Qualitative Method - Semi-structured interviews**

Six participants of the questionnaire who offered to provide additional input to the research were invited to take part in a semi-structured interview. Once each participant had read and signed the consent sheet, the interviews took place online using Zoom meetings software. The interviews were recorded and had live transcript enabled in order to transcribe the content of the interview. The duration of each interview ranged from thirty to forty minutes. The participants were advised that the content of the interview would be anonymous and they would be identified as Graduate 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Participants were assured that all Zoom recordings used for the purpose of the research

would be safely stored on the researcher's laptop and would be deleted following grading by the Examining Board of Griffith College or within 24 months at the latest, whichever is the sooner. They were also advised of the research process after the interview took place. The interview live transcript would be cross-checked against the audio recording and then analysed through a process of open and axial coding and synthesised into categories and themes in order to construct the narrative and provide the research findings. As it was a semi-structured interview, the participants were also guided on the possible feeling of discomfort when answering questions relating to personal motivations for registering for a higher education degree programme and assured that there would be no way of identifying their responses in this research process. The interviews were designed to gather more in-depth data that captured the core motivating factors in the decision to engage with and sustain their studies to completion. The semi-structured interview questions were derived from a social constructivist approach, resting on the assumption that participants make meaning of the events they describe from a subjectivist perspective, Creswell (2009).

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

According to Creswell (2009), data analysis involves preparing data for analysis and subsequently analysing and interpreting the data using appropriate techniques. For this study, data analysis was conducted on all three sources of data –the literature review, the quantitative questionnaires and the qualitative interviews.

#### **3.6.1 Data Analysis of Literature Review**

Using the literature underpinning the core themes from the research, the researcher mapped the literature and prominent themes to the two core motivation theories, Self- Determination Theory (SDT) – Intrinsic and Extrinsic, Ryan and Deci (2000) and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) – Attainment, Intrinsic, Utility and Cost, Eccles and Wigfield (2002). (See Appendix 4).

#### **3.6.2 Data Analysis of Quantitative Questionnaires**

Quantitative questionnaires designed using Google Forms allowed the researcher to conduct the data analysis and graphical presentation of the results online. Google Forms is a cloud-based data management tool provided by Google Inc. used for creating web-based questionnaires. Once the graduates completed the questionnaire online, the data was automatically recorded in a Google spreadsheet in a format that was readily designed for analysis and graphical representation of data with descriptive percentage statistics. (See Appendix 5) The final step in the quantitative data

analysis was to compare and contrast the most notable findings in the results with the themes that emerged in the literature review and qualitative analysis.

### **3.6.3 Data Analysis of Qualitative Interviews and Questionnaires**

Six graduate interviews were conducted using Zoom meeting software and lasted thirty to forty minutes in duration. Each transcript generated by Zoom was then edited to align with the audio file. Each interview transcript took on average four to five hours to edit and generated a large volume of valuable data ready for thematic coding and analysis.

According to Williams and Moser (2019), coding in qualitative research is comprised of processes that enable collected data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted, providing an organized platform for the construction of meaning. In this study, the coding process involved a three-step coding strategy; open, axial, and selective coding. This strategy enabled *“a cyclical and evolving data loop in which the researcher interacts, is constantly comparing data and applying data reduction, and consolidation techniques”*, Williams and Moser, (2019, p.3). Nine themes emerged as major findings for the first research question – motivating factors to register on a part-time higher education degree programme. Seven themes emerged as major findings for the second research question – motivating factors to sustain and complete a part-time higher education degree programme.

### **3.7 Dependability and Reliability in Mixed Methods Research**

Nunan, (1999, p.14) defined reliability as, *“the consistency, dependability and replicability of the results obtained from a piece of research.”* The main instruments used in this mixed methods research consisted of a questionnaire containing Likert scale questions and open-ended questions plus semi-structured interviews with six participants. The dependability of the data was supported by the fact that the questionnaire statements and interview questions were derived from the education motivation literature review. The researcher conducted a pilot study of the questionnaire in order to test and reduce any ambiguity or unclearness in the wording of the questions. The inclusion of two open-ended questions in the questionnaire was to incorporate *“questions which will more accurately reflect what the respondent wants to say”*, Nunan, (1999, p.143) and therefore augment the reliability.

According to Flick, (2006, p.160) the purpose of interviews *“is to reveal existing knowledge in a way that can be expressed in the form of answers and so become accessible to interpretation.”* A semi-structured interview approach was selected for this study as the researcher’s goal was *“to obtain a*

*special kind of information and to investigate what is going on in the respondent's mind*", Merriam, (1998, p.71). As the study involved using Zoom video software, the participants and the researcher were able to have a brief conversation explaining the purpose and process of the interview before the recording commenced. This allowed the participants to feel clearer about the process, more relaxed and ready to open up during the recorded interview. Having a video recording of each interview allowed the researcher to strengthen the *"consistency and dependability"*, Lincoln and Guba, (1985, p.288) of the research by cross-checking the video recording against the interview transcripts as part of an audit trail.

### **3.7.1 Validity**

*"Reality is holistic, multidimensional and ever-changing"*, Merriam, (1998, p.202), therefore, the responsibility lies with the researcher and the research participants to ensure validity and trustworthiness are built into all stages of the research process. In this study a triangulation strategy was employed in order to improve the validity and dependability of the research and the evaluation of the findings. Triangulation is defined to be *"a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study"*, Creswell and Miller, (2000, p.126). Qualitative and quantitative approaches were utilised in this study supporting Patton's, (2002, p.247) findings that *"triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods."*

As the participants were known to the researcher throughout their studies at Griffith College Cork, the researcher was highly aware of researcher bias. Throughout the research process, the researcher aimed to be as clear and non-judgemental as possible, adhering to the ethical rules, performing the evaluation as precisely as possible and conveying the findings honestly.

Incorporating a research objective of finding additional educational initiatives and innovations that Faculty members could implement in their teaching, provided the researcher with the opportunity to aim for a utility criterion of validity as part of the research process also. Lynch, (1996, p.63) asserts that *"Utility refers to the degree of usefulness the evaluation findings have for administrators, managers and other stakeholders."*

### **3.8 Ethical Issues**

Hammersley and Traianou (2012) synthesise the five main ethical concerns relevant to social research as: 1) Minimising Harm, 2) Respecting Autonomy, 3) Protecting Privacy, 4) Offering Reciprocity, 5) Treating People Equitably. Reflecting on these ethical concerns in this research, the researcher addressed them as follows:

#### **1) Minimising Harm:**

Permission from the Griffith College Ethics Committee was secured in advance of commencing the research process. As the first point of contact for the participants when they commenced their studies at Griffith College Cork, the researcher and the participants had an established relationship over three years, therefore the potential for harm or bias existed in the semi-structured qualitative interview research process. The researcher ensured they had the minimum amount of influence on the participants during the interview process. The participants were guided on the possible feeling of discomfort when answering questions relating to personal motivations for registering on a higher education part-time degree programme. The participants were also advised that they were free to withdraw from the research at any point without having to give a reason.

#### **2) Respecting Autonomy - Participant Consent**

It was imperative as part of the research process for the researcher to procure the informed verbal and written consent of each participant in advance of the research process. In advance of commencing the recording of audio and visual content on Zoom, the interview process was explained to each participant. Participants were offered the opportunity to withdraw their consent at any stage during the research.

#### **3) Protecting Privacy – Storing of Participant Data**

All graduate data collected during the questionnaires was anonymised including qualitative responses in the final question of each section of the questionnaire. The researcher provided a guarantee to all participants that their data would be anonymised, accessible only by the researcher and securely stored for the duration of the research. The data was stored in an encrypted file on a laptop and the researcher committed to erase the file within 24 months after the research process.

#### **4) Offering Reciprocity**

In exchange for allowing the researcher access to personal data and for giving up their time, the researcher offered to share the findings of the research with the participants once the dissertation was graded and available to circulate.

#### **5) Treating People Equitably**

The researcher ensured that each participant was communicated with in a timely manner and each interview was scheduled at a time that was convenient for them. The core twelve questions were posed to each participant with the exception of an occasional deviating question to suit the context of the interview.

### **3.9 Limitations of this Study**

There were a number of limitations to this research which may have influenced the findings and conclusions of the primary research. Firstly, with a sample size of fifty-eight questionnaires and six participant graduates for interview, the researcher would have preferred to have secured a greater number of questionnaire responses and interviewed a more diverse group of graduates. This would have enabled a more statistically significant quantitative and qualitative analysis and offer a wider perspective from mature learners on how Griffith College could enhance and support the learning experience particularly in relation to sustaining motivation through educational initiatives and innovations.

The first limitation is unequivocally linked to the second limitation of time scarcity. In order to meet an academic timeline of supervision and grading, the research process had to be conducted and completed within a precise timeframe and word count. This also meant the analysis needed to focus only on the main themes that emerged in the primary data. For future research, there are themes and categories that are worthy of further study.

Finally, although the topic of motivation of part-time mature learners in higher education is widely researched, the researcher chose a sample group that is limited to mature learners in a privately-owned third level institution in Ireland. The researcher was cognisant that a sample group from a large university setting may result in a more divergent set of findings and conclusions. For future research, a comparative study of motivation between part-time mature learners in private third level colleges versus public universities could be explored.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter detailed and analysed the research methodology implemented for this research study. Having reviewed various philosophies in educational research methodologies, and in order to gain a deeper understanding of the research questions posed, a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design was considered appropriate for this research – a combination of a literature review, quantitative questionnaires (positivist/ post-positivist philosophy) and qualitative interviews (interpretivist). All core components of the research methodology were explained, namely, the research philosophy, objectives, design, data collection methods and data analysis. Considerations relating to ethics, limitations of the study, dependability and validity were also detailed.

## CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS, DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings generated from the collection and analysis of primary data which was gathered in accordance with the research methodology outlined in chapter three.

The chapter discusses the relevance of these findings in the context of the original research objectives:

1. To examine the motivational factors that influenced the mature learners' decision to register for their respective part-time degree courses;
2. To analyse the motivational factors that engaged and sustained the mature learner allowing them to complete their studies;
3. To consider additional educational initiatives and innovations that Faculty members can implement in order to enhance and support the learning experience for mature learners.

Themes that emerged in the primary data collection were compared and contrasted against arguments developed in the literature review. In order to provide a comprehensive and fluid discussion of the findings and their implications on the research objectives, the findings and the discussion points were presented simultaneously.

To achieve this, the chapter is divided into three parts to align with the three research objectives. The first part focuses on the dominant themes which emerged from the research in relation to the motivational drivers to start a part-time honours degree programme. The second part focuses on the dominant themes in relation to how the graduates sustained their motivation throughout their studies. The final part focuses on reflections and suggestions from the graduates on how Griffith College could improve the part-time mature learner experience by implementing additional educational initiatives.

Dominant themes from the questionnaire were derived based on the combined percentage scores of 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' which were higher than 50%. Questionnaire statements of a similar theme were combined in the research analysis. (See Appendix 6)

## **4.2 Research Analysis Population**

From 102 invitations to participate in the study, 58 completed a 44-question online survey on the motivational factors that drove their decision to register and complete an honours degree on a part-time basis over three years. 6 of the graduates also participated in an in-depth qualitative interview on the research topic. This cohort of graduates constitutes the primary and sole dataset on which this research analysis is based.

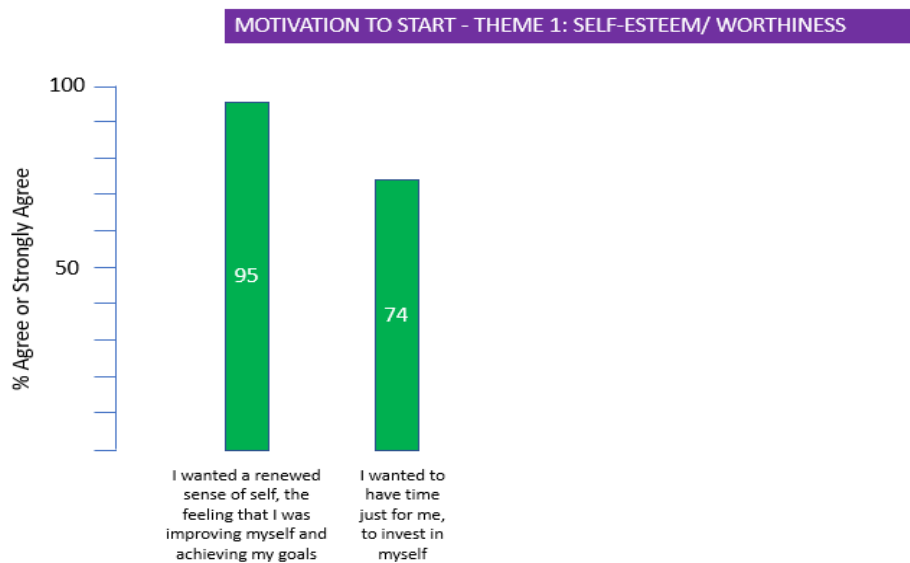
## **4.3 Research Question 1: Motivation to Start a Part-time Honours Degree Programme Findings, Data Analysis and Discussion**

Five dominant themes emerged from the qualitative and quantitative analysis on the motivating factors for graduates to register on a three year, part-time, honours degree programme namely;

- 1) Self-Esteem/ Worthiness
- 2) Timing
- 3) Career/ Change
- 4) Admissions Process and Cost
- 5) Love of Learning

### 4.3.1 Theme 1 – Self-Esteem/ Worthiness

Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination motivation theory focused on the innate human psychological need for competence, autonomy and relatedness. 95% of the participants in this research study agreed or strongly agreed that their motivation to embark on a part-time higher education degree was to gain a renewed sense of self, the feeling that they were improving themselves and achieving their goals.



**Figure 5:** Motivation to Start – Theme 1: Self-Esteem/ Worthiness.

The theme of self-esteem and worthiness emerged in the qualitative responses of five of the interview participants.

Graduate 2: *I didn't have a degree and I felt inadequate. I didn't feel I was good enough. I wanted to prove to myself I was wrong.*

Graduate 3: *I used to think that College was for other people or that I wouldn't be capable. I felt there was more in me and that I could do better than I was doing.*

Graduate 4: *Defending myself in the divorce gave me the confidence that perhaps I could do it.*

Graduate 5: *I had begun to realise that I had been ignoring myself. I used to put my family first and make sure they were happy. I lost track of myself a bit.*

Graduate 6: *It was something I simply wanted to do for myself.*

These findings also align with the second motivation theory in this study, Expectancy Value Theory (EVT) developed by Eccles and Wigfield (2002), more specifically *Attainment Value – finding a task to*

be important to confirming salient aspects of one's self-schema – mature learners who commit to a programme of study in addition to all their other life commitments have an expectation of success. However, there is a tenuous line between the mature learner's expectation of success and Kerka's (1989) findings on the psychological and educational barriers that mature learners may experience such as inadequate coping skills, lack of self-confidence, poor self-image and feeling academically ill-prepared.

### 4.3.2 Theme 2 – Life Stage/ Timing

Kasworm's (2003) research into motivation in adult learners found that they could be categorised into three distinct groups:

- 1) Those that are going through an internal life change such as divorce, grown-up children, job or promotion loss;
- 2) Those that are proactively life planning to create a different future life in their adult world.
- 3) Those that are responding to both life transitions and proactively planning for goals and life priorities through higher education.

90% of the participants in this research study agreed or strongly agreed that their motivation to register on a part-time higher education degree was because the timing was right and they were ready to learn.

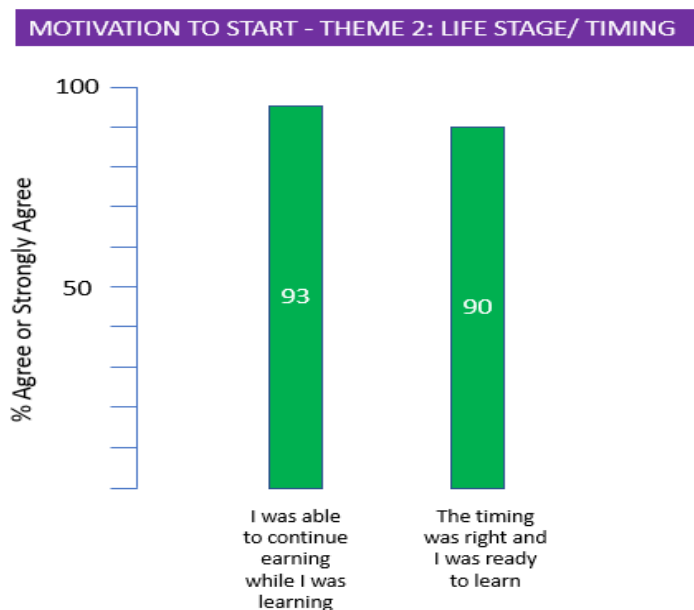


Figure 6: Motivation to Start – Theme 2: Life Stage/ Timing

The theme of timing emerged in the responses of all six participants in the interviews:

Graduate 1: *I had considered registering for quite some time, so I knew I would have to sacrifice a lot of personal time.*

Graduate 2: *Not having a degree gnawed and niggled at me for years.*

Graduate 3: *I became a Dad at 19 so I didn't get the chance to go to College in my twenties. It was now or never.*

Graduate 4: *I had my first child very young at 23. My ex-husband and I got divorced.*

Graduate 5: *I had been very sick. I felt it was time to put some of the skeletons from my past to rest.*

Graduate 6: *I thought about it for two years before making the decision. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity for me and I had to do it.*

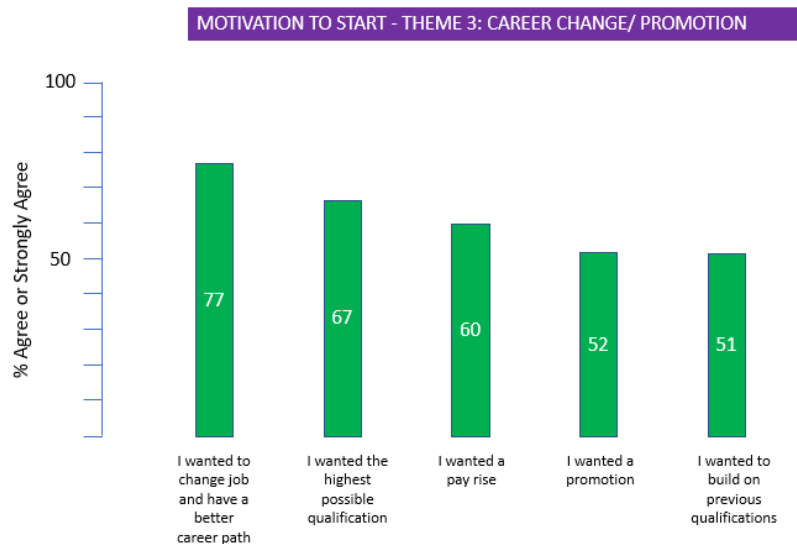
Stein, Wanstreet and Trinko (2011) asserted that the decision for mature learners to register and complete a degree programme of study is a complex cognitive, emotional and relational decision that is made over a period of time within a web of family, work, social, finances, gender and programme delivery and support considerations

93% of the participants in this study agreed or strongly agreed that their motivation to register on a part-time higher education degree was because they were able to continue earning while they were learning.

These findings are consistent with Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy, most notably the principle of their 'readiness to learn' and the adults' self-concept of being responsible for their own lives.

### 4.3.3 Theme 3 – Career Change/ Promotion

Five questionnaire statements relating to the motivational factor for career change or the desire for a promotion had combined 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' scores higher than 50%.



**Figure 7:** Motivation to Start – Theme 3: Career Change/ Promotion

The theme of Career Change /Promotion emerged in the responses of all six participants in the qualitative interviews:

- Graduate 1: *I needed a change professionally. It was mainly for me to maybe go down a slightly different angle professionally.*
- Graduate 2: *I was ready for change. I was always meeting people with qualifications and couldn't help feeling inadequate. A more senior role became available at work.*
- Graduate 3: *I didn't have the academic qualifications to back up the experience. I felt I needed the qualification in order to take a bigger step into another company.*
- Graduate 4: *I had my children very young and thought that the Certificate in Mediation would be a useful course to do. (Note: this graduate completed the LLB (Hons) in Law degree).*
- Graduate 5: *I had studied nursery nursing but I hated it. My heart wasn't in it.*
- Graduate 6: *Where I was working was pandemonium with understaffing. I had to get out of there. I hadn't previously gone to College. I had nothing to fall back on. I had nothing to attract future employers.*

Both the qualitative and quantitative findings of this study correlated with Ryan and Deci's, (2000, p.55) definition of extrinsic motivation which refers to "doing something because it leads to a separable outcome" – for the graduates of this study the motivational goal was a pay rise, a promotion, a new job or a better career with a higher qualification. The findings are consistent with Osbourne, Marks and Turner's (2004) study on adult learners deciding on whether to commit to a higher education degree programme and found that enhanced career prospects, improved qualifications and the chance to change direction were common in all groupings.

#### 4.3.4 Theme 4 – Admissions Process

In researching the social, environmental, institutional and situational factors that shape the complex process of mature student decision-making, Cross' (1981) Chain of Response Model revealed five key variables in adults becoming registered learners: 1) attitude towards education 2) assessment of the ability to succeed 3) the cost versus the benefit 4) the timing of the decision 5) availability of information relating to the programme of study and the availability of support services.

Similar findings emerged to correlate with factor three and factor five of Cross' research. In this study 95% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that their motivation to register on a part-time higher education degree was because the admissions process of becoming a registered learner was easy.

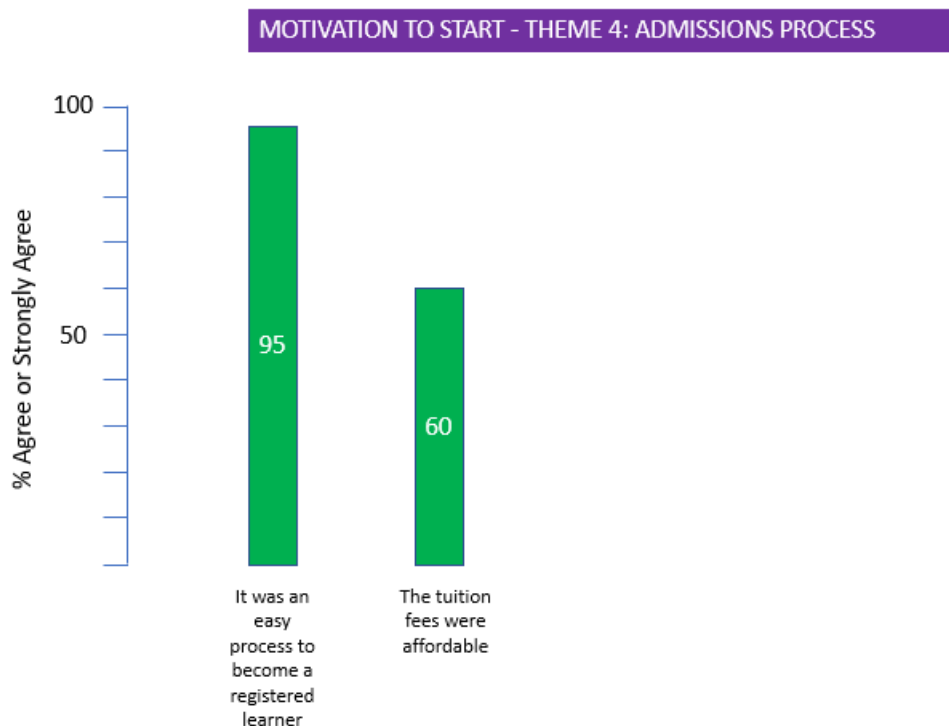


Figure 8: Motivation to Start – Theme 4: Admissions Process

60% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that their motivation to register on a part-time higher education degree was because tuition fees were affordable for them at that time in their lives.

Three of the graduates provided insight into the theme of the admissions process:

Graduate 2: *The Programme Director for my course put me at ease straight away at the Open Evening. She gave me the confidence to go for it, to go ahead.*

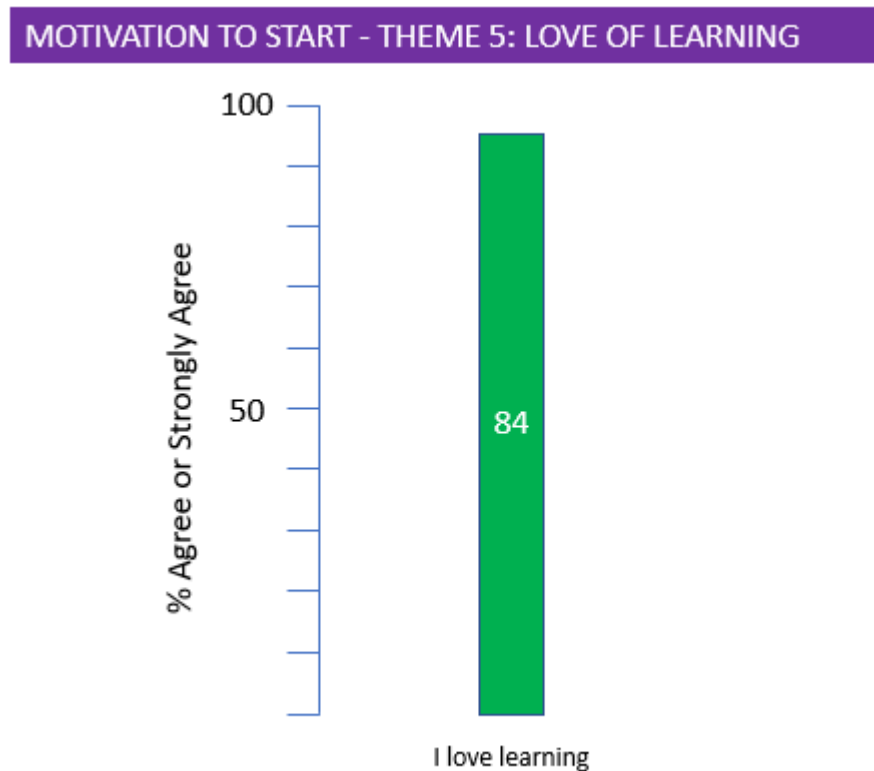
Graduate 5: *I remember thinking she believes in me. She thinks I can do it. I just needed someone to say "listen, it's going to be ok". You just need that person that gets you to take the first step.*

Graduate 6: *I went to the Open Day, I read up on the prospectus. I spoke to a few lecturers and I spoke to you. You just need someone to explain to you this is how it works. I had made the decision and the Open Evening cemented it.*

Davies and Williams' (2001) research on motivation and demotivation in adult learners revealed the concept of fragility stemming from the new identity as a learner in higher education. When transitioning into higher education, Hardin (2008) found that mature learners face many psychological barriers relating to negative beliefs about outcomes, anxiety based on previous experiences and a lack of self-confidence. These barriers can be overcome or lessened by educational institutions providing greater clarity and availability of information in relation to timetables, delivery modes, admissions advice, costs and finance options.

### 4.3.5 Theme 5 – Love of Learning

The final theme that emerged as a key motivating factor for mature learners was the love of learning. 84% of the participants in this study agreed or strongly agreed that their motivation to register on a part-time higher education degree was because of their love of learning.



**Figure 9:** Motivation to Start – Theme 5: Love of Learning

Although it emerged as a strong theme in the quantitative survey, only two graduates referenced their love of learning in their interviews.

Graduate 1: *I enjoy education, I have an aptitude for learning. I have always had an interest in studying something new.*

Graduate 3: *I knew I could do it and I wanted to do it. The brain needs to be exercised just as much as any other part of the body.*

These findings are testament to Deckers', (2005, p.21) theory that for some mature learners a programme of higher education may be *"inherently motivated, freely chosen by the learner with no particular goal or reward in mind, something that is intrinsically pleasing to the individual."*

## 4.4 Research Question 2 - Motivation to Sustain a Part-time Honours Degree Programme

### Findings, Data Analysis and Discussion

Five dominant themes emerged from the qualitative and quantitative analysis on the motivating factors that sustained the graduates to complete a three year, part-time, honours degree programme, namely;

- 1) Lecturers/ Lecture Style
- 2) Intrinsic Motivation
- 3) Peer Support
- 4) Extrinsic Motivation
- 5) Fear of Failure

#### 4.4.1 Theme 1 – Lecturers/ Lecture Style

Nine statements relating to the theme of Lecturers/ Lecture Style had a combined ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Agree’ score higher than fifty percent.

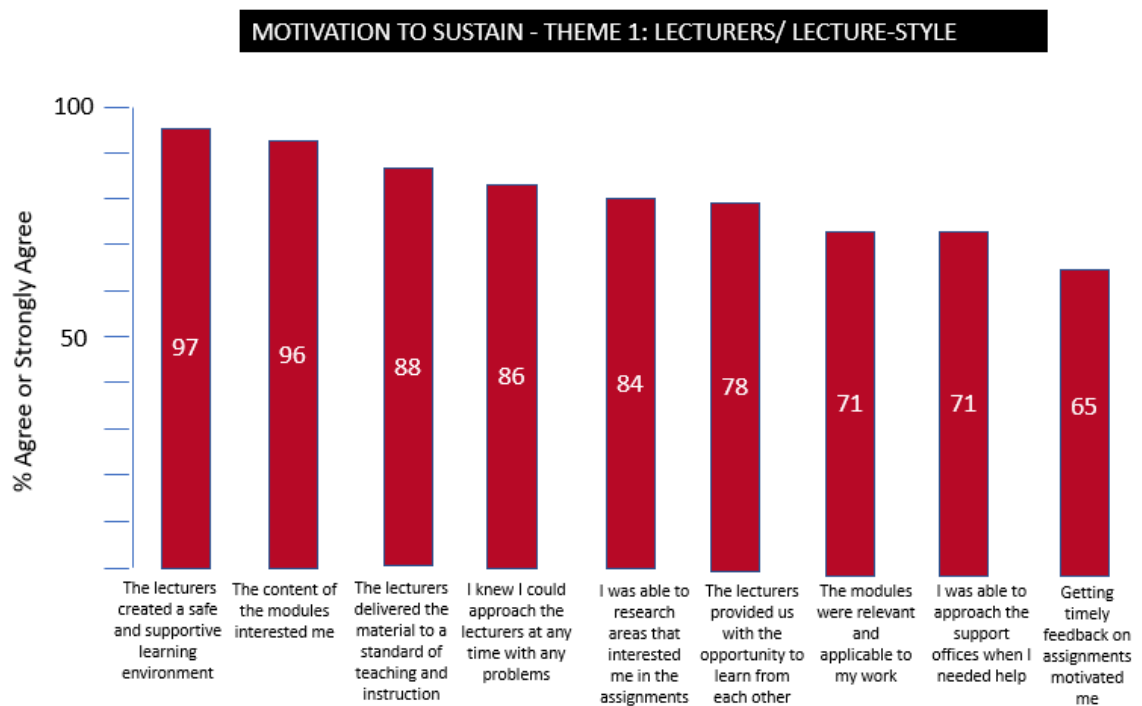


Figure 10: Motivation to Sustain – Theme 1: Lecturers/ Lecture Style

Five of the graduates provided insight into the theme of the lecturers/ lecture-style:

Graduate 1: *The style of lectures was very motivating for me.*

Graduate 3: *I had a lot of support from the Programme Director. I always felt what I'm getting here is maybe not what I would get anywhere else. You could have the "I don't have a clue" conversation very easily with them.*

Graduate 4: *The lecturers were really supportive.*

Graduate 5: *I had a great relationship with the tutors. It was a friendly professional relationship. It made an awful difference. The sense of comradeship with the Programme Director was so motivating for me. She believed in me and would always say "Listen, it's going to be ok." You need the type of tutor that will take you under their wing and guide you all the way.*

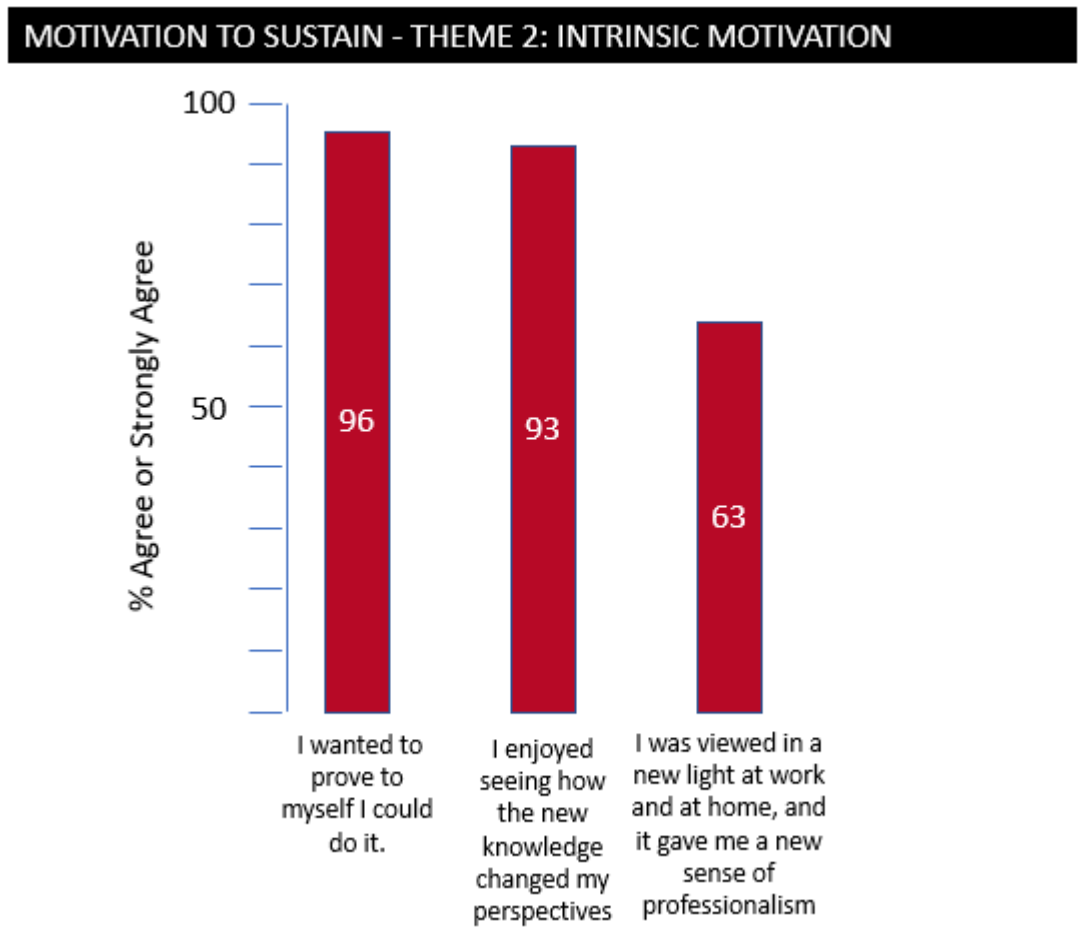
Graduate 6: *My relationships with the lecturers was a massive factor in sustaining my motivation. They laid out the semester. You knew where you stood. You knew when things were due and they were only an email away if you had a problem or question. If you needed more support, you asked, and you got more support, the lecturers were outstanding.*

These four high-scoring motivating factors within the theme of Lecturers/ Lecture-Style, namely; 1) a support and safe learning environment, 2) interesting module content, 3) a high standard of teaching and instruction 4) approachable and supportive lecturers, were consistent with Sogunro's (2015) research into the motivating factors for mature learners in higher education including quality of instruction, quality of curriculum, relevance and pragmatism, interactive lectures, effective management practices, progressive assessment, timely feedback, self-directedness and effective academic advising practices.

#### **4.4.2 Theme 2 – Intrinsic Motivation**

According to Green and Kelso's, (2006, p.1) research into mature learner motivation, defined as "*an internal force that energises the individual and determines the direction of that action*", the single most-influential factor affecting motivation was "*Personal pride in my efforts and success*" followed closely by "*intellectual gain or knowledge.*"

Similar findings were revealed in this study. 96% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that one of the motivating factors that sustained them throughout their part-time studies over three years was to prove to themselves that they could do it.



**Figure 11:** Motivation to Sustain – Theme 2: Intrinsic Motivation

All six graduates referred to motivational factors that align with Ryan and Deci’s (2000) Self-Determination Theory on intrinsic motivation:

- Graduate 1: *The sense of personal achievement was a big thing for me.*
- Graduate 2: *I achieved my goal of a first class honours degree. Nobody can take it away, it’s mine, and I did it. The motivation was extrinsic at the start but it became more intrinsic. I wanted to do the best I could for me.*
- Graduate 3: *I am very self-driven. I said to myself, there’s nothing in this that I cannot do or that can stop me from getting a 1:1 and then the head does the rest.*

Graduate 4: *Once I realised it was possible, and I was capable, I really wanted it. My friend motivated me at the start but it became more of an internal thing.*

Graduate 5: *There is no greater motivation than someone saying you can't do something. It gave me a sense of development, fulfilment, ability, strength and power. I gained so much confidence, I was able to stand up for myself and know that I was worth something and that I could do it.*

Graduate 6: *I had people saying to me, why don't you pack it in? Don't bother with it. Aren't you grand as you are? So I had to dig deep and have the grit and determination to never give up.*

### 4.4.3 Theme 3 – Peer Support

Consistent with Roberts and Plakhotnik's (2009) findings in relation to the mature learners' ability to persist and stay focused being contingent on the informal relationships they build with peers, 86% of the participants in this study agreed or strongly agreed that one of the motivating factors that sustained them throughout their part-time studies over three years was the supportive friendships they made and how they carried each other through the tough parts of the course.

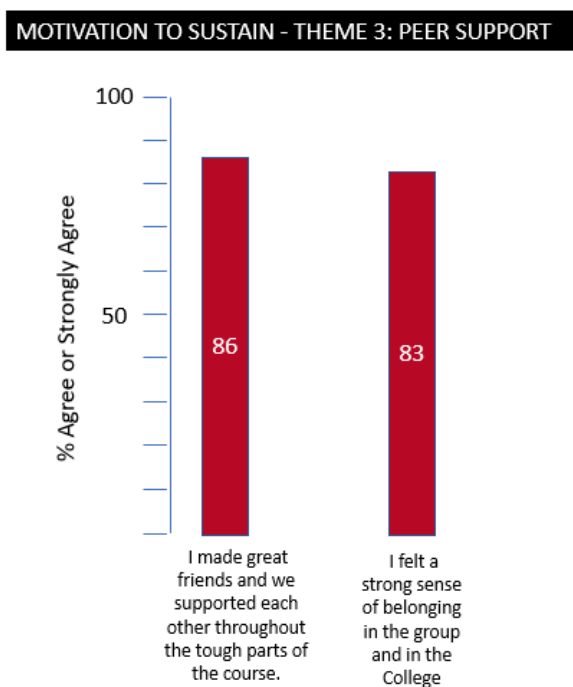


Figure 12: Motivation to Sustain – Theme 3: Peer Support

Four of the graduates referred to Peer Support as an important motivating factor in sustaining their studies:

Graduate 1: *I had a great rapport with two friends in the class.*

Graduate 2: *We had a great class, we motivated each other and pushed each other along. Everyone is juggling or sacrificing something so that bonds people together.*

Graduate 5: *Peers play a massive role. The small class sizes are Griffith's greatest asset. We all got to know each other so well.*

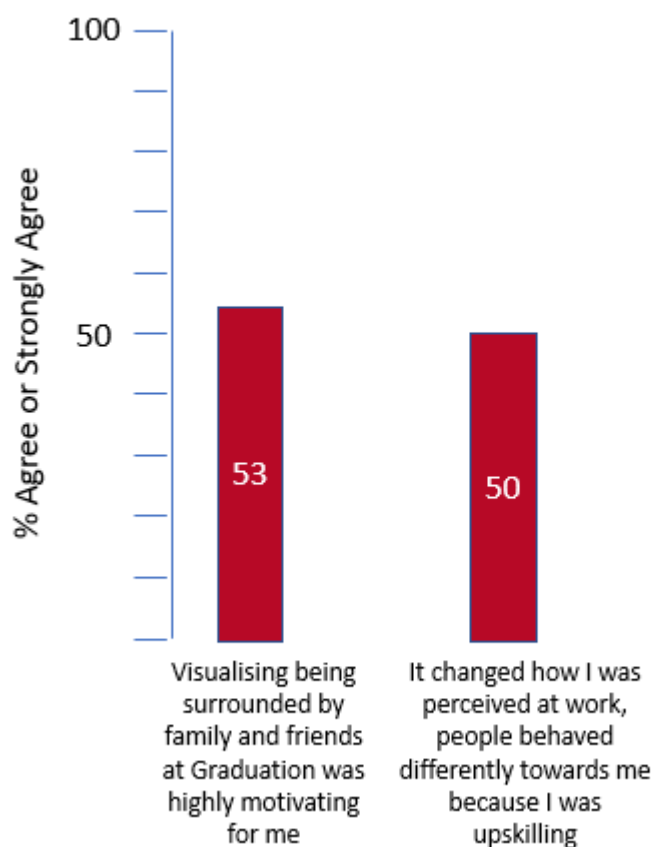
Graduate 6: *I knew two of my classmates when I met them on the first night. This broke down barriers straight away. It made it fun.*

Ryan and Deci's (2000) theory on Self-Determination contends that the more intrinsically motivated the learner is about achieving their goals, the stronger the feeling of belonging and connection they feel among their peers, family and society, a sense of relatedness. 83% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that one of the motivating factors that sustained them throughout their part-time studies over three years was because they felt a strong sense of belonging in their programme group and in the College.

#### **4.4.4 Theme 4 – Extrinsic Motivation**

Extrinsically-motivated factors featured highly in both the qualitative and quantitative research. Ryan and Deci (2000) concluded that learners can perform motivated actions with varying degrees of autonomy depending on the situational factors of the learner. For some, the motivation is *externally regulated* to secure the approval of family/ peers, for others, the learner is motivated through *introjected regulation* where they feel pressure to perform at a high level for pride and self-esteem reasons at work and with family.

## MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEME 4: EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION



**Figure 13:** Motivation to Sustain – Theme 4: Extrinsic Motivation

Five of the interview participants referred to extrinsic motivating factors as having played an important role in sustaining their studies.

Graduate 1: *People admire you for going back to study. I was surprised at how much.*

Graduate 2: *My employer was paying for it. If I didn't perform, I'd let myself down and I'd let him down too. I wanted him to get his money's worth out of it.*

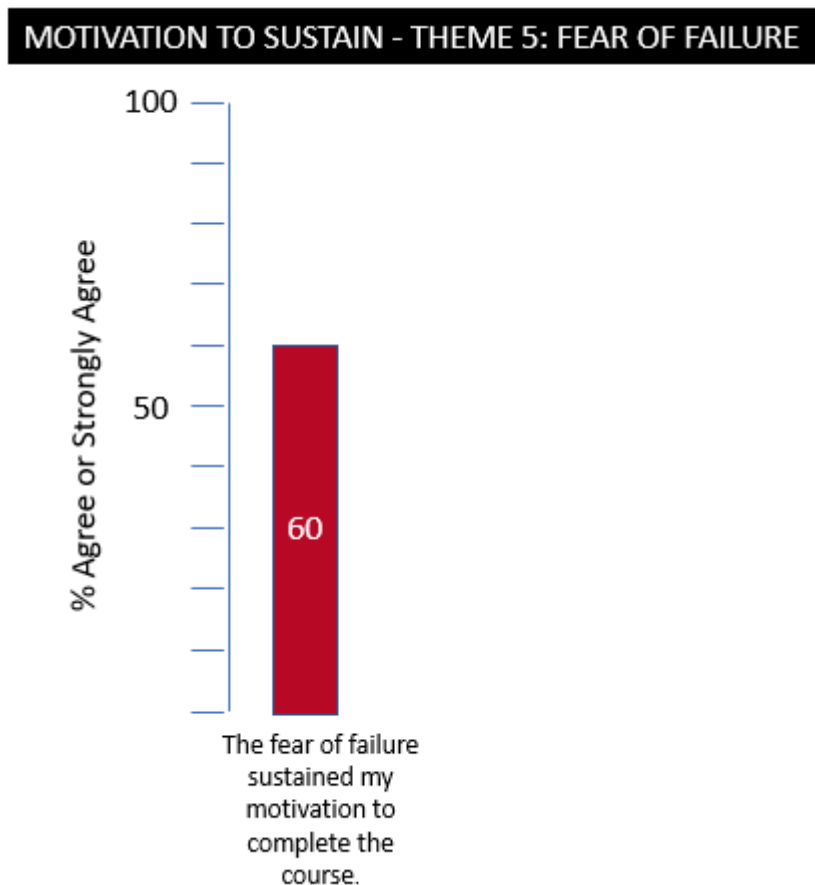
Graduate 3: *The only pressure I felt on myself was that if I didn't successfully complete, I didn't get reimbursed financially.*

Graduate 4: *My friend motivated me at the start but it became more of an internal thing.*

Graduate 5: *There is no greater motivation than someone saying you can't do something.*

#### 4.4.5 Theme 5 – Fear of Failure

Kasworm’s (2003) research revealed the additional pressure that mature learners face in higher education as a result of having to continue with their complex lives in addition to the challenging role of being a learner again. 60% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that one of the motivating factors that sustained them throughout their part-time studies over three years was the fear of failure.



**Figure 14:** Motivation to Sustain – Theme 5: Fear of Failure

Four of the graduates referred to Fear of Failure as a significant motivating factor in sustaining their studies:

Graduate 3: *The only pressure I felt was on myself that if I didn't successfully complete, I didn't get reimbursed.*

Graduate 4: *You think you are going to go into a lecture and you're going to be exposed. What in the name of God is she doing here? She hasn't a clue.*

Graduate 5: *I remember not telling a lot of people as I didn't want to risk telling them and then failing. I didn't want to make a fool of myself. The fear of failure was a massive driver.*

Graduate 6: *Afraid to fail was 100% the motivating factor for me throughout the course. I didn't go to College before so I had to make sure I wasn't a failure.*

Similar findings emerged in the work of Davies and Williams (2001) in the themes of risk and fragility for mature learners in higher education, most specifically, the risk of failure.

A notable and consistent finding across both the qualitative and quantitative research for both starting and sustaining a part-time higher education degree was the role of the employer. Whilst they play a pivotal role in supporting the learner to balance their commitments, only 7% responded to the statement "My employer wanted me to upskill", 5% - "I did it because my employer paid the tuition fees" and 2% - "I had no choice but to complete it as my employer was funding my studies.", indicating the importance of intrinsic motivation in mature learners in driving the decision to enter and remain in higher education.

#### **4.5 Research Question 3 – Additional Educational Initiatives and Innovations to Support the Learning Experience for Mature Learners**

##### **Findings, Data Analysis and Discussion**

In each of the qualitative interviews, participants were asked what Griffith College Cork could have done better to motivate them to start a part-time programme of higher education and to help sustain their motivation throughout their studies. This section will present the themes that emerged.

##### **4.5.1 Time Management Clarity**

The importance of time management clarity emerged a key suggestion from graduates as part of their decision-making process to start and in their ability to sustain their studies

Graduate 1: *More clarity on the exact days and times of the week for lectures and exams in order to let my employer and family know in advance. Balancing work and study was very challenging. I did a lot of overtime. I felt guilty missing family birthdays because of all the study deadlines.*

Graduate 2: *There were weekends when I didn't see my family. It was harder than I thought it would be. There was a lot more study to do than I would have thought.*

Graduate 3: *There were days when I would be writing assignments whilst getting up and down to check the dinner on the hob.*

Graduate 4: *As an older student, I'm too old to feel this clueless. You like things clearly laid out for you.*

Graduate 5: *I had to be very selfish with my time, it was very difficult over three years.*

A further suggestion in relation to time was that more academic guidance on independent study for each year of the course in order to pass each module and/ or achieve high grades, would have been helpful in managing expectations and balancing other commitments.

#### **4.5.2 Testimonial Advertising**

Ryan and Deci (2017) concluded that mature learners aspire to competency in the subject matter, autonomy in their lives and a sense of relatedness with others. Two of the graduates felt strongly that they would have benefitted from more testimonial advertising by former graduates to encourage their sense of connection and relatedness with their future peers. Equally, the graduates would have found it more encouraging if the College had communicated the uniqueness of the smaller College experience for those that are seeking a more intimate learning experience.

Graduate 1: *I would have found it more difficult sitting in a big lecture theatre with 200 people, that's not very personal.*

Graduate 2: *Testimonials are an excellent way of getting the message to potential students that they can do it too.*

Graduate 5: *More advertising, I didn't even know it existed. I came across it by accident on Google. I was never part of the category of people that would go to college. UCC is well known but it is not a College for people seeking comfort and security.*

#### **4.5.3 Opportunity to Experience Higher Education**

Knowles' (1980) second andragogical principle, 'Self-Concept of the Learner', concluded that adult learners need to be responsible for their own education and be involved in the creation of it.

Participant graduates of this study proposed having the opportunity to attend the College in advance of starting, to live like a College learner for a day, to attend lectures and to meet the lecturers and support teams.

Graduate 4: *To spend a day living the life as a student would give potential learners a chance to see how it actually runs. It would kill off the first day nerves and would be a chance to walk in, meet some people, to see that they are normal and you'll be fine.*

Graduate 5: *Having someone from the College sit you down, face-to-face, and say it's going to be overwhelming but it's going to be ok.*

#### **4.5.4 Elective Choices**

Knowles' (1980) first andragogical principle, 'The Learner's Need to Know' states that mature learners have a reason for learning something. When elective choices are based on demand or based in another campus with limited access, this disempowers the learner from being in control and involved in their own learning experience and is highly demotivating.

Graduate 1: *We didn't get much of a choice in the modules we had to study. We were always out-voted by the Dublin learners. Maybe I would have had more motivation if I didn't have to study modules I had no interest in.*

Graduate 5: *The Innocence Project being run out of Dublin is useless. I can't express that enough. Files didn't come down and we had to read them off the computer. Reading legal files off the computer is painful.*

#### **4.5.5 Social/ Study Space**

86% of the participants in this study strongly agreed or agreed that they made great friends on the course and they supported each other through the tougher periods on the programme. Typically, mature learners come straight from work in the evenings to attend lectures. A place to convene with friends, to recharge, to study or to eat would greatly assist learners in sustaining their motivation throughout the programme.

Graduate 2: *We had nowhere to meet up socially before, during or after class. A canteen, restaurant, a place to go to eat after work and study/ catch up with classmates would be a super addition.*

#### 4.5.6 Physical Support for Learning

Participants were asked during the interview process to briefly describe what the learning experience was like once they had made the decision to register and begin their studies. The majority expressed positive emotions of 'excitement', 'challenging' and 'enjoyable', however they also gave mention to the physical and mental challenge of learning:

Graduate 5: *Overwhelming, it was unmerciful. It's horrendously intense. I found myself way in over my head.*

Graduate 6: *The physical challenge of learning is excruciatingly draining sometimes. It's so physically tiring, three nights per week, lectures, assignments, full-time work, children, it's physically and mentally tough. The first year is a shock to the system. It's a bit of a fright.*

Suggestions from the participants on how they could have been better supported by the College to meet the physical challenge of learning included:

Graduate 2: *Tired learners after a day of work and lectures would benefit from being able to watch lecture recordings back when their brain is not so tired and they are able to concentrate fully.*

Graduate 3: *Maybe the occasional Saturday lecture. Rather than pushing mature learners to the max during the week until 10/11pm by the time they get home, maybe more could be achieved in a few hours on a Saturday morning.*

Graduate 5: *Access to the library in the evening is crucial for getting the research done.*  
*Access to photocopying - I need to have a physical copy of the notes in order to learn. I can't learn from a screen.*

#### 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented, analysed and discussed the dominant themes that emerged relating to the three research objectives. In the final chapter that follows the implications of the research findings will be summarised and recommendations will be made for the future.

## CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Introduction

This study examined the motivation of mature learners to engage and sustain engagement with part-time higher education honours degree programmes. The aim of this chapter was to present the main conclusions and recommendations and to suggest other areas for further research. This chapter also considered new findings the research has brought to the current body of knowledge on motivation and evaluated what the study has achieved in terms of contributions and outcomes.

### 5.2 Research Objectives

- To examine the motivational factors that influenced the mature learners’ decision to apply for their respective part-time degree courses.
- To analyse the motivational factors that engaged and sustained the mature learner allowing them to complete their studies.
- Drawing on the primary research findings and the literature review, to consider additional educational initiatives and innovations that Faculty members can implement in order to enhance and support the learning experience for mature learners.

The research identified the following main themes for each objective:

Mature Learners in Part-Time Higher Education Degree Programmes		
Motivation to Start	Motivation to Sustain	Educational Initiatives
Self-Esteem/ Worthiness	Lecturers/ Lecture-Style	Time Management Clarity
Life Stage/ Timing	Intrinsic Motivation	Testimonial Advertising
Career Change/ Promotion	Peer Support	Opportunity to Experience Higher Education
Admissions Process	Extrinsic Motivation	Elective Choices
Love of Learning	Fear of Failure	Social/ Study Space
		Physical Supports for Learning

**Figure 15:** Research Aims and Objectives – Core Themes

## 5.3 Recommendations

Ryan and Deci's (2017) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) focused on types and quantity of motivation - *intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation* - as predictors of performance and well-being outcomes. The theory claims that learners are motivated to grow and change if three innate and universal psychological needs are fulfilled; *the need for competence, the need for autonomy and the need for relatedness or connection*.

### Self-determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017)

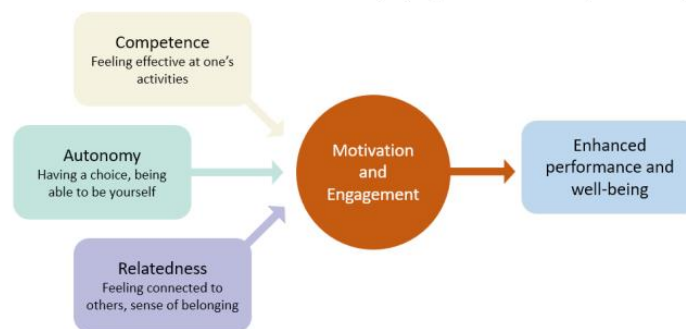


Figure 16: Self-Determination Theory, Ryan and Deci (2000)

### 5.3.1 Recommendations to enhance Competence, Autonomy and Relatedness in the learner experience at Griffith College

#### 1) Competence

- In order for learners to feel competent in their studies, the research has shown that mature learners expect lecturers and the module content to be of a high standard. Nine statements in the questionnaire relating to Lecturers/ Lecture-Style had a score between 65% and 97%. This is a strong indication of the importance of the quality of the lecturing team, how they are on-boarded and professionally nurtured as lecturers.
- The research has also revealed the importance of admissions teams and Programme Directors having the interpersonal and counselling skills to be able to develop an awareness of where the learner sits on the extrinsic motivation continuum at the outset and supporting them to achieve integrated extrinsic motivation or intrinsic motivation to achieve their goals. *"Integration is the process by which individuals fully transform the regulation into their own so that it will emanate from their sense of self."*

Ryan and Deci, (2000, p.60)

## 2) **Autonomy**

Findings from the third research question revealed the importance to a mature learner of elective choice, the opportunity to experience higher education in advance and more clarity in relation to time management. These findings align with Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy and the self-concept of the learner – mature learners need to be responsible for their own education and be involved in the creation of it. The College could consider developing a time management programme for learners to complete in advance of starting as the research revealed that this is a challenge mature learners do not anticipate and struggle greatly with once they register.

## 3) **Relatedness/ Connection**

*“For adults as well as children, affirmation, holding and inclusion, provides a basis for existential legitimacy, core cohesion and authentic engagement in the world.”*

West, (1996, p.207)

Enhancing the sense of connection and relatedness could be considered by the College at every point of communication and engagement with learners, from the admissions stage, throughout their studies and to graduation and beyond once they become part of the alumni community. The findings of this study confirmed that mature learners struggle with feelings of inadequacy and academic ill-preparedness at the start and have difficulty adjusting to the new learning environment. Additional resources to guide and reassure learners on what to expect from the modules and academic guidance on independent study for each year in order to successfully complete each module would provide clarity and connection between the learner and the lecturing teams from the outset.

Supporting mature learners to feel a sense of affinity and relatedness with the College before they commence their studies could be achieved by communicating graduate testimonials more effectively and widely through the marketing channels, thereby reducing the sense of anxiety that making a decision to go to College might present for mature learners.

Equally, in order to enhance the sense of connection and relatedness between peers during their studies, valid practical suggestions came from the participants in relation to improved social and study space outside the lecture rooms in order to learn effectively, experiment and exchange ideas within study groups.

## **5.4 Areas for Further Research**

The main objective of this research was to examine the motivation of mature learners to engage and sustain engagement with part-time higher education and to uncover educational initiatives to improve the learning experience. Future study would benefit from examining the motivation of full-time undergraduate learners on three year honours degree programmes to ensure an optimal learning experience also. Similarly, a comparative study examining the educational motivation of mature learners in university settings would also provide a deeper understanding of the learning experience for mature learners in a smaller, private college environment such as Griffith College.

## **5.5 Contribution to the Study**

One of the main contributions of this study was in building on existing studies on mature learner motivation by investigating part-time mature learners in a private college setting, especially given the high percentage scores for Self-esteem/ Worthiness and Lecturers/ Lecture-Style. These insights provide a deep understanding of mature learners who did not take the traditional learning journey of starting college full-time after secondary school and who therefore may require a more personalised and supportive learning experience.

A further contribution of this study was the fact that the research methodology employed proved to be particularly effective in renewing relationships with the alumni community of Griffith College Cork. The graduates were highly responsive with the questionnaires and were enthusiastic about taking part in the qualitative research. Displaying a strong sense of connection and relatedness towards the College, they were forthcoming in sharing their experiences in order to improve the learning experiences for future mature learners.

Word Count: 16,025

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bamber, J. and Tett, L. (2000). Transforming the Learning Experiences of Non-traditional Students: A Perspective from Higher Education. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 22(1), pp.57-75.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: a social cognitive theory*. Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Beck, R. C. (2004). *Motivation: Theories and principles*. 5th Ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bird, J. and Morgan, C. (2003). Adults Contemplating University Study at a Distance: Issues, themes and concerns. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 4(1), pp.1-17.
- Callender, C., Wilkinson, D. and Mackinon, K. (2006a). *Part-Time Students and Part-Time Study in Higher Education in the UK Strand 3: a Survey of Students' Attitudes and Experiences of Part-Time Study and Its Costs 2005/6*. London: Universities UK and Guild HE.
- Collis, J. and Hussey, R. (2014). *Business Research: A Practical Guide for Undergraduate and Postgraduate students*. 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Hampshire: Palgrave Mac Millan.
- Cook, D. A. and Artino Jr, A. R. (2016) Motivation to learn: An Overview of Contemporary Theories. *Medical Education*, 50, pp.997-1014.
- Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V.L., Gutmann, M. and Hanson, W. (2003). *Advanced mixed methods research designs*. In *Handbook on mixed methods in the behavioural and social sciences*, ed. A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. and Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research; Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). 'Steps in Conducting a Scholarly Mixed Methods Study', *DBER Speaker Series*. 48, p.54.
- Creswell, J. W. and Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Creswell, J. W. and Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), pp.121-131.

- Cross, P. K. (1981). *Adults as learners: Increasing participation and facilitating learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. London: SAGE.
- Davies, P. and Williams, J. (2001). For Me or Not For Me? Fragility and Risk in Mature Students' Decision-Making. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 55(2), pp.185-203.
- Deckers, L. (2005). *Motivation: Biological, psychological, and environmental*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Boston: Pearson.
- Deci, E. L., Vallerand, R. J., Pelletier, L. G. and Ryan, R. M. (1991). Motivation and education: The self-determination perspective. *Educational Psychologist*, 26(3-4), pp.325–346.
- Donaldson, J. F. and Graham, S. W. (1999). A model of college outcomes for adults. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50(1), pp.24–40.
- Eccles, J. S. and Wigfield, A. (2002). Motivational beliefs, values and goals. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, pp.109–132.
- Elliot, A. J., Dweck, C. S. and Yeager, D. S. (Eds.). (2017). *Handbook of Competence and Motivation: Theory and Application*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London: The Guilford Press.
- Europe. (2000). *Lisbon Strategy*. [online] Available from: [D R A F T \(europa.eu\)](#) [Accessed: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2021].
- Flake, J. K. (2012). Measuring cost: The forgotten component of expectancy value theory. *Masters Theses, 2010-2019*. 208. [online] Available from: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/master201019/208> [Accessed: 26<sup>th</sup> June 2022].
- Flick, U. (2006). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Fowler, F. J. (2013). *Survey Research Methods*. 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Geiger, J. F., Weinstein, L. and Jones, C. S. (2004). Differences in meaning in life in students: The effect of non-traditional status and region of country. *College Student Journal*, 38(4), pp.569–572.
- Goleman, D. (2020). *Emotional Intelligence*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Green, T. M. and Kelso, C. M. (2006). Factors that affect motivation among adult learners. *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*, 3(4), pp.65-74.
- Hammersley, M. (2012). *Methodological Paradigms in Educational Research*, British Educational Research Association on-line resource [online] Available from: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/methodological-paradigms-in-educational-research> [Accessed: 29<sup>th</sup> December 2021].

- Hammersley, M. and Traianou, A. (2012). *Ethics and Educational Research*, British Educational Research Association online resource. [online] Available from: [Ethics and Educational Research | BERA](#) [Accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2022].
- Hardin, C. (2008). Adult Students in Higher Education: A Portrait of Transitions. *New Directions of Higher Education*, 144, pp.49–57.
- Houle, C. O. (1961). *The inquiring mind*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Ireland. (2018). *Adult Education Survey 2017*. Dublin. Central Statistics Office. [online] Available from: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/aes/adulteducationsurvey2017/> [Accessed: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2021].
- Ireland. IBEC. (2015). *National Skills Strategy 2015-2025*. Dublin. The Department of Education and Skills. [online] Available from: [https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Skills-Strategy/Submissions/NationalSkillsStrategy\\_Tony-Donohoe\\_IBEC.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Skills-Strategy/Submissions/NationalSkillsStrategy_Tony-Donohoe_IBEC.pdf) [Accessed: 4<sup>th</sup> January 2022].
- Ivankova, N. V., Creswell, J. W. and Stick, S. L. (2006). 'Using Mixed-Methods Sequential Explanatory Design: From Theory to Practice', *In Field Methods*, 18(1), pp.3–20.
- Jarvis, P. (2010). *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning, Theory and Practice*. 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. London: Routledge.
- Johnson, R. B. and Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), pp.14-26.
- Johnson, M. L., Edwards, O. V. and Dai, T. (2014). Growth trajectories of task values and self-efficacy. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 2(1), pp.10–18.
- Johnstone, J. and Rivera, R. (1965). *Volunteers for learning: A study of educational pursuits of adults*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine Press.
- Kasworm, C. E. (2003). Setting the Stage: Adults in Higher Education. *New Directions for Student Services*, 102, pp.3-10.
- Kember, D., Hong, C. and Ho, A. (2008). Characterising the motivational orientation of students in higher education: A naturalistic study in three Hong Kong universities. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 78, pp.313-329.
- Kerka, S. (1989). Retaining Adults Students in Higher Education. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education*, 88, pp.1-6.
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: The Association Press.

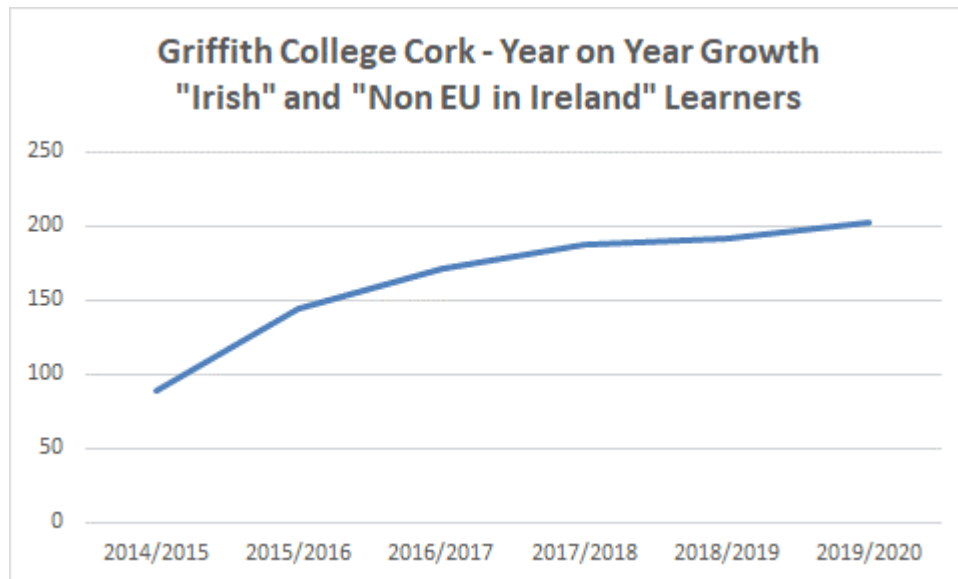
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F. and Swanson, R. A. (1998). *The Adult Learner*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. Houston, TX: Gulf.
- Knowles, M., Holton, E. F. and Swanson, R. A. (2015). *The Adult Learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*. 8th Ed. London: Routledge.
- Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Lynch, B. K. (1996). *Language program evaluation: Theory and practice*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Madey, D. L. (1982). Some benefits of integrating qualitative and quantitative methods in program evaluation, with some illustrations. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 4, pp.223-236.
- Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Researching*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London: SAGE Publications.
- McMillan, J. H. and Forsyth, D. R. (1991). What theories of motivation say about why learners learn. College teaching: From theory to practice. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 45, pp.39-52.
- McKinsey Global Institute. (2021). *The Future of Work after COVID-19*. [online] Available from: [The future of work after COVID-19 | McKinsey](#) [Accessed: 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022].
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S., Caffarella, R. and Baumgartner, L. M. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*. 3rd Ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Murray, W. C., Smith, L. and Nielson, K. (2011). Exploring Motivational and Learning Differences with Mature Students in Post-Secondary Education. *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*, 3, p.189.
- Nunan, D. (1999). *Research methods in language learning*. 8<sup>th</sup> Ed. Cambridge: CUP.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J. and Leech, N. L. (2005). On Becoming a Pragmatic Researcher: The Importance of Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methodologies. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(5), pp.375-387.
- Osbourne, M., Marks, A. and Turner, E. (2004). Becoming a mature student: How adult applicants weigh the advantages and disadvantages of higher education. *Higher Education*, 48, pp.291-315.
- Pascarella, E. T. and Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research* (Vol. 2). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, M. Q. (1987). *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*. CA: Sage Publications.

- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. 3rd Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Polson, C. J. (2003). Adult graduate students challenge institutions to change. *New Directions for Student Services*, 102, pp.59–68.
- Powell, S. (1999). *Learning to study: A guide for professionals*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Roberts, N. and Plakhotnik, M. (2009). Building social capital in the academy: The nature and function of support systems in graduate adult education. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 122, pp.43–52.
- Rovai, A. P., Baker, J. D. and Ponton, M. K. (2014). *Social Science Research Design and Statistics*. Chesapeake, VA: Watertree Press LLC.
- Ryan, R. M. and Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, pp.54-67.
- Ryan, R. M. and Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-Determination Theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development and wellness*. London: The Guilford Press.
- Schuller, T., Raffe, D., Morgan-Klein, B. and Clark, I. (1999). *Part-Time Higher Education: Policy, Practice and Experience*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publisher.
- Schunk, D. H., Pintrich, P. R. and Meese, J. L. (2008). *Motivation in education: Theory, research and applications*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Shepherd, J. and Nelson, B. M. (2012). Balancing act: A phenomenological study of female adult learners who successfully persisted in graduate studies. *The Qualitative Report*, 17 (Art. 39), pp.1-21.
- Smart, J. C. and Pascarella, E. T. (1987). Influences on the intention to re-enter higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 58 (3), pp.306–322.
- Sogunro, O. A. (2015). Motivating Factors for Adult Learners in Higher Education. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 4(1), pp.22-37.
- Spanard, J. A. (1990). Beyond intent: Re-entering college to complete the degree. *Review of Educational Research*, 60(3), pp.309-344.
- Stein, D. S., Wanstreet, C. and Trinko, L. A. (2011). From Consideration to Commitment: Factors in Adults' Decisions to Enrol in a Higher Education Degree Programme. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 59, pp.68-76.
- Stevens, J. (2014). Perceptions, Attitudes and Preferences of Adult Learners in Higher Education: A National Survey. *Journal of Higher Education*, 10(2), pp.65-78.

- Svinicki, M. D. (2004). *Learning and motivation in the postsecondary classroom*. Bolton, MA: Anker.
- Swain, J., Hammond, C. and Jamieson, A. (2007). The Benefits of Part-Time Study for Mature Students: Findings from Interviews with Birkbeck Graduates. *Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education and Birkbeck College*. University of London.
- Tashakkori, A. and Teddlie, C. (1998). *Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches*. *Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 46*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tennant, M. C. and Pogson, P. (1995). *Learning and change in the adult years: A developmental perspective*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Walters, M. (2000). The mature students' three Rs. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 28(2), pp.267-277.
- Watson, T. J. (2001). The emergent manager and processes of management. *Management Learning*, 32(2), pp.221-235.
- Webber, T. (2004). Orientations to learning in mid-career management students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(2), pp.259-277.
- West, L. (1996). *Beyond Fragments – Adults, Motivation and Higher Education, A Biographical Analysis*. Oxon: Taylor & Francis.
- Williams, M. and Moser, T. (2019). The Art of Coding and Thematic Exploration in Qualitative Research. *International Management Review*, 15(1), pp.45-55.
- Wlodkowski, R. J. (1985). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A guide to improving instruction and increasing learner achievement*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wlodkowski, R. J. (1999). *Enhancing adult motivation to learn: A comprehensive guide for teaching all adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Yilmaz, K. (2013). Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Traditions: Epistemological, Theoretical and Methodological Differences. *European Journal of Education*, 48(2), pp.311-325.
- Yin, R. (1989). *Case Study Research*. California: Sage Publications.
- Zainal, Z. (2007). Case Study as a Research Method. *Journal Kemanusiaan*, 9, pp.1-6.

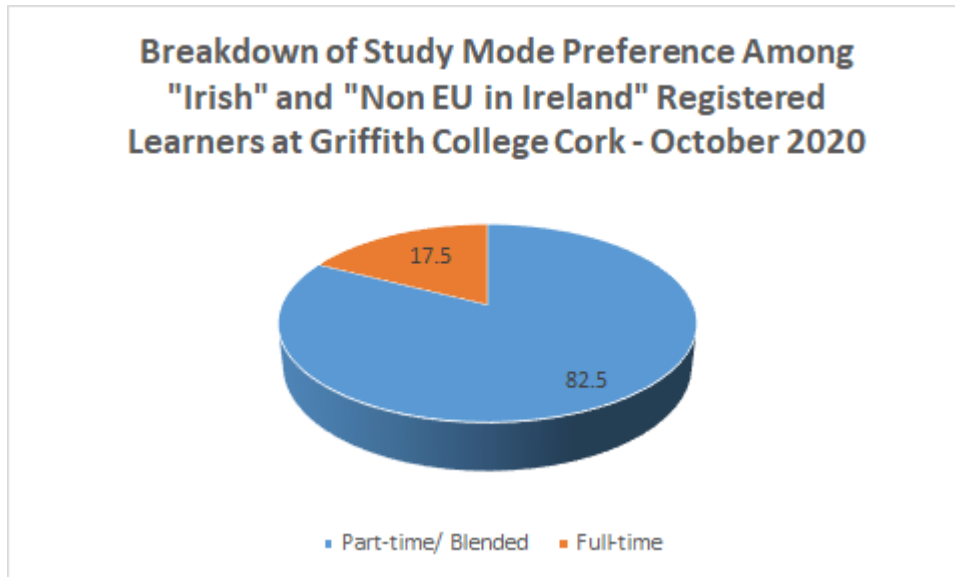
## APPENDIX 1 – Griffith College Cork Learner Numbers – 2014-2020

Source: SCHOLAR - Admissions and Student Management System at Griffith College



**APPENDIX 2 - Breakdown of full-time and part-time registered learners at Griffith College Cork as at 31st October 2020**

<b>SOURCE: SCHOLAR - Admissions and Student Management System at Griffith College</b>	
	<b>Irish and Non EU Learners</b>
Part-time/ Blended	165
Full-time	35
	200



## APPENDIX 3 - Quantitative Research Questionnaire

### Research Question 1 - Motivation to Start

MOTIVATION TO START - Questionnaire Statements
I wanted a renewed sense of self, the feeling that I was improving myself and achieving my goals.
It was an easy process to become a registered mature learner
I was able to continue earning while I was learning
The timing was right and I was ready to learn
I love learning
I wanted to change job and have a better career path
I wanted to have time just for me, to invest in myself
I wanted the highest qualification possible for me
I wanted a pay rise
The tuition fees were affordable
I wanted a promotion in my role
I wanted to build on previous qualifications
I wanted to be a role model for my children/ family
I was unhappy at work at the time
I didn't have a positive educational experience when I was younger and I wanted to overcome this setback
I required new knowledge for my current role
My education was interrupted in the past and I wanted to finish it
My previous experience and work-based learning was recognised by the College
I was going through a significant life change and education gave me something to focus on
I didn't get the chance when I was younger
My employer wanted me to upskill
I was unemployed at the time and needed to upskill to find work
I did it because my employer paid the tuition fees

### Research Question 2 – Motivation to Sustain

MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - Questionnaire Statements
The lecturers created a supportive and safe learning environment.
I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it.
The content of the modules interested me.
I enjoyed seeing how the new knowledge changed my perspectives.
The lecturers delivered the material to a high standard of teaching and instruction
I knew I could approach the lecturers at any time with any problems I had.
I made great friends and we supported each other through the tough parts of the course.
I was able to research areas that interested me in the assignments.
I felt a strong sense of belonging in the group and in the College.
The lecturers provided us with the opportunity to learn from each other as well as from the curriculum.
The modules were relevant and applicable to my work.
I was able to approach any of the support offices in the College to help me progress and complete my studies.
Getting timely feedback on assignments motivated me to perform better in exams.
I was viewed in a new light at work and at home and it gave me a new sense of professionalism.
The fear of failure sustained my motivation to complete the course.
Visualising being surrounded by family and friends at Graduation was highly motivating for me.
It changed how I was perceived at work, people behaved differently towards me because I was upskilling.
I wanted to ensure I wasn't overlooked for promotion again because I didn't have a degree.
I had no choice but to complete it as my employer was funding my studies.

## APPENDIX 4 – Thematic Analysis of Literature

### Research Question 1 - Motivation to Start

Themes from the literature - Motivation to start a higher degree part-time	Underpinning Literature	Self-Determination Theory (SDT) - Ryan & Deci (2000)	Self-Determination Theory (SDT) - Ryan & Deci (2000)	Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) - Eccles & Wigfield (2002)	Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) - Eccles & Wigfield (2002)	Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) - Eccles & Wigfield (2002)	Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) - Eccles & Wigfield (2002)
		Extrinsic Motivation	Intrinsic Motivation	Attainment Value	Intrinsic Value	Utility Value	Cost Value
Goal-oriented, Activity-oriented, Learning-oriented	Houle (1961)	x	x	x	x	x	
Improve occupational standing - make a living	Johnstone and Riviera (1965)	x				x	
Attitude to education, ability to succeed, cost v benefit, timing, availability of information	Cross (1981)	x		x		x	x
Life transitions and institutional barriers	Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007)	x		x		x	x
Undergraduate experience, characteristics of employer, career experiences	Smart and Pascarella (1987)	x		x		x	
Focus on statuses - age, maturity, competing responsibilities	Kasworm (2003)	x	x	x	x	x	
6 Groups: Late starter, Single parent, Careerists, Delayed traditional student, Escapees, Personal growers	Osbourne, Marks and Turner (2004)	x	x	x	x	x	x
Adults' self concept is of being responsible for their own lives - intrinsic motivation - learning is life-centred	Jarvis (2010)		x	x	x		
Adults are ready to learn what they need to know - Life-centred - responsible for themselves	Knowles (1980)		x	x	x		
Complex decision - 6 variables - time out of school, intellectual, personal and career opportunities, institutional support, earning and learning, reflective learner, match with academic reputation	Stein, Wanstreet and Trinko (2011)	x	x	x		x	x
Mature learners want practical skills they can apply immediately at work as well as theoretical concepts	Stevens (2014)	x		x		x	
Cost of study, the need to work, responsibilities of job and family, lack of childcare, lack of confidence, fear of long-term debt	Osbourne, Marks and Turner (2004)	x					x
Financial - defending a job under threat or a way out of unemployment	Schuller et al (1999)	x				x	x
Financial - defending a job under threat or a way out of unemployment	Callender et al (2006a)	x				x	x
Financial burden and time away from families	Murray, Smith and Nielson (2011)	x				x	x
Redundancy, Recognition, Regeneration - Major life event trigger - divorce, bereavement, redundancy	Walters (2000)		x	x		x	x
Fragility and risk - cost, new identity as a learner, confidence to access the programme and avail of supports	Davies and Williams (2001)	x	x			x	x
Fragility and risk - age, gender, life-stage, personal/ career transition as a result of a positive or negative life experience. Institutional and situational barriers - proximity to home, timetable, faculty hours, childcare, admissions and academic advice, time management, role conflicts, finance, quality of content	Hardin (2008)	x	x	x		x	x
6 core themes - Fears, motivation to succeed, support from home, academic preparedness, suitability of programme, identity change	Bird and Morgan (2003)	x	x	x		x	x
Psychological and educational barriers - inadequate coping skills, lack of self-confidence, negative beliefs about outcomes, academically ill-prepared	Kerka (1989)		x			x	x

## Research Question 2 - Motivation to Sustain

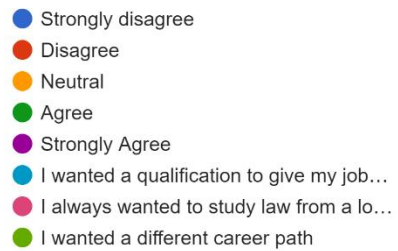
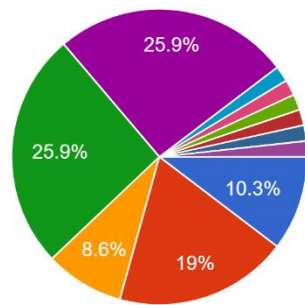
Themes from the literature - Motivation to sustain a higher degree part-time	Underpinning Literature	Self-Determination Theory (SDT) - Ryan & Deci (2000)	Self-Determination Theory (SDT) - Ryan & Deci (2000)	Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) - Eccles & Wigfield (2002)	Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) - Eccles & Wigfield (2002)	Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) - Eccles & Wigfield (2002)	Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) - Eccles & Wigfield (2002)
		Extrinsic Motivation	Intrinsic Motivation	Attainment Value	Intrinsic Value	Utility Value	Cost Value
Purposeful engagement from learner to master skills and concepts - concentration, participation, attention, effort, perseverance and resilience	Mc Millan and Forsyth (1991)		x	x	x		
8 factors: Quality of instruction, quality of curriculum, relevance and pragmatism, interactive classroom, effective management practices, progressive assessment and timely feedback, self-directedness, conducive learning environment, effective academic advising practices	Sogunro (2015)	x	x	x	x	x	
3 themes: Importance of family support, ability to prioritise activities and tasks, higher sense of purpose as a learner	Shepherd and Mullins Nelson (2012)	x	x	x	x	x	
Situational, institutional and dispositional barriers - Attitude to education, ability to succeed, cost v benefit, timing, availability of information	Cross (1981)	x		x		x	x
Personal pride in the learner's effort and success, Intellectual gain or knowledge, Increased marketability and employability. Mature learners have high expectations of lecturers - highly competent, working in the field, care about the learners and manage the lecture effectively. Lecturer: Learner relationship fundamental impact on motivation of learner	Green and Kelso (2006)	x	x	x	x	x	
The nature, timing and processes of learning depends on the circumstances, experience and opportunities of the learner	Tennant and Pogson (1995)	x		x		x	
Transformations - HE is an alien environment for mature learners - their entitlement to participate in HE, their disposition towards the course, their approach to theory-practice, their attitude to becoming a professional	Bamber and Tett (2000)	x	x	x	x	x	
Learners are in a constant state of becoming	Watson (2001)		x	x	x		
5 orientations to learning - development of confidence and self-esteem, development of personal competence, development of managerial competence, orientation towards politics and power, development of intellectual capability	Webber (2004)	x	x	x	x		
Social cognitive model - learner's cognition, behaviour and environmental factors impact motivation	Bandura (1986)	x	x	x		x	
Six continua: compliance with exams and assignments, individual goal setting, sense of belonging, interest in the modules, career motivation, university lifestyle	Kember, Hong and Ho (2008)	x	x	x		x	
Demotivating factors: Situational: Lack of time, lack of money, home responsibilities, lack of childcare, lack of transport. Institutional: inconvenient schedules, inconvenient locations, fees, inappropriate modules. Dispositional: learner self-perception, age, lack of confidence	Cross (1981)	x	x			x	x
Lack of social integration for mature learners negatively impacts persistence	Pascarella and Terenzini (2005)	x				x	x
Inability to balance life activities	Powell (1999)	x				x	x
Difficult for mature learners to separate themselves from their other roles - a complex and challenging role	Kasworm (2008)	x				x	x
Mature learners struggle academically and psychologically if they do not feel supported by lecturers	Polson (2003)		x				x
Ability to sustain motivation, persist through intense periods and stay focused - Contingent on informal relationships with peers	Roberts and Plakhotnik (2009)	x				x	x

## APPENDIX 5 – Graphical Representation of Quantitative Data

### Research Question 1 - Motivation to Start

I wanted a promotion in my role.

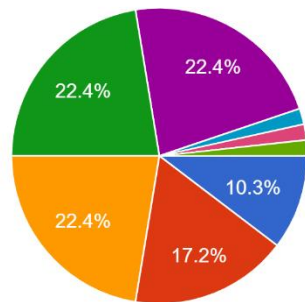
58 responses



▲ 1/2 ▼

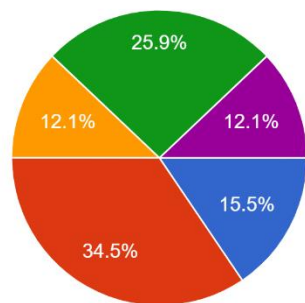
I wanted to be a role model for my children/ family.

58 responses



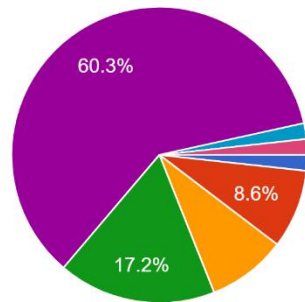
I required new knowledge and skills for my current role.

58 responses



I wanted to change job and have a better career path.

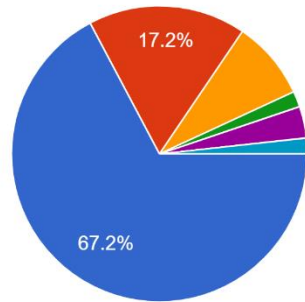
58 responses



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Starting the course helped to lead me down a different path
- Wanted to give myself the option of changing job

I was unemployed at the time and needed to upskill to find work.

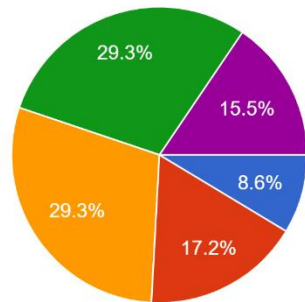
58 responses



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- I was about to be made redundant

I was unhappy at work at the time.

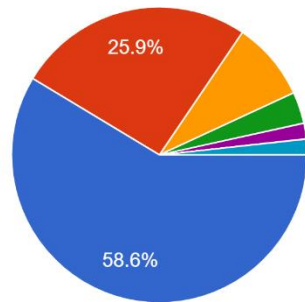
58 responses



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I did it because my employer paid the tuition fees.

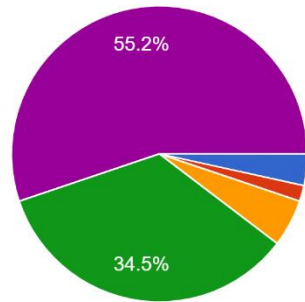
58 responses



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- My employer paid a contribution, equal to about 20% of my fees. This was still a deciding factor.

The timing was right and I was ready to learn.

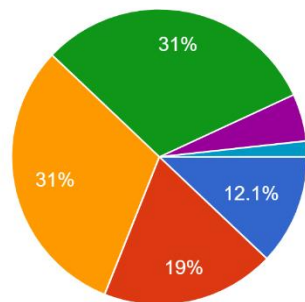
58 responses



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

My previous experience and work-based learning was recognised by the College.

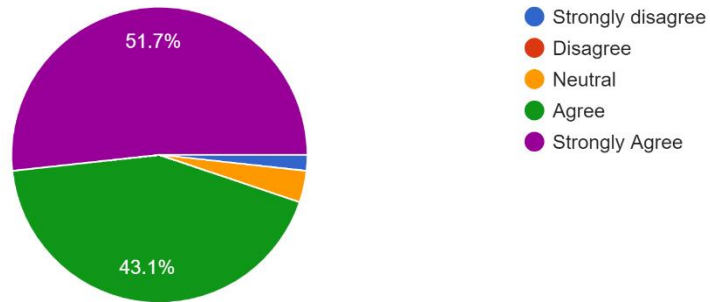
58 responses



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- did not apply

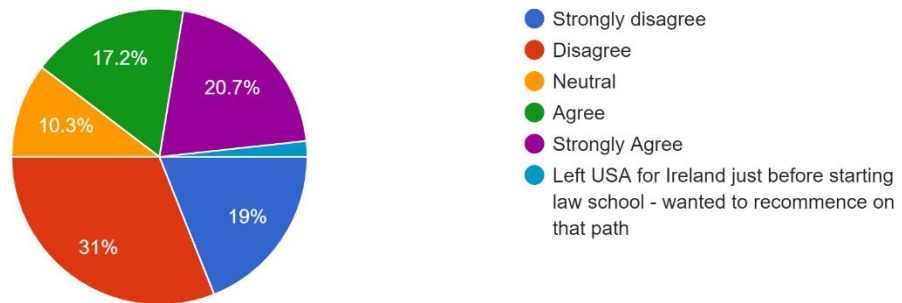
It was an easy process to become a registered mature learner.

58 responses



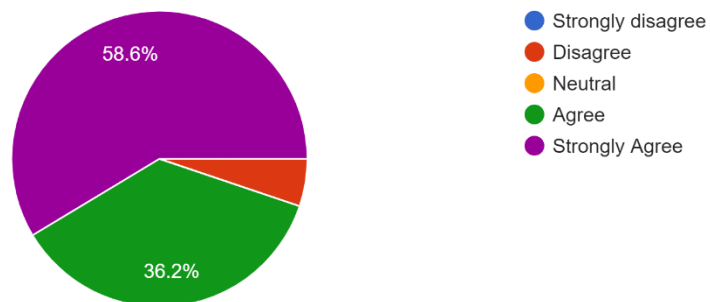
My education was interrupted in the past and I wanted to finish it.

58 responses

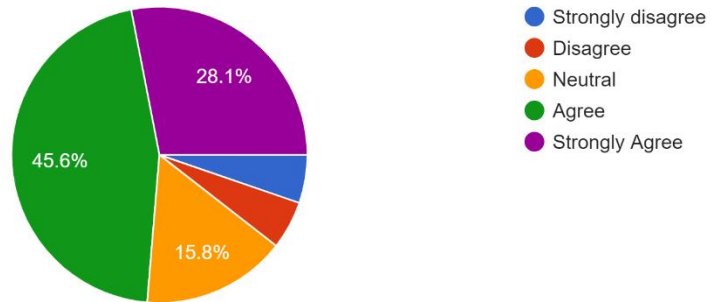


I wanted a renewed sense of self, the feeling that I was improving myself and achieving my goals.

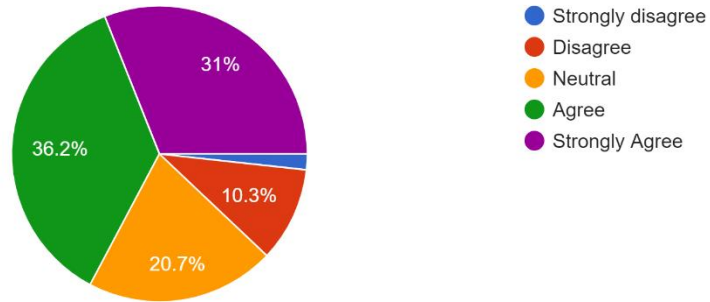
58 responses



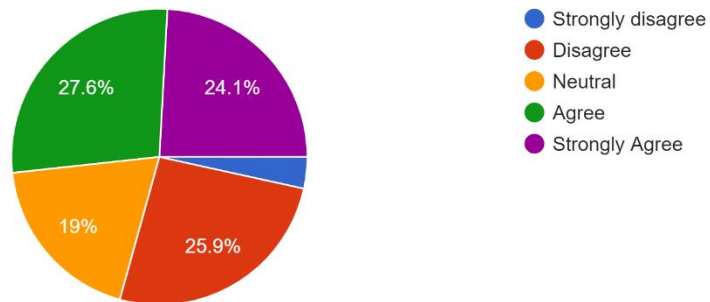
I wanted to have time just for me, to invest in myself.  
57 responses



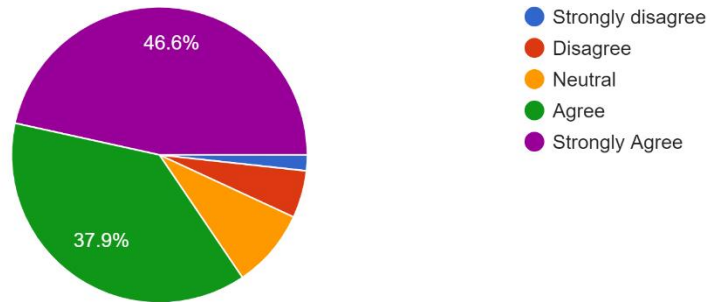
I wanted the highest qualification possible for me.  
58 responses



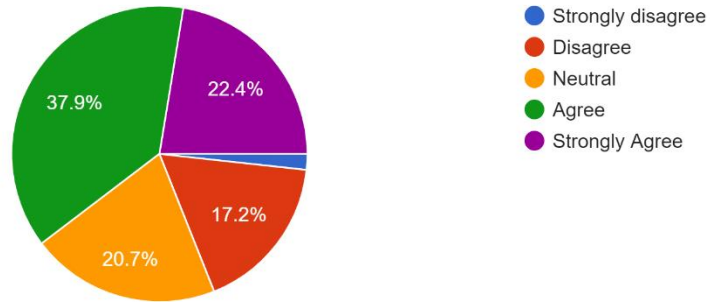
I wanted to build on previous qualifications.  
58 responses



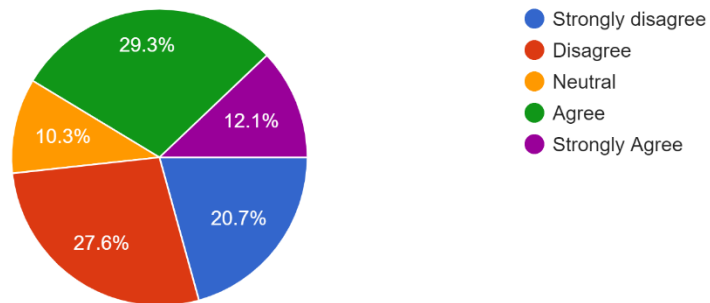
I love learning.  
58 responses



I wanted a pay rise.  
58 responses

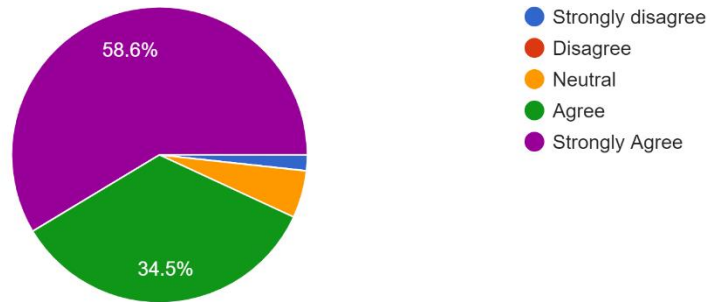


I didn't have a positive educational experience when I was younger and wanted to overcome this setback.  
58 responses



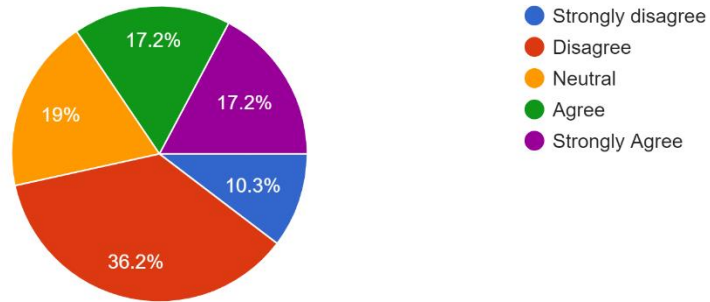
I was able to continuing earning while I was learning.

58 responses



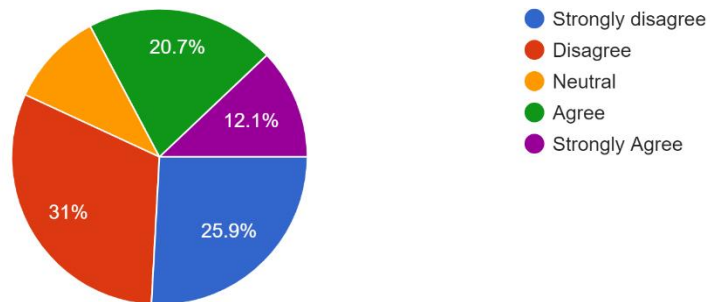
I was going through a significant life change and education gave me something to focus on.

58 responses



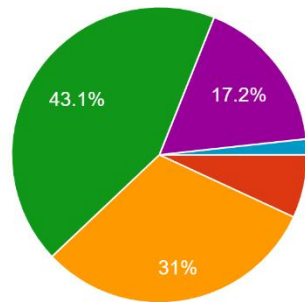
I didn't get the chance when I was younger.

58 responses



The tuition fees were affordable.

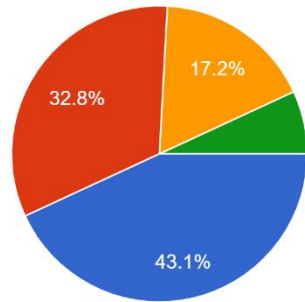
58 responses



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Employer funded the course for me

My employer wanted me to upskill.

58 responses

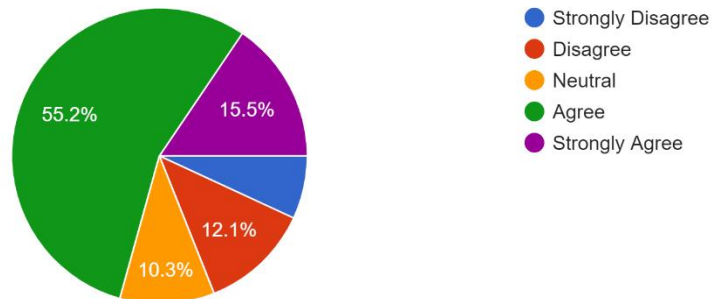


- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

## Research Question 2 - Motivation to Sustain

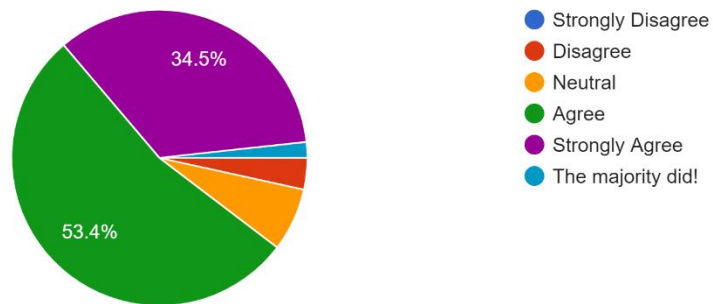
The modules were relevant and applicable to my work.

58 responses



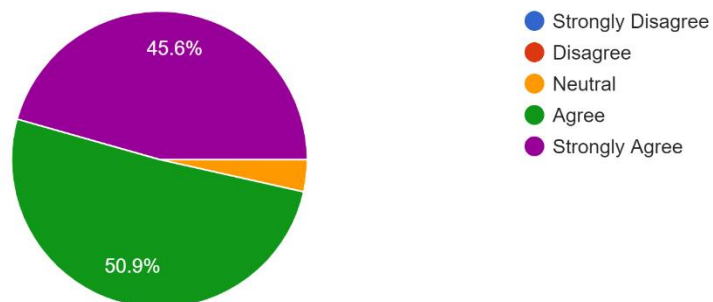
The lecturers delivered the material to a high standard of teaching and instruction.

58 responses



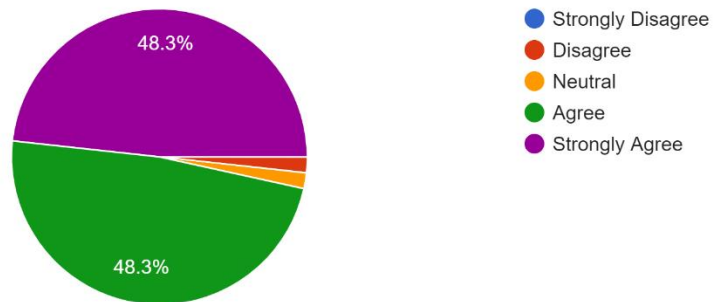
The content of the modules interested me.

57 responses



The lecturers created a supportive and safe learning environment.

58 responses



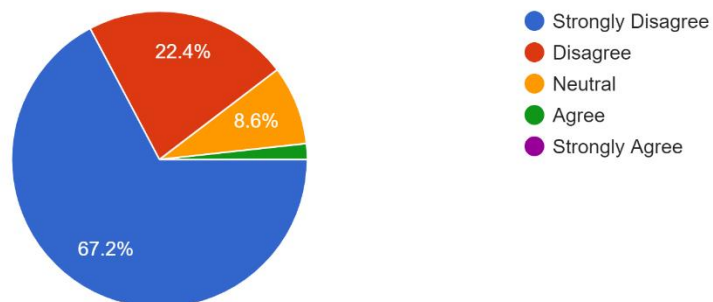
I made great friends and we supported each other through the tough parts of the course.

58 responses



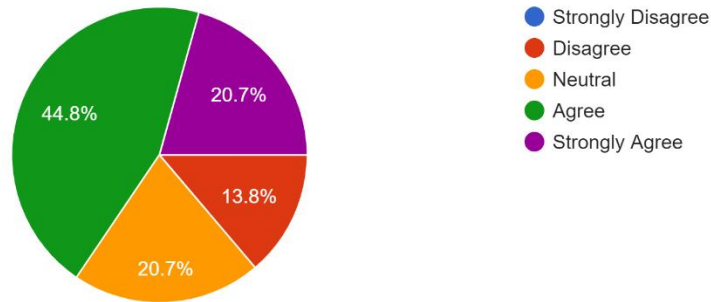
I had no choice but to complete it as my employer was funding my studies.

58 responses



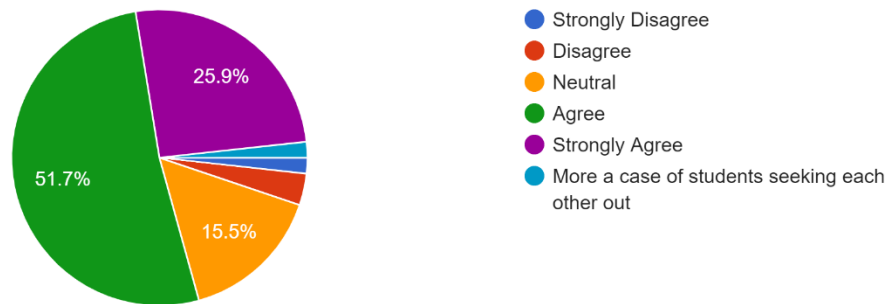
Getting timely feedback on assignments motivated me to perform better in exams.

58 responses



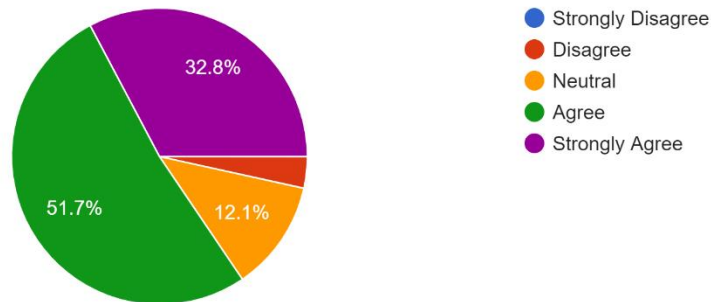
The lecturers provided us with the opportunity to learn from each other as well as from the curriculum.

58 responses



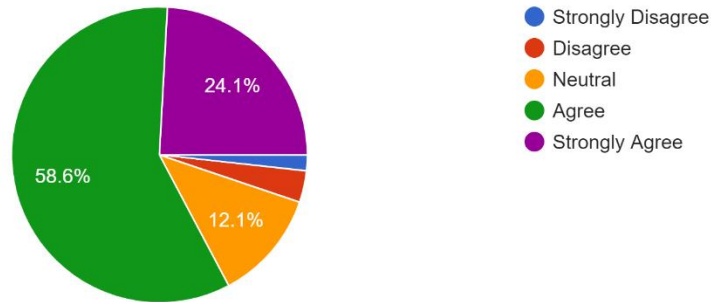
I was able to research areas that interested me in the assignments.

58 responses



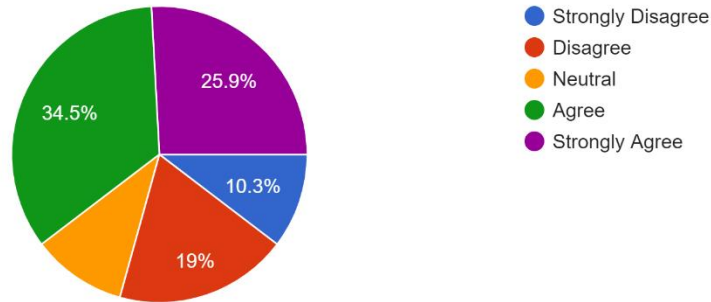
I felt a strong sense of belonging in the group and in the College.

58 responses



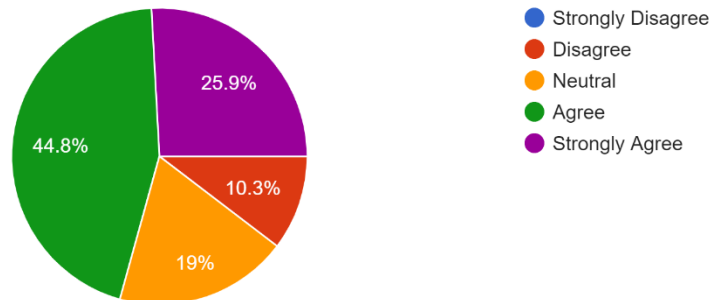
The fear of failure sustained my motivation to complete the course.

58 responses



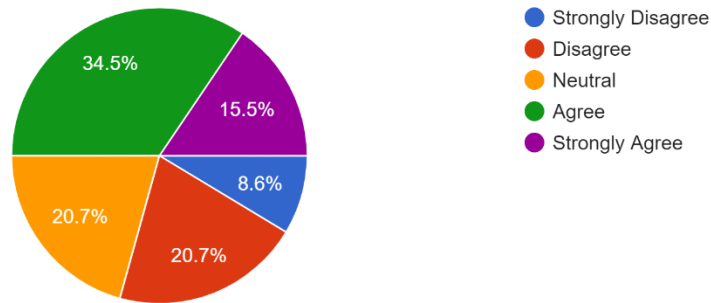
I was able to approach any of the support offices in the College to help me progress and complete my studies.

58 responses



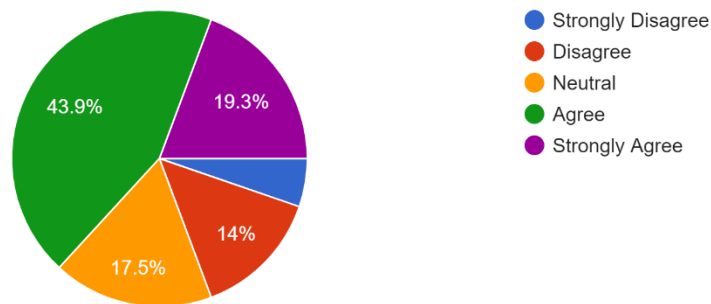
It changed how I was perceived at work, people behaved differently towards me because I was upskilling.

58 responses



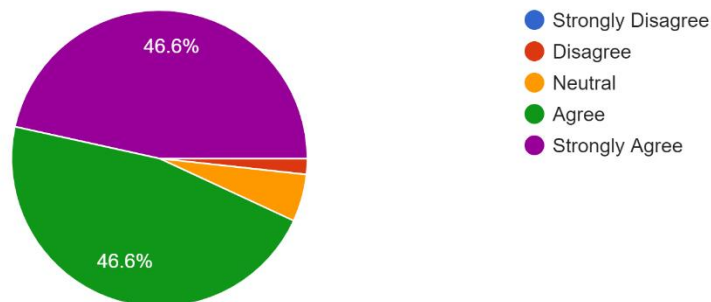
I was viewed in a new light at work and at home and it gave me a new sense of professionalism.

57 responses

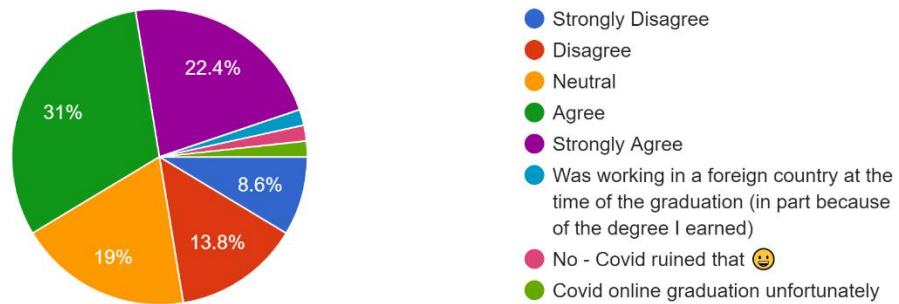


I enjoyed seeing how the new knowledge changed my perspectives.

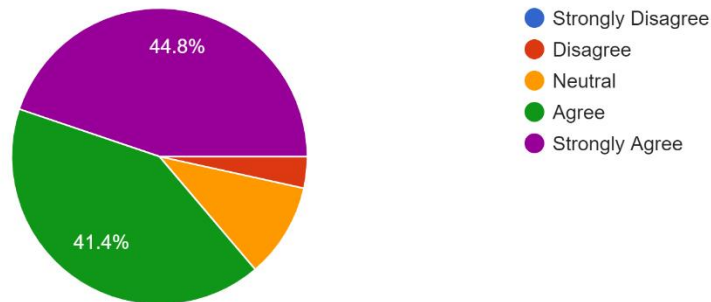
58 responses



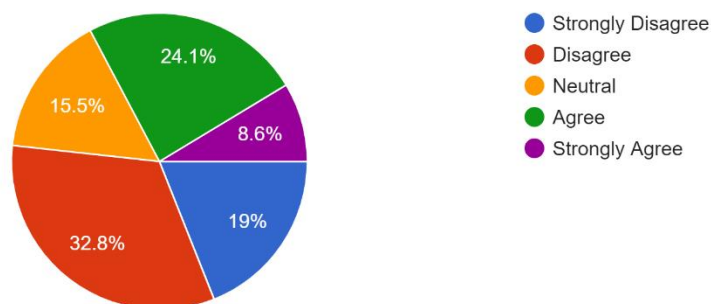
Visualising being surrounded by family and friends at Graduation was highly motivating for me.  
58 responses



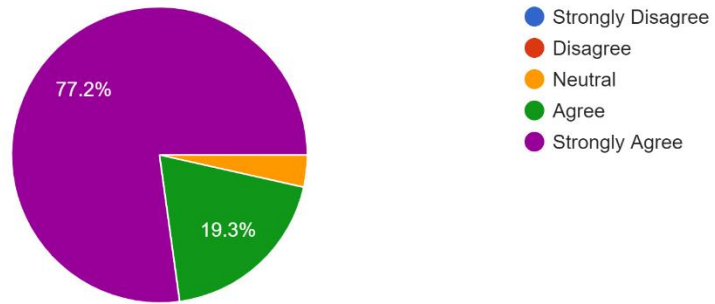
I knew I could approach the lecturers at any time with any problems I had.  
58 responses



I wanted to ensure I wasn't overlooked for promotion again because I didn't have a degree.  
58 responses



I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it.  
57 responses

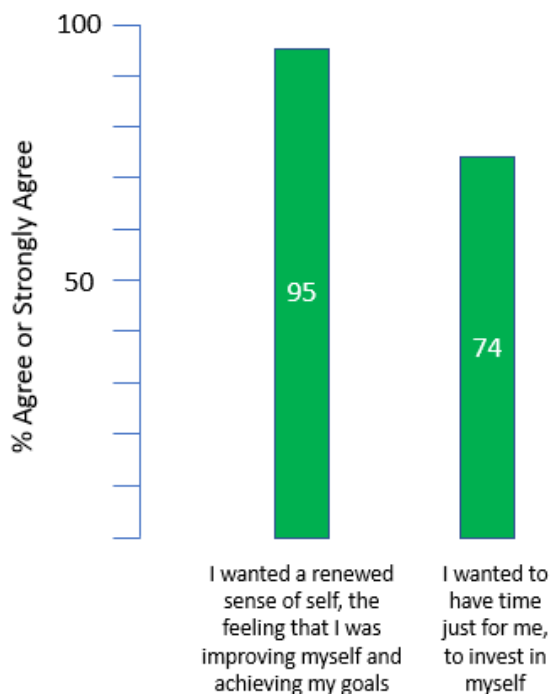


## APPENDIX 6 – Thematic Analysis of Quantitative Findings from Coding Process

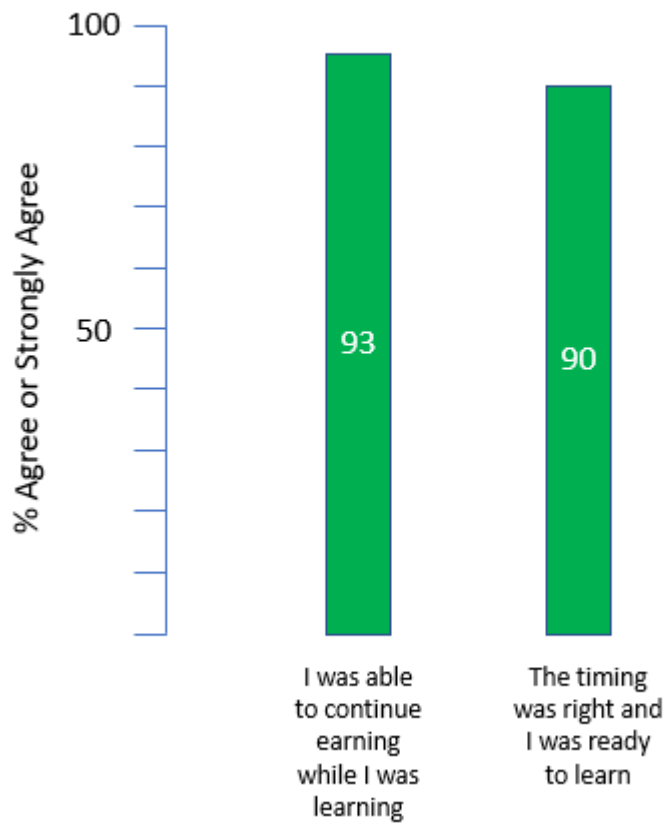
### Research Question 1 - Motivation to Start

MOTIVATION TO START - Questionnaire Statements	STRONGLY AGREE/ AGREE	THEME
I wanted a renewed sense of self, the feeling that I was improving myself and achieving my goals.	95	Self Esteem/ Worthiness
It was an easy process to become a registered mature learner	95	Admissions Process
I was able to continue earning while I was learning	93	Timing
The timing was right and I was ready to learn	90	Timing
I love learning	84	Love of Learning
I wanted to change job and have a better career path	77	Career Change/ Promotion
I wanted to have time just for me, to invest in myself	74	Self Esteem/ Worthiness
I wanted the highest qualification possible for me	67	Career Change/ Promotion
I wanted a pay rise	60	Career Change/ Promotion
The tuition fees were affordable	60	Admissions Process
I wanted a promotion in my role	52	Career Change/ Promotion
I wanted to build on previous qualifications	51	Career Change/ Promotion
I wanted to be a role model for my children/ family	45	Role Model for Family
I was unhappy at work at the time	45	Self Esteem/ Worthiness
I didn't have a positive educational experience when I was younger and I wanted to overcome this setback	41	Self Esteem/ Worthiness
I required new knowledge for my current role	38	Career Change/ Promotion
My education was interrupted in the past and I wanted to finish it	38	Timing
My previous experience and work-based learning was recognised by the College	36	Career Change/ Promotion
I was going through a significant life change and education gave me something to focus on	34	Timing
I didn't get the chance when I was younger	33	Timing
My employer wanted me to upskill	7	Support from employer
I was unemployed at the time and needed to upskill to find work	5	Career Change/ Promotion
I did it because my employer paid the tuition fees	5	Support from employer

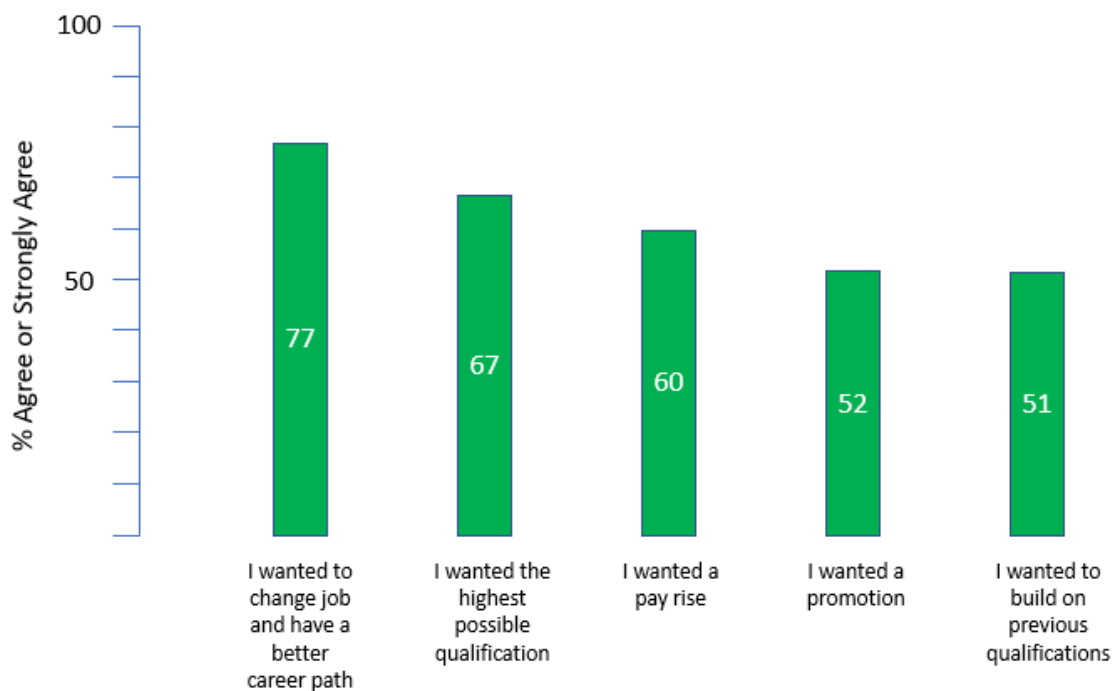
#### MOTIVATION TO START - THEME 1: SELF-ESTEEM/ WORTHINESS



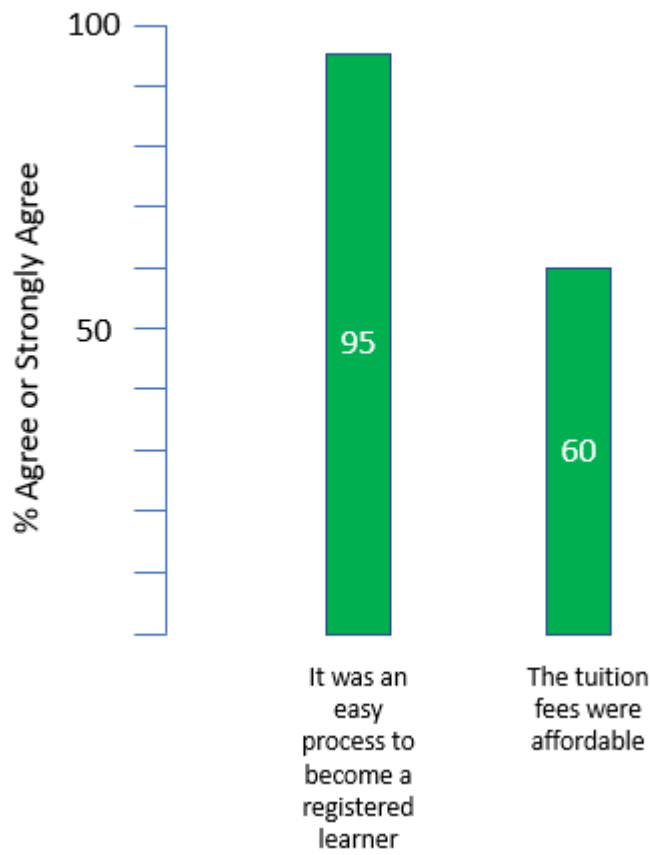
## MOTIVATION TO START - THEME 2: LIFE STAGE/ TIMING



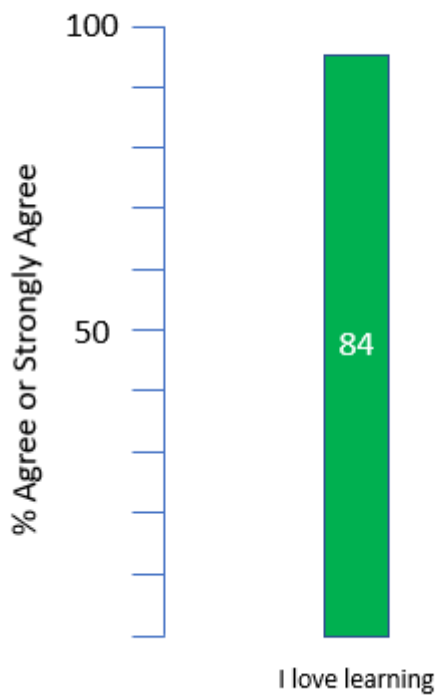
## MOTIVATION TO START - THEME 3: CAREER CHANGE/ PROMOTION



## MOTIVATION TO START - THEME 4: ADMISSIONS PROCESS



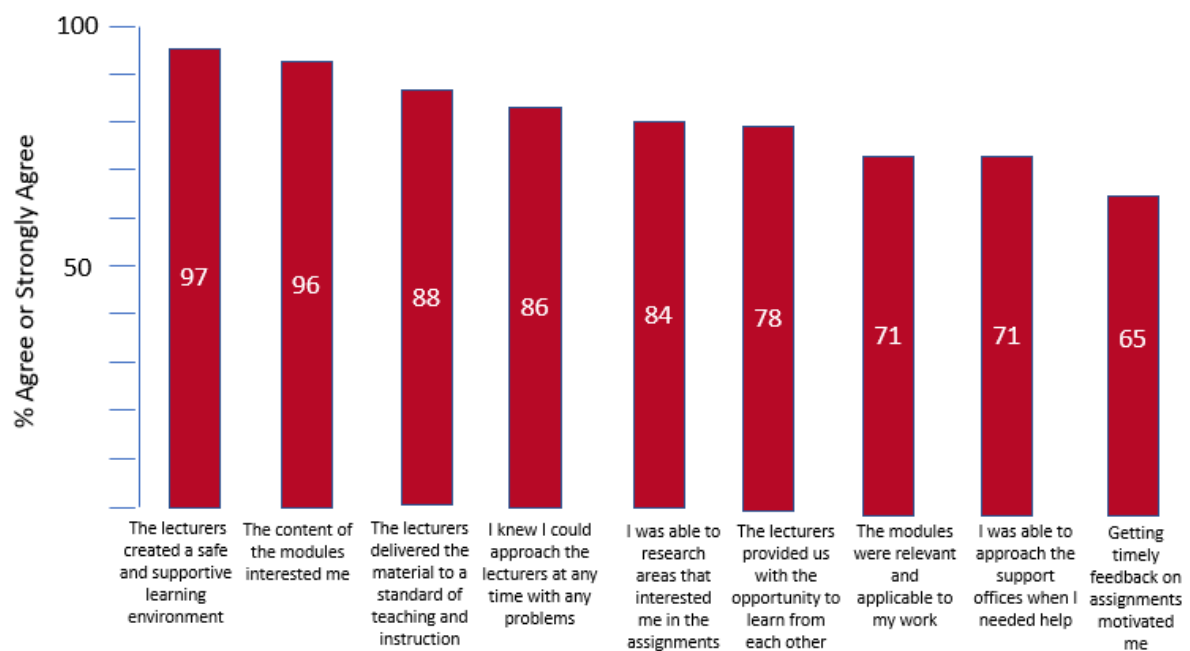
## MOTIVATION TO START - THEME 5: LOVE OF LEARNING



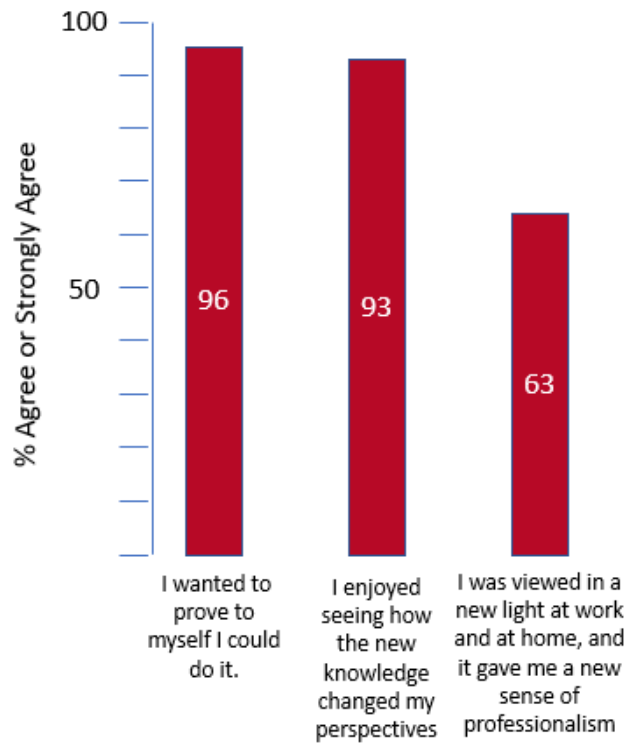
## Research Question 2 - Motivation to Sustain

MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - Questionnaire Statements	STRONGLY AGREE/ AGREE	THEME
The lecturers created a supportive and safe learning environment.	97	Lecturers/ Lecture-Style
I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it.	96	Intrinsic Motivation
The content of the modules interested me.	96	Lecturers/ Lecture-Style
I enjoyed seeing how the new knowledge changed my perspectives.	93	Intrinsic Motivation
The lecturers delivered the material to a high standard of teaching and instruction	88	Lecturers/ Lecture-Style
I knew I could approach the lecturers at any time with any problems I had.	86	Lecturers/ Lecture-Style
I made great friends and we supported each other through the tough parts of the course.	86	Peer Support
I was able to research areas that interested me in the assignments.	84	Lecturers/ Lecture-Style
I felt a strong sense of belonging in the group and in the College.	83	Peer Support
The lecturers provided us with the opportunity to learn from each other as well as from the curriculum.	78	Lecturers/ Lecture-Style
The modules were relevant and applicable to my work.	71	Lecturers/ Lecture-Style
I was able to approach any of the support offices in the College to help me progress and complete my studies.	71	Lecturers/ Lecture-Style
Getting timely feedback on assignments motivated me to perform better in exams.	65	Lecturers/ Lecture-Style
I was viewed in a new light at work and at home and it gave me a new sense of professionalism.	63	Intrinsic Motivation
The fear of failure sustained my motivation to complete the course.	60	Fear of Failure
Visualising being surrounded by family and friends at Graduation was highly motivating for me.	53	Intrinsic Motivation
It changed how I was perceived at work, people behaved differently towards me because I was upskilling.	50	Intrinsic Motivation
I wanted to ensure I wasn't overlooked for promotion again because I didn't have a degree.	33	Intrinsic Motivation
I had no choice but to complete it as my employer was funding my studies.	2	Employer Support

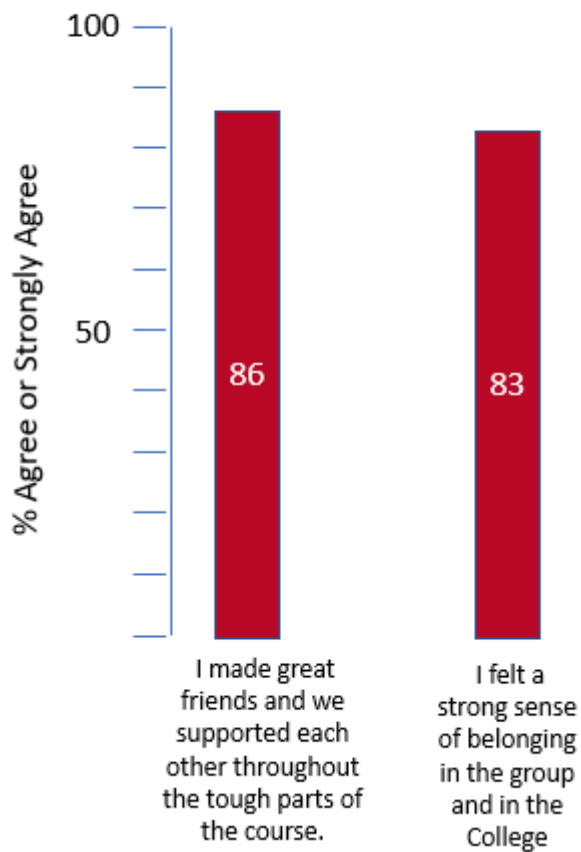
### MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEME 1: LECTURERS/ LECTURE-STYLE



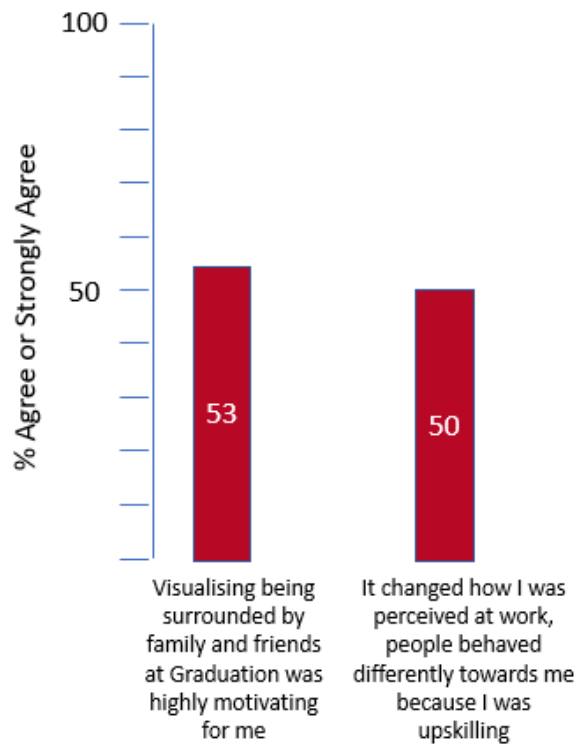
## MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEME 2: INTRINSIC MOTIVATION



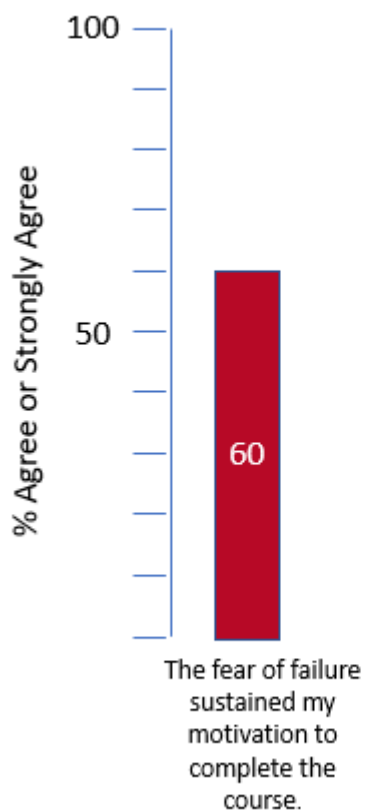
## MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEME 3: PEER SUPPORT



#### MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEME 4: EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION



#### MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEME 5: FEAR OF FAILURE



## APPENDIX 7 – Ethical Approval

### Part 3: Griffith College Ethical Approval Form

This form should be completed by the researcher (with the advice of the research supervisor), for all research which involves human participants.

<b>Research Title</b>	Investigation into the motivation of mature learners to engage and sustain engagement with part-time higher education degree programmes.
<b>Researcher(s)/Learner</b>	Sinéad O’Dea
<b>Supervisor (where relevant)</b>	Mr Peter Gillis
<b>Programme of Study (where relevant)</b>	MA-Education, Learning and Development

#### Checklist:

*Please attach to all forms:*

Summary of Project Proposal (no more than 500 words)	X
Participant Information Sheet	X

*If applicable, application should also include the following:*

Draft Consent Form	X
Draft Research Instrument e.g. survey, interview schedule, focus group questions etc.	X

**To be completed by the supervisor (in the case of a learner application)**


PLEASE TICK ONE

As the supervisor of this research project, I confirm that I believe that all ethical issues relating to research have been dealt with in accordance with the College’s policy on research ethics.

The application requires the attention and approval of the Research Ethics Committee. (In general, forms which answer ‘yes’ to questions 8-13, should be forwarded to the Research Ethics Committee).

Comments: Some care needed around topics that ‘may’ arise in ~~interviews~~ **interviews**.

**Signed (by Supervisor):** Peter Gillis



**Date:** 11<sup>th</sup> February 2022

## APPENDIX 8 – Participant Information Sheets

### 1. Participant Information Sheet – For Survey Participants

Dear Graduate of Griffith College Cork,

My name is Sinéad O’Dea and I am a student in the MA in Education, Learning and Development. As part of my studies I am researching the principle motivations and drivers that led you to register on the part-time degree at Griffith College and the factors that sustained your engagement until completion of the programme.

The findings of this study will be incorporated by Griffith College to develop a more supportive and inclusive learning environment from the perspective of the mature learner studying on a part-time basis.

As part of my research, I am conducting an anonymous survey. No personal data will be collected. I am asking for your help by completing the survey.


If you decide to take part in the study the following will happen:

- I will send you a link to a Google Forms questionnaire.
- There will be a series of questions for you to complete.
- The first part of the survey will be based on the personal and professional motivational factors that led you to become a registered learner at Griffith College.
- The second part of the survey will be based on the motivating factors that sustained your learning during your studies.
- Your survey answers will be recorded by Google Forms where data is stored in a password protected electronic format. Your responses are confidential as Google Forms does not collect identifiable information such as your name, email and/or IP address. The survey data will be deleted within 60 days.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and should take no more than 7-10 minutes to complete. You can refuse to take part or withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason.

At a later date, if you have any concerns about the study or your responses to the survey, you can contact me at [Sinead.odea@griffith.ie](mailto:Sinead.odea@griffith.ie)

Thank you for reading this information sheet.



**Sinéad O’Dea**

## 2. Participant Information Sheet – For Interview Participants

Dear Graduate of Griffith College Cork,

My name is Sinéad O’Dea and I am a student in the MA in Education, Learning and Development. As part of my studies I want to explore the principle motivations and drivers that led you to register on the part-time degree at Griffith College and the factors that sustained your engagement until completion of the programme.

The findings of this study will be incorporated by Griffith College to develop a more supportive and inclusive learning environment from the perspective of the mature learner studying on a part-time basis.

If you decide to take part in the study the following will happen:

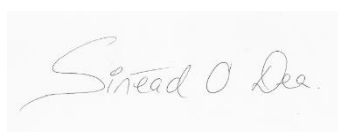
1. I will arrange with you a suitable time to meet and to interview you.
2. All interviews will be recorded on Zoom. The interview will last a maximum of 30 minutes.
3. I will ask questions about personal and professional motivation in relation to education prior to becoming a registered learner and the motivating factors that sustained your learning during your studies.

Then I will listen to the recording and type up what was said. The recordings will be kept safe in a password protected file on my laptop and they will be destroyed 1 year after the project is completed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason.

At a later date if you have any concerns about the study or what you said during our interview, you can contact me at [Sinéad.odea@griffith.ie](mailto:Sinéad.odea@griffith.ie)

Thank you for reading this information sheet.



\_\_\_\_\_  
Sinéad O’Dea

## **APPENDIX 9 – Participant Consent Form – Interview Candidates**

### **Research Topic: Mature Learner Motivation on Part-Time Honours Degree Programmes**

You are invited to take part in a research study on the principle motivations and drivers of mature learners to undertake a part-time honours degree programme and the motivational factors that sustained learner engagement until completion of the degree programme.

#### **Aim and Benefits of this Research:**

This research aims to discover additional educational initiatives and innovations that Griffith College Faculty members can implement in order to enhance and support the learning experience from the perspective of mature learners.

#### **Researcher:**

This research will be conducted by Sinéad O’Dea from Griffith College Cork in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MA in Education, Learning and Development – QQI Level 9 at Griffith College Dublin.

#### **What is required of you:**

Should you agree to participate in this research, you will be required to attend an interview on Zoom. The interview will last 30 minutes.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The data that is collected as part of this research will be treated in the strictest of confidence. Your anonymity will be preserved at all times throughout the research process and will not be identifiable in any version of results submitted for grading or presentation. The interview recordings will be transcribed and analysed. Through a process of open and axial coding, the data will be synthesised into categories and themes, in order to construct the narrative and provide the research findings. There will be no way of identifying your responses in this research process.

#### **Data Storage:**

The Zoom recordings will be safely stored in a password encrypted file on the researcher’s laptop and a back-up file of the recordings will be stored on an encrypted USB memory stick. The researcher will be the only person with access to the data and the recordings will be destroyed within 24 months.

#### **Research Findings:**

Research findings will be submitted to the dissertation examiners and the Examining Board of Griffith College for final grading. The findings will be available to you on request. The final dissertation may be published on the Griffith College dissertations repository.

#### **Risks:**

The possible risks of this research are minor. You may feel uncomfortable answering questions relating to your personal motivations for registering on higher education degree programme.

**Ethics Committee:**

This research study has been approved by the Griffith College Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason.

**Contact Details:**

For any queries on this research, please contact the researcher, Sinéad O’Dea at [Sinéad.odea@griffith.ie](mailto:Sinéad.odea@griffith.ie) or the research supervisor, Mr Peter Gillis at [peter.gillis@griffith.ie](mailto:peter.gillis@griffith.ie)

Please indicate your consent to participate in this research by ticking the boxes and signing the form below:

**Participant Consent Form – to be completed by participant:**

- I have read the information sheet about this research.
- I have received sufficient information about this research and understand what is required of me.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers.
- I agree to participate in a 30-minute interview via Zoom with the researcher.
- I have given permission to the researcher to record the interview on a laptop and I am satisfied that the data will be deleted within 24 months.
- I am satisfied that my data will be treated in strict confidence and safely stored for the duration of the research.
- I understand that the anonymised data I provide will be used for the sole purpose of this research and may be published on the Griffith College dissertations repository.
- I understand that this request is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from this research at any time before the interview takes place and I do not have to give a reason.

**Participant’s signature:**

**Date:**

**Participant’s name in block capitals:**

**Researcher’s signature:**

**Date:**

## **APPENDIX 10 – Semi-structured Interview Questions**

### **PART 1 – MOTIVATION TO START A HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREE PROGRAMME**

1. Can you tell me what you were doing professionally before you decided to register for your degree programme?
2. From a professional point of view, what were the motivating factors that led you to make the decision to commit to a three year, honours degree programme?
3. From a personal point of view, what were the motivating factors that led you to make the decision to commit to a three year, honours degree programme?
4. Did you have doubts about registering on the programme? If yes, could you please explain what they were?
5. Which do you feel had a stronger influence on your decision to register, the personal motivating factors or the professional motivating factors?
6. What do you think the College could have done better to help you with making your decision?

### **PART 2 – MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN AND COMPLETE A HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREE PROGRAMME**

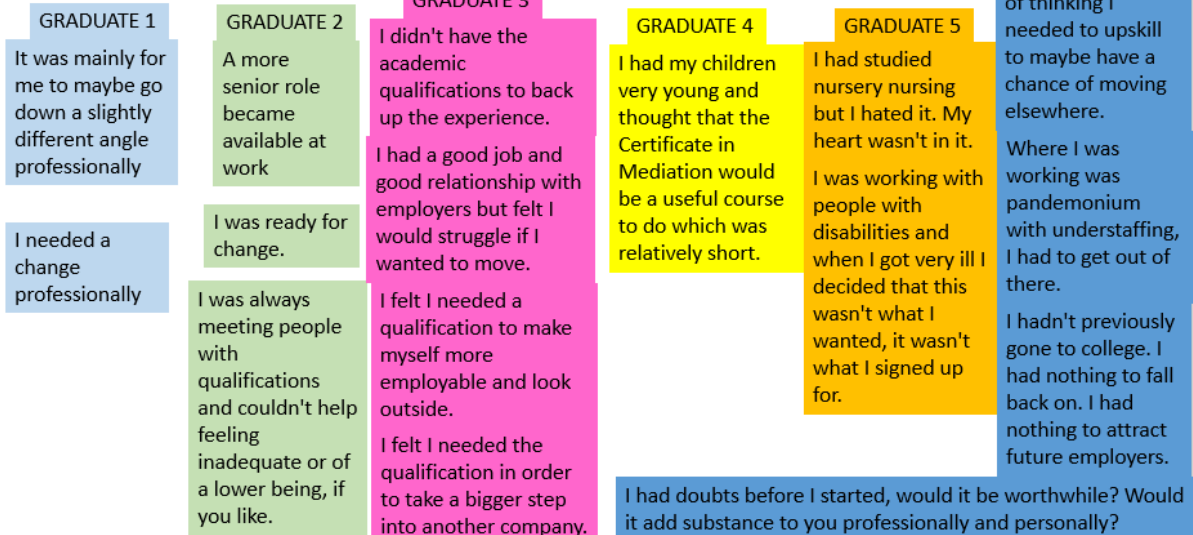
1. Can you tell me how you found the experience of studying the degree?
2. From a professional point of view, what were the motivating factors that helped to sustain your motivation throughout the programme?
3. From a personal point of view, what were the motivating factors that helped to sustain your motivation throughout the programme?
4. Did you face challenges along the way? Can you explain what they were?
5. Which do you feel had a stronger influence on your motivation to keep going and finish the programme, the personal or the professional motivating factors?
6. What do you think the College could have done better to help sustain your motivation during the degree programme?

## APPENDIX 11 – Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Research

### Research Question 1 - Motivation to Start

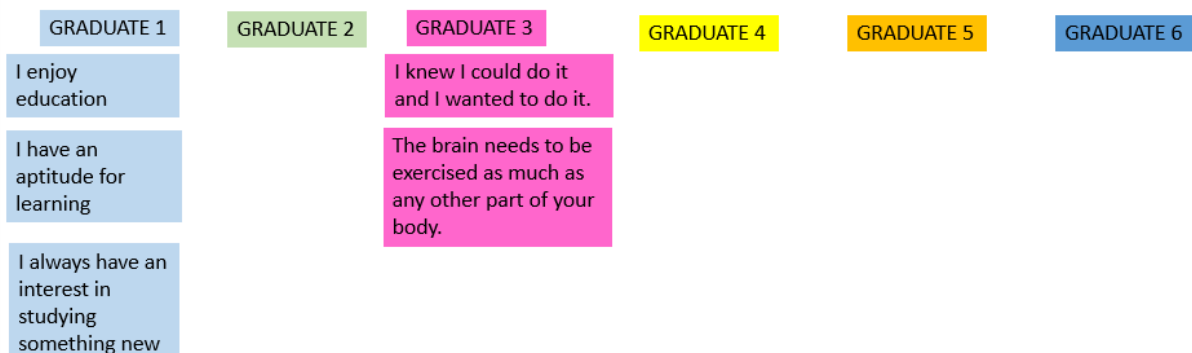
#### MOTIVATION TO START - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

##### CAREER CHANGE/ SEEKING PROMOTION



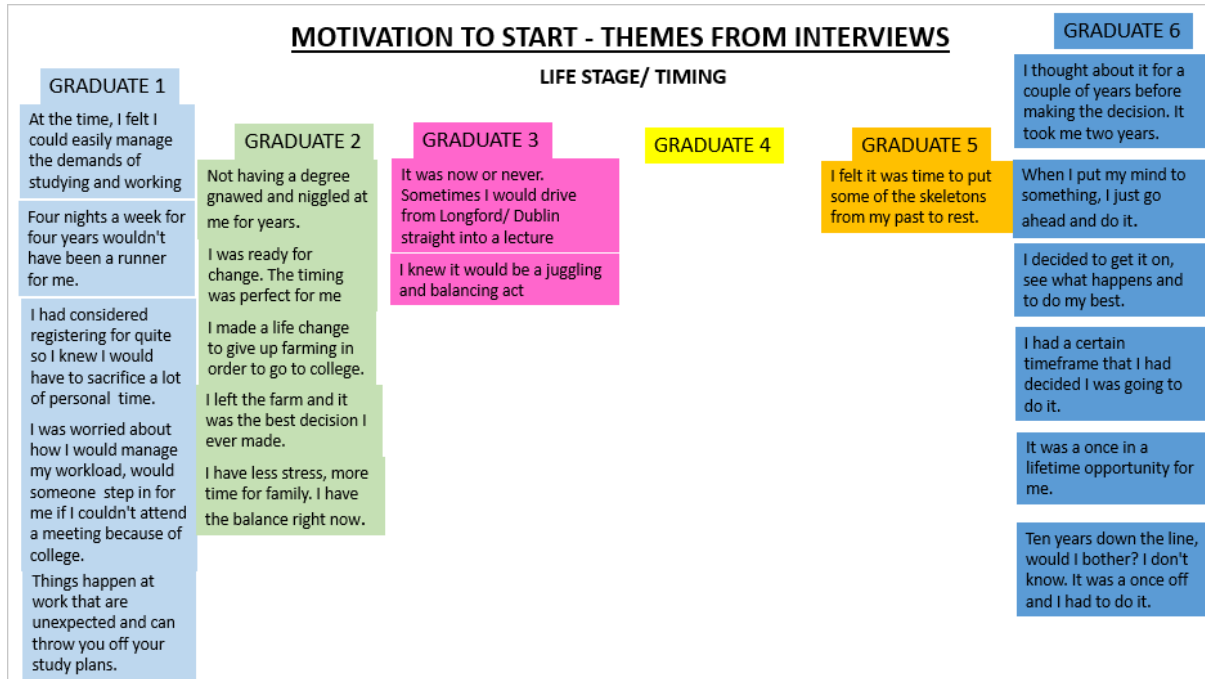
#### MOTIVATION TO START - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

##### LOVE OF LEARNING



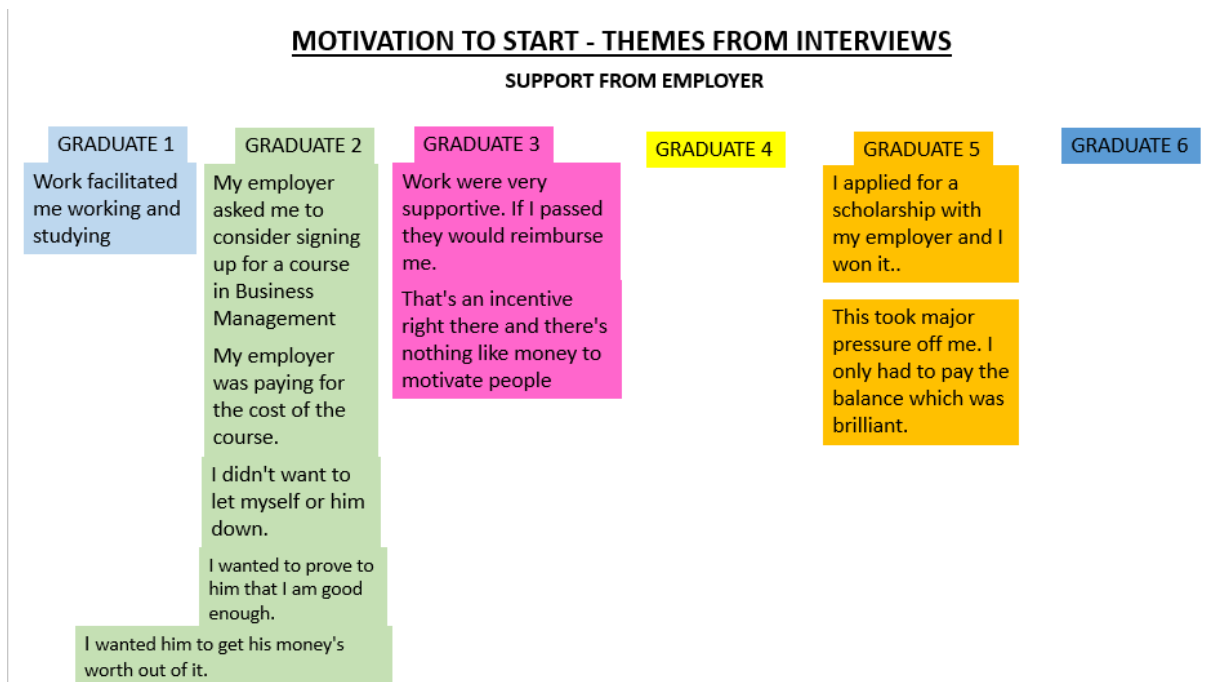
## MOTIVATION TO START - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### LIFE STAGE/ TIMING



## MOTIVATION TO START - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### SUPPORT FROM EMPLOYER



## MOTIVATION TO START - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### SUPPORT/ LACK OF SUPPORT FROM FAMILY/ FRIEND

GRADUATE 1	GRADUATE 2	GRADUATE 3	GRADUATE 4	GRADUATE 5	GRADUATE 6
My partner was working too.	My mother didn't have faith in me going to secondary school.		At the open evening, I was considering mediation but a solicitor friend convinced me I could do law.	My mother was in Marymount Hospice. I can't tell you the amount of emotion that went through me that first night.	I was under no pressure to do it but I had a lot of friends telling me not to do it.
My personal life was stable	There was always a sense of competitiveness with our cousins who lived nearby.		I have friends in the legal profession who said to me "not too many people could do what you did, don't underestimate what you achieved, keeping it together during a divorce hearing".	I felt there was some reason for me to choose Griffith College as it was the place where my mother spent a lot of time when she was ill.	I had people saying to me, why don't you pack it in? Don't bother with it. Aren't you grand as you are?
	My mother said "I knew you would fail" even though I had passed all the subjects in the Leaving Cert.			It felt like a settling of the past, maybe I could let my mother go finally.	A solicitor friend really believed in me. He told me to stop talking about doing it, and just get on with it. He was a massive driving force.
	I wanted to prove her wrong.			When Mum was alive, I always said I would do something with my life.	Mum was a driving factor. I had made a promise to her. She said, if you are happy, stay where you are. If you are not happy, please get out.
				When my mother died, I had to make a choice, either throw myself in after her or actually live my life for her.	

## GRADUATE 1

## MOTIVATION TO START - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### SELF-ESTEEM/ WORTHINESS

GRADUATE 1	GRADUATE 2	GRADUATE 3	GRADUATE 4	GRADUATE 5	GRADUATE 6
I didn't have a degree and my boss didn't feel I was suitable for the job.	I had a hang up with education, I didn't feel I was good enough.	I felt I had left a bit behind and that I was more than capable.	Defending myself in the divorce gave me the confidence that I could perhaps do it.	I remember not telling a lot of people as I didn't want to risk telling them and then failing. I didn't want to make a fool of myself.	It was something I simply wanted to do for myself.
He told me I would have the skillset to be able to deal with more senior professionals in the industry. This upset me.	It's my biggest regret. If only I had pushed myself in secondary school.	I always felt there was more in me and that I could do better than what I was doing.		I didn't know if I would last.	
The role came up again after 15 years with the company and I wasn't approached for the role. I was very disappointed.	I always felt I wasn't cut out for education, I was going to be a farmer.	I was very nervous having never been in a college setting before		I used to think to myself "Oh my God, who am I trying to kid, this is you, you know. You're living in a fantasy bubble.	
He said I didn't have enough qualifications for the role, I didn't have enough credentials.	I thought it wasn't for people like me.	I don't think I could have gone anywhere apart from Griffith College as I would have felt very intimidated.		When I took to a person, I took to a person, especially when they believed in me.	
I didn't have a degree and I felt inadequate	I wanted to prove to my employer I was good enough.	I used to think that college was for other people or that I wouldn't be capable.		I had begun to realise that I had been ignoring myself. I used to put my family first and make sure they were happy. I lost track of myself a bit.	
I was always meeting people with qualifications and couldn't help feeling inadequate or of a lower being, if you like.	I wanted to prove to myself that I was wrong.				
	I'm not as stupid as I think I am and I have the intelligence to get through this degree.				
	I was seriously of the opinion that I wouldn't be able for this.				
	Walking passed Trinity once, I remember thinking I wouldn't be allowed in there.				
	I felt I wasn't good enough or worthy to walk through those doors because I'm not a learning person.				
	I never thought I would be good enough for college education.				

## MOTIVATION TO START - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### ROLE MODEL FOR CHILDREN/ FAMILY

GRADUATE 1

GRADUATE 2

GRADUATE 3

GRADUATE 4

GRADUATE 5

GRADUATE 6

I have three children and I wanted to show them what I could do

## MOTIVATION TO START - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### ADMISSIONS PROCESS

GRADUATE 1

GRADUATE 2

GRADUATE 3

GRADUATE 4

GRADUATE 5

GRADUATE 6

The PD for my course put me at ease straight away at the Open Evening

The PD gave me a bit of confidence to go for it, to go ahead.

I remember how bubbly your emails were to me.

I remember thinking she believes in me, she thinks I can do it.

It meant an awful lot to me when you posted a piece on the Griffith website about me winning the scholarship.

If I had been met with a person that was resistant, I probably would have walked away.

If I am met with any negativity or a big depressive face, chances are I'm not going to go any further. I'll walk back out the door and say that's not for me.

I just needed someone to say listen, it's going to be ok.

You just need that person that gets you to take the first step.

I went to the Open Day, I had read up on the prospectus

I spoke to a few lecturers and I spoke to you.

You just need someone to explain to you this is where we're at, this is how it works.

It just kind of felt right.

I had made the decision and the Open Evening cemented it. .

## MOTIVATION TO START - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### UNEXPECTED LIFE TWIST

GRADUATE 1

GRADUATE 2

GRADUATE 3

GRADUATE 4

GRADUATE 5

GRADUATE 6

I became a Dad at 19 so didn't get the chance to go to college in my twenties.

I had to go to work at 19.

I had my first child very young at 23.

My ex husband and I got divorced

There was no legal aid available for divorce in family in the UK.

I had a choice to make, accept his proposal and walk away with nothing or do it myself.

I represented myself in a 4/ 5 day hearing. I did it all myself and I just kind of thought I could do it.

I got a pulmonary embolism and was very sick.

I found myself in need of legal people because of issues in my life.

My health was deteriorating and I had to get my affairs in order.

I lost my mother at age 17

## Research Question 2 - Motivation to Sustain

### MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

#### INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

GRADUATE 1

GRADUATE 2

GRADUATE 3

GRADUATE 4

GRADUATE 5

GRADUATE 6

I was quite senior in my role.

I had sway, I was valuable to the organisation and was able to control my schedule.

The sense of personal achievement was a big thing for me.

I had to work very hard to get it into my head but I was prepared to do that.

I achieved my goal of a first class honours degree

I have an impressive degree now, many years of experience, a whole new network so maybe I'll look for a new role down the line

Nobody can take it away, it's mine. I did it.

The motivation was extrinsic at the start but it became more intrinsic

I wanted to do the best I could for me.

I'm very self driven

It was really about employability and safeguarding my professional future.

Life came at me in reverse, Dad at 19, first house at 21, so everything after that was self-driven.

In the end, it wasn't about getting the degree, it was about getting the 1:1

I said to myself, there's nothing in this that I can't do or that can stop me from getting a 1:1 and then the head does the rest.

The day I discovered I got a 1:1, I was so overwhelmed

When I started I didn't think for a second that it would have been achievable, it wasn't even in my mindset. Then as it progressed, you get it into your mindset to get it and achieve it. It's incredible stuff!

My friend motivated me at the start but it became more of an internal thing.

My mother was dying in my second year exams

I had to make a decision to go ahead, do the exam and risk that my mother would have passed by the end of the exam.

Once I realised it was possible, and I was capable, I really wanted it.

Once I realised that I could see a path, and I understood the path, I knew I could complete it.

I didn't lack motivation. In fact if someone tried to motivate me, I went the other way. I didn't want the platitudes.

I gained so much confidence, I was able to stand up for myself and know that I was worth something and that I could do it

It gave me a sense of development, fulfilment, ability, strength and power.

I think by letting go, I realised there was a whole world out there that I could actually be a part of.

Taking on something new, You can turn your life around.

I had people saying to me, why don't you pack it in? Don't bother with it. Aren't you grand as you are?

So I had to dig deep and have the grit and determination to never give up.

Once I had decided I wasn't going to not finish it.

You want to do well. If you have a competitive bone in your body, there's always someone you want to beat.

If you like the module, you will do well in it.

## MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### FEAR OF FAILURE/ NEGATIVE OUTCOME

#### GRADUATE 1

#### GRADUATE 2

#### GRADUATE 3

#### GRADUATE 4

#### GRADUATE 5

#### GRADUATE 6

The only pressure I felt was on myself that if I didn't successfully complete, I didn't get reimbursed.

When you think of how long you are working, it was an opportunity cost.

It was a type of paying it forward

I'm investing in myself so others will invest in me because of what I've invested in myself.

You think you are going into a lecture and you're going to be exposed.

What in the name of God is she doing here? She hasn't a clue

There were many moments when I thought, I can't do this, I'm wasting my time, I'm doing it for all the wrong reasons.

The fear of failure was a massive driver.

I remember not telling a lot of people as I didn't want to risk telling them and then failing. I didn't want to make a fool of myself.

Afraid to fail was 100% the motivating factor for me throughout the course.

I had friends that were negative about it.

They wasted three years in college and didn't put in the effort.

I didn't go to college so I had to make sure I wasn't a failure.

## MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### TIME/ TIME MANAGEMENT

#### GRADUATE 1

#### GRADUATE 2

#### GRADUATE 3

#### GRADUATE 4

#### GRADUATE 5

#### GRADUATE 6

Balancing work and study was very challenging.

I did a lot of overtime.

I felt a bit guilty for missing family birthdays because of all the study deadlines.

You just don't have time for everything.

I had to sacrifice my fitness.

I had to work very hard to get it into my head

There were weekends when I didn't see my family.

I would do the accounting questions over and over until I cracked them.

I didn't want to go head-first into the degree so I did the diploma first.

This taught me how to manage time and it gave me exemptions for the degree.

There were days when I would be writing assignments whilst getting up and down to the check the dinner on the hob.

There was a lot of telling the family I couldn't go to certain things.

I broke the time down, it was a bit of a modular thing for me, block by block, by block.

The support and encouragement from my employer was incredible.

The support was there when I needed time off. There was always a lot of encouragement

I'm not a night-time person. As I wasn't working, day-time lectures would have suited me better.

I had one shot at this.

It's very difficult, over the 3 years, it's very difficult.

I had small kids at the time. I used to study on a Sunday night watching the TV and running over the notes

Working by day and studying at night was very difficult.

I had to be very selfish with my time. I was very structured.

Time-framewise, it's only 18 months when you add the semesters together.

I just tipped away at it all the time, always doing my best to stay on top of it all the time.

## MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### LECTURERS/ LECTURER-STYLE

GRADUATE 1	GRADUATE 2	GRADUATE 3	GRADUATE 4	GRADUATE 5	GRADUATE 6
The style of lectures was very motivating for me.		I had a lot of support from the PD. I had health issues and had to defer. The support I got was fantastic.	I remember emailing Sian thinking that I had failed. She said "You're not failing, you're doing really well, calm down."	I had a great relationship with the tutors. It was a friendly professional relationship. It made an awful difference.	My relationship with the lecturers was a massive factor in sustaining my motivation.
		I always felt what I'm getting here is maybe not what I would get anywhere else	The lecturers were really good and supportive.	I was having lots of personal issues and wanted to pull out. Sian sat me down and said, "You can't make a decision like you're about to make right now".	They laid out the semester, you knew where you stood, you knew when things were due and they only an email away if you had a problem or a question.
		I enjoyed the relationships you could have with the lecturers and the staff		Brian took me aside one evening after a lecture and told me not to play it safe in an assignment. I found that so inspiring as I didn't trust myself.	I know from friends in other colleges, a lecturer would never email you back.
		They were there to do a job but you could have a bit of craic along the way too.	The sense of comradery with the PD was so motivating for me. She believed in me and would always say, listen, it's going to be ok.	Vinnie and Paul Pierce also told me to believe in myself.	It was easy for learners to pick up the phone, ask a question, request an extension, there was never a problem.
		You could have the "I haven't a clue what you are on about" conversation very easily.	You need the type of tutor that will take you under their wing and guide you all the way through the module and course.	The lecturers were so good at explaining everything. Things that might seem so simple, they can snowball and be so overwhelming, suddenly I was looking at a boulder.	Everything was laid out clearly, once you had a structure and the assignment due dates, you knew where you stood.
	You could have a conversation with the lecturers literally about anything. I really enjoyed it.				The lecturers were outstanding
					If you needed more support, you asked and you received more support.

## MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### PEER SUPPORT

GRADUATE 1	GRADUATE 2	GRADUATE 3	GRADUATE 4	GRADUATE 5	GRADUATE 6
I had a great rapport with two friends in the class	I made a lot of new friends and met lots of new people			I became great friends with the people in my class.	I knew two of my classmates when I met them on the first night.
	We had a great class, we motivated each other and pushed each other along.			I had a study buddy to work with for the first year exams, we crammed the first year modules and got through to second year.	This broke down barriers straight away. It made it fun.
	If anyone was having difficulty, we would always help that person or that person would help me.			We agreed that we needed to cop on and never do that again. It was great motivation going forward.	The small class sizes meant that you weren't walking into a room with 100 people.
	I didn't expect that we would have gelled together as much as we did.			Peers play a massive role.	Once you got the initial anxiousness over with, it was grand.
Everyone is juggling or sacrificing something so that bonds people together.	The common denominator for mature students is that the struggle is real.			The small class sizes are Griffith's greatest asset. We all got to know each other so well.	You want to do well. It you have a competitive bone in your body, there's always someone you want to beat.
We egged each other on all the time. A degree wasn't enough, it had to be first class honours.	I had a friend in the class who highly motivated me to aim for the top marks.				

## MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### FAMILY SUPPORT

GRADUATE 1	GRADUATE 2	GRADUATE 3	GRADUATE 4	GRADUATE 5	GRADUATE 6
	I wanted to do well for my family.	Family support is critical	My mother was dying at the time of the second year exams.	My son was a huge motivator for me. He used to say to me "If I end up half as strong as the mother I have, I'll be all right in life. I'm happy with that."	It's was a massive commitment from my family over the three years.
	They could see how hard I was working at it and were always egging me on.	There were days when I would be writing assignments whilst getting up and down to the check the dinner on the hob.	I pulled the plug on studying for Kings' Inns as she needed my help and support at the time.		I had small kids at the time and working full-time you could end up in the library on Bank Holiday family days.
		You have to have family support and understanding, if that's not there, you're fighting a losing battle.	All my difficulties were personal, they weren't academic, they were just things happening in my life that I really couldn't avoid.		

## MOTIVATION TO SUSTAIN - THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS

### EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

GRADUATE 1	GRADUATE 2	GRADUATE 3	GRADUATE 4	GRADUATE 5	GRADUATE 6
People admire you for going back to study. I was surprised at how much.	I have three kids and I wanted to show them that I could do it. I wanted them to know that if I could do it, they could too.	The only pressure I felt on myself was that if I didn't successfully complete, I didn't get reimbursed financially.	My friend motivated me at the start but it became more of an internal thing.	There is no greater motivation than someone saying you can't do something.	
You get accolades at work.	My employer was paying for it. If I didn't perform, I'd let myself down and I'd let him down too. I wanted him to get his money's worth out of it.			It was like a red rag to a bull. I will go through you for a short cut to prove I can do it.	
	At the start I wanted to prove to others that I could do it.			When my Mum was dying, I promised her I would do something with my life,	
				My son said to me during the course "if I end up half as strong as the mother I have, I'll be doing all right". That isn't a bad aul legacy to leave behind. I'm happy with that.	

## MOTIVATION - THEMES FROM QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS IN QUESTIONNAIRE

### CAREER CHANGE/ SEEKING PROMOTION

Having a degree is an important factor in advancing my career

To find a relevant placement in the workplace which led me back to college

My overall goal was to become more financially aware and become a qualified chartered accountant

When looking at potential new roles I found the minimum education level had vastly increased from when I qualified

I wanted a qualification that may enable me to work in a different sector

I wanted a qualification that may enable me to work in a different sector

Lifelong ambition to study law

Future proofing my employability. I had to start my career from zero.

I wanted the background in Irish law that the program would provide me.

I knew I wanted a new career path

I wanted to go on and do my Masters with a more specialised focus on my areas of interest, for which I needed to complete this BA degree

## MOTIVATION - THEMES FROM QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS IN QUESTIONNAIRE

### EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Wanted to follow my father's footsteps and get a higher qualification and make my parents dream come true

My boyfriend has a good job as an engineer and meeting him also motivated me to want to go back to college and build a career path for myself and our future together

I was in a relationship with a woman who had 2 masters degrees at the time I enrolled. Her commitment to improving herself and her support and encouragement were the primary reasons I pursued a degree part time and was able to maintain my motivation to complete my studies

Seeing other people my age graduating made me focus on myself more to upskill

My then girlfriend (now wife) was studying dentistry (as a mature student) at the time. Being competitive, I formed the view that if she could qualify as a dentist, I could go into the law.

Knowledge of friends who were chartered accountants at the time I started study. Knowledge of career prospects, salary and benefits that would be applicable once I got chartered accountants qualification.

## MOTIVATION - THEMES FROM QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS IN QUESTIONNAIRE

### INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

It felt like unfinished business

My feeling was that having or not having a degree will play a major role in how my future life will develop and will it be more or less successful

Wanting to upskill and reach my potential was very important to me

When I questioned my choice to return to education and starting a new job to become a role model, inspiration, and motivator for others and indicate that learning and education should never be bound at any age and one can achieve their dreams with bit of hard work.

It's very simple for me - if I start a job I will always endeavour to finish it!

Previous experience with exams had not gone to plan and Griffith provided a great opportunity to rectify that and get back on track and get to the level I always wanted to reach

## MOTIVATION - THEMES FROM QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS IN QUESTIONNAIRE

### SELF-ESTEEM/ WORTHINESS

Self-achievement, a sense of fulfilment. Push yourself believe in yourself that you can achieve this qualification. If you don't challenge yourself you don't change yourself.

A need to find myself again after losing past opportunities and boosting my self esteem in an effort to overcome physical challenges.

Building confidence in my own abilities and believing in myself.

Self improvement and I always had a sense of unfulfilled potential.

Desire to upskill and improve myself.

To prove myself that I can do it.

## MOTIVATION - THEMES FROM QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS IN QUESTIONNAIRE

### TIMING

It was something I've always wanted to do but life kept getting in the way. It was the right time for me to finally do what I want.

It's only a short period of time to commit yourself to education in the long run of your life.