The Progress of Mature Students

Alan Smithers
and
Alice Griffin

The Progress of Mature Students

Alan Smithers and Alice Griffin

Joint Matriculation Board
Manchester M15 6EU

@ Alan Smithers

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Published January 1986
Digitized March 2021

Published by the
Joint Matriculation Board
Manchester M15 6EU

Printed in England for the Joint Matriculation Board
by Advertiser Printing Works, Newport, Shropshire TF10 7AJ

ISBN 0 901628 44 1

CONTENTS

Foreword

Acknowledgements

I. Introduction 1

II. Applicants 4

III. Enquirers Who Did Not Apply 16

IV. Matriculation Process 27

V. Successful and Unsuccessful applicants 33

VI. Reasons for Applying 37

VII. Perceptions of Mature Matriculation 46

VIII. Those Who Did Not Matriculate 53

IX. University Experience 59

X. Outcomes 73

XI. Retrospect 82

XII. Conclusions and Recommendations 88

***References* 95**

***Appendices* 101**

FOREWORD

The Joint Matriculation Board welcomes this study funded by the Leverhulme Trust of its Mature Matriculation Scheme. This scheme has been in operation since 1920 and many people of twenty-one years of age or over without recognised university entrance qualifications have benefited from its provisions.

Professor Alan Smithers and Mrs. Alice Griffin of the University of Manchester's Department of Education, in the report which follows, describe and evaluate the scheme. They have analysed in detail the records held by the Board for applicants in the period 1975-80 and they have followed all those who expressed an interest in the scheme in l980 – the successful as well as the unsuccessful-through the process of trying to obtain a place, attending university, graduating and taking a job. The researchers have been completely independent of the Board and free to make their own judgments. Broadly their conclusions are favourable. They bring out some of the problems of securing mature entry, but show that those who do gain admission tend to do rather better than other students and to comment on their experiences enthusiastically. The Board through its Matriculation Committee has taken note of the findings, and changes have already been made to take account of some of the difficulties which have come to light, for example, by providing fuller information about the content of the mature matriculation examination.

However, although the results are particularly useful to the Board their implications run far wider. The report exemplifies what it is to be a mature student at university - the pains and the pleasures, the problems and accomplishments. The recommendations are an important contribution to the debate on how best to provide for mature students in universities.

In publishing the report, the Board hopes that it will be read with interest by many people. In particular, it hopes that it will stimulate applications to the scheme and that it will encourage admissions officers to consider sympathetically applications from those of mature years, who are very likely to form an increasing proportion of the university student population in the future.

H.B. Rodgers
Chairman of the Board

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to express their gratitude to The Leverhulme Trust for funding the project and to the Joint Matriculation Board for the initial provision of data and continuing support and co-operation.

They are particularly indebted to Mr. F.G. Stewart, Senior Assistant Secretary in charge of University Entrance at the Joint Matriculation Board, for his readiness to advise and assist at all stages of the project. John Dearnaley, senior lecturer in psychology and former JMB representative in the University of Manchester, responded generously to our numerous requests for help. John Hathaway, University of Birmingham and Chairman of the JMB Matriculation Committee, kindly read and commented on a draft of the report, and other members of the committee made a number of very useful suggestions.

Mrs. M.E. Spencer, Mrs. C. Williams and Mrs. J. Collings gave valuable help with the interviewing and Ms. Helen Franklin with the typescript. Especial thanks are due to Peter Wilson at the JMB, who patiently and skilfully saw the report through the numerous and various production stages from typescript to book.

We are very grateful to all those, whether they became mature students or not, who so willingly gave of their time to participate in the study. An earlier version of Chapter III was published in *Studies in Higher Education*.

Alan Smithers
Alice Griffin
January, 1986

I. INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of older people are applying for university places. Some have qualifications which meet the entrance requirements and they are considered in the usual way, but others apply for admission through special entry schemes. These are designed to facilitate the admission of mature students and arouse considerable interest, but, as a particular set of procedures, they also represent something of a barrier to be overcome.

In this report we examine a scheme of entry for candidates ***without formal matriculation qualifications*** into the five universities of the Joint Matriculation Board. The universities – Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham – have operated the scheme since 1920 when 'an examination for persons of mature years' (in fact, over 23) was instituted. The minutes of the JMB, in 1918, show that it was expected to meet the needs of:

> (a) men and women with industrial or commercial experience who desire to increase their knowledge of the theoretical or scientific aspects of their work;
>
> (b) manual workers and others interested in social organisations and
>
> (c) men and women who desire rather late in life to pursue an academic course as members of a university.

The original provisions were not much altered until 1961, since when there have been a number of facilitating amendments, and the age limit has been lowered to 21[1].

Under present arrangements, the entry of mature students into the JMB universities is very much in the hands of admissions tutors and is really quite flexible. It is on their advice that students are matriculated and an entrance examination is not a requirement if the tutor does not think one is necessary, although there is frequently a written element. Usually the mature matriculation examination consists of a general paper common to all candidates within a university together with one or more papers set by the prospective department. The papers are often devised for the particular candidates.

Whether or not a test is set, the JMB is still the agency through which the students are admitted, and its records are therefore the quickest and simplest (and perhaps only) method of identifying people who have expressed an interest in becoming mature students through this Special Scheme. All adults over 21 years of age lacking recognised qualifications who wish to enter one of the five constituent universities of the Joint Matriculation Board must first apply to the JMB for consideration under the provisions for candidates of mature years. Fewer than half those sufficiently interested to enquire actually apply. The research is concerned with those who drop

[1] A booklet, *A University Degree: A Second Chance at 21+*, giving details of the scheme is available on request from the Joint Matriculation Board.

out during each stage of the process, including those who did not follow through with applications, as well as those who matriculate and graduate.

In this study, particular attention has been paid to the cohort approaching the JMB in the application year[2] ending 31 March, 1980. In that year, 1208 people asked for application forms and 502 actually submitted them. Of these, 187 matriculated, 174 entered JMB universities and 151 were awarded degrees. All 1208 were asked to complete a questionnaire appropriate to their circumstances and a one-in-five sub-sample of applicants was interviewed[3]. In addition, application forms received by the Board in the years 1975-80 have been analysed.

During this period, 2,641[4] applications were received of which 482 came from candidates normally resident abroad. For technical reasons these had to be left to one side making an effective sample of 2,159.

A description of the applicants derived from the forms in terms of their educational aspirations, and their geographical, personal, educational, social and economic backgrounds is given in Chapter II. Those who enquired but did not apply are considered in Chapter III where they are compared with the applicants, and an account is given of their reasons for not applying and what alternative arrangements they made. In Chapter IV the flow of the 2,159 applicants through the matriculation process is followed and the outcomes enumerated. Comparisons are made between the universities and across the different subject areas. In Chapter V, by comparing those accepted on interview only, those who passed the exams, those who failed the exams, and those rejected at the interview stage, an attempt is made to discern some of the characteristics of the successful applicant.

In the next chapters, we turn to the 1980 cohort and from the questionnaires and interviews we give an account of why they applied (Chapter VI), their views on the mature matriculation process (Chapter VII), what happened to those who did not matriculate (Chapter VIII), and the perceptions of university experience of those who did take up places (Chapter IX).

Chapter X looks at outcomes. It presents the degree results of the 1980 and 1975-80 cohorts. Degree results are analysed in comparison with other students in the same courses by type of degree, university and age. Measures derived from the application forms are examined in relation to degree result to see which, if any, are indicative of success. The career destinations of mature entry graduates are explored to see how they compare with those of other graduates. In Chapter XI the graduates look back

[2] Applications for mature matriculation are considered by the JMB only during the period 1 November to 31 March. Mature matriculation examinations are held at the end of May and successful candidates normally enter university in the October.

[3] See Appendices C and D for examples of the questionnaires and interview schedules.

[4] During the years 1975-80 candidates in colleges of education under the aegis of the five universities involved in the study could proceed to B.Ed. degree courses by passing special B.Ed. matriculation examinations offered in those colleges. These candidates are not included in the present analysis. The last special B.Ed. examination was held in 1980.

on their courses and report how they see themselves as having been influenced in terms of personal and family life, outlook and lifestyle, and employment opportunities. Finally, in Chapter XII, we draw the various threads together, and present our conclusions and recommendations.

II. APPLICANTS

In this chapter we look at the people who applied for a place as a mature unqualified student at one of the JMB universities in the period 1 November, 1974 to 31 March, 1980 with a view to gaining admission in the academic years beginning October 1975-October 1980. By analysing the data provided on the application forms we attempt to describe the applicants in terms of their educational aspirations and their geographical, personal, educational, social and economic backgrounds.

During the period under review the number of applications rose from 208 in 1975 to 502 in 1980 though not at a uniformly accelerating rate. Table 2.1 gives the numbers year by year.

Table 2.1: Applications by Year

Year	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
N	208	241	317	384	507	502

Since 1980, there has been about a ten per cent increase overall in applications, but again not a steady one, with the peak so far being reached in 1982, and applications in 1983 falling back to the 1980 level.

These fluctuations are in accord with national trends (Roderick *et al*, 1981). It appears that since 1979 the general economic climate has made those in employment somewhat less inclined to take on the burdens of becoming students. Not only has financial assistance become harder to obtain, but the tightening up of job opportunities has made it more of a gamble to give up a secure job in the hope of a better one on graduating. Nevertheless, since 1975 the proportional increase in demand for places through the Special Scheme has outstripped both that of school-leavers and qualified mature applicants.[5]

Institutions and Courses

Most of the applicants lived close to the university of their choice. As Table 2.2 shows, Birmingham received nearly four-fifths of its applications from the Midlands, and Liverpool and Manchester, over three-quarters from the North West. Sheffield appeared to spread its net widest, but still received most of its applications from within relatively easy commuting distance.

Nearly 80 per cent (1,712) of the applications were for B.A. or B.Sc. degree courses. Some 20 per cent (442) were for BEd courses[6] in the affiliated colleges. But only five applications were to study for Master's degrees.

[5] Approaching ten per cent of those satisfying normal requirements are 21+ on entry and can be classed as mature students. In 1984, for example, of the 15,886 intending students registered by the Board as qualified for matriculation on the basis of GCE and other examinations, 1349 were over 21 years of age. In that year, 229 became eligible through the Special Scheme.

[6] This is in addition to the 3272 candidates in colleges of education who took the special B.Ed. examination.

Table 2.2: Place of Residence

University	N	Per Cent							
		Scotland	Wales	NW	NE	Midlands	East	SW	SE
Manchester	765	0.9	2.4	75.4	4.3	5.2	0.9	2.2	8.6
Liverpool	338	0.6	5.3	75.7	5.0	4.1	0.6	0.9	7.7
Leeds	330	2.4	0.3	8.5	63.6	9.1	1.8	3.0	11.1
Sheffield	354	0.6	1.4	8.2	56.2	9.9	3.1	5.1	15.5
Birmingham	372	1.1	1.1	2.2	3.5	77.7	1.3	3.0	10.2
Total	2159	1.1	2.1	41.6	21.9	18.9	1.4	2.7	10.3

Table 2.3 shows that, although the number of Special scheme applications to the JMB universities themselves rose from 203 in 1975 to 375 in 1980, as a proportion, it declined due to the increasing availability of courses in the affiliated colleges[7]. At the beginning of the period being considered, nearly all the applicants were to the universities, but by 1980 this had fallen to about three-quarters of the total. Applications to the colleges of education increased from 5 (2.4%) in 1975 to 95 (18.7%) in 1979, their peak year. Degree courses in the associated colleges of higher education attracted only a modest number of applicants in the early years, but advanced to ten per cent of the total in 1979.

Table 2.3: Universities and Affiliated Colleges

Year	N	Per Cent		
		University	Colleges of Education	Colleges of Higher Education
1975	208	97.6	2.4	0.0
1976	241	83.8	12.0	4.2
1977	317	82.3	14.5	3.2
1978	384	78.4	18.0	3.6
1979	507	71.0	18.7	10.3
1980	502	74.7	18.3	7.0
Total	2159	78.8	15.6	5.6

Applications were received for over seventy different courses. These have been conflated into nine subject areas. The types of course included under each heading are shown in Table 2.4.

[7] Each of the JMB universities, except Sheffield, has affiliated colleges, the degrees of which it validates. Manchester has three, North Cheshire College, De La Salle College and Bolton College of Education; Liverpool has three, Chester, S. Katharine's and Christ & Notre Dame Colleges; Leeds has four, Bretton Hall, North Riding, Trinity & All Saints and Ripon & York St. John Colleges; and Birmingham has two, Westhill and Newman Colleges.

Table 2.4: Subject Areas

Subject Area	Type of Course
Education	education (BEd); audiology; speech therapy; home economics.
Technology	mechanical, aeronautical and electrical engineering; biochemistry; management science; textile design; metallurgy,
Economics and Social Studies	commercial and social science; sociology; public service; economics and social studies; social and environmental studies; communications; politics; international studies; accountancy.
Arts	Near Eastern studies; liberal studies; philosophy; history; drama; geography; general arts; modern languages; architecture; theology; American studies; fine arts; English.
Law	law.
Music	music.
Science	mathematics; computer science; zoology; psychology; geology.
Medicine	medicine; dentistry; ophthalmic; optics.
Combined Arts and Science	combined arts and science.

Table 2.5 shows that Arts, and Economic and Social Studies, were the most popular fields for Special scheme applicants, and consistently so from year to year. Education, which attracted only five per cent of applications in 1975, grew rapidly so that by 1977 it was second only to Arts, but since then, seemingly associated with the reduction in demand for teachers, it has fallen somewhat. Nevertheless, between them Arts, Economics and Social Studies, and Education accounted for some 70 per cent of all applications. Manchester, with its popular affiliated colleges, received fifty-five per cent of Education applications and, as Table 2.6 shows, in this university, the field shared first place with Arts.

Table 2.5: Courses by Year

Year	N	Per Cent								
		Educ.*	Tech.	Econ. And Soc. St.	Arts	Law	Music	Science	Medicine	Comb. Arts and Science
1975	208	4.8	1.4	29.3	31.3	12.0	0.5	13.0	7.2	0.5
1976	241	14.9	3.7	22.8	24.1	10.4	2.5	15.8	5.0	0.8
1977	317	21.8	2.5	19.2	25.6	11.0	1.3	14.5	2.8	1.3
1978	384	20.0	3.1	24.2	30.5	8.9	0.5	8.1	3.9	0.8
1979	507	17.5	2.2	24.1	31.7	8.5	0.8	10.6	2.6	2.0
1980	502	17.9	4.6	31.1	23.5	7.2	0.4	10.1	3.6	1.6
Total	2159	17.2	3.1	25.4	27.8	9.2	0.9	11.4	3.8	1.3

* Applicants for colleges of education who stipulated a definite subject have been allocated accordingly.

In other universities, either Arts, or Economics and Social Studies, came out top. At Sheffield and Liverpool, Economics and Social Studies seem to have been in demand, while at Leeds and Birmingham it was Arts which attracted most applicants. However, this is to consider only proportions.

Table 2.6: Field and University

University	N	Per Cent								
		Educ.	Tech.	Econ. And Soc. St.	Arts	Law	Music	Science	Medicine	Comb. Arts and Science
Manchester	765	26.8	3.1	17.4	26.8	5.8	1.3	12.7	3.9	2.2
Liverpool	338	12.1	4.1	34.3	24.6	10.6	0.0	11.8	1.2	1.2
Leeds	330	16.7	2.1	23.0	34.6	11.8	1.8	8.5	1.2	0.3
Sheffield	354	1.4	3.1	43.5	22.9	9.0	0.3	14.1	5.1	0.6
Birmingham	372	17.5	2.7	18.6	31.5	12.6	0.5	8.6	7.0	1.1
Total	2159	17.2	3.1	25.4	27.8	9.2	0.9	11.4	3.8	1.3

Even with Education excluded, Manchester still received the highest number of applications, and this was true of all fields except Economics and Social Studies where Sheffield attracted more, and Law where Birmingham was the most popular. Compared with the other universities Sheffield, which does not have affiliated colleges or offer a BEd, received only a small number of applicants in the general area of Education as we have defined it.

Characteristics of Applicants

There can be no simple or general picture of 'a mature applicant.' In the period under review, as Table 2.7 shows, ages ranged from 19 to 71, but almost a half were under 30, and a further 38 per cent were under 40 years.

Table 2.7: Age

Age	≤24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60≥	Total
N	434	630	525	296	145	71	28	17	13	2159
%	20.1	29.2	24.3	13.7	6.7	3.3	1.3	0.8	0.6	100.0

Overall, rather more than half (57.8%) were male (see Table 2.8), but the ratio changed from about twice as many males as females in 1975 to near parity in 1980.

Table 2.8: Gender

Year	N	Per Cent	
		Female	Male
1975	208	35.1	64.9
1976	241	34.4	65.6
1977	317	40.7	59.3
1978	384	39.8	60.2
1979	507	44.8	55.2
1980	502	49.2	50.8
Total	2159	42.2	57.8

Applications from women to the Special Scheme increased threefold during the period under consideration-compared with a 47.9 per cent increase via conventional routes.

Table 2.9 shows that just over a half (51.3%) were married, and about one in twenty was divorced or separated (5.2%) or widowed (0.8%). The proportion of married to single applicants fluctuated over the years, but there has been a continuing increase in the percentage of applicants who were divorced, separated or widowed.

Table 2.9: Marital Status

Year	N	Per Cent		
		Married	Single	Divorced, Separated or Widowed
1975	208	39.3	55.9	4.8
1976	241	52.7	42.7	4.6
1977	317	61.8	33.8	4.4
1978	384	49.0	45.3	5.7
1979	505*	51.7	41.0	7.3
1980	502	50.2	42.6	7.2
Total	2157	51.3	42.7	6.0

* 2 missing cases

Rather more than half the applicants (56.8%) had no children, about a third (31.6%) had one or two, and one per cent, five or more. (Two had nine children and three had eight.) The children's ages ranged from less than one year to 34, but nearly half were in the range five to ten years (46.4%).

Table 2.10: Gender and Field of Study

Field of study	N	Per Cent	
		Female	Male
Education	371	70.1	29.9
Technology	66	9.1	90.9
Econ & Soc. St.	548	35.0	65.0
Arts	600	42.8	57.2
Law	198	25.8	74.2
Music	19	21.1	78.9
Science	247	35.5	61.5
Medicine	82	39.0	61.0
Comb A & S	28	53.6	46.4
Total	2159	42.2	57.8

Part of the changing gender ratio in the period 1975 to 1980 can be accounted for in terms of the increase in the number of Education applicants. Table 2.10 shows that in

this field females outnumbered males by more than two to one. The Education applicants were also the most likely to be married (67.1%) and, on average, at 32.6 years, they were nearly two years older than the average for other fields. Technology applicants provide the contrast. They were mainly male, about half were married and they were, on average, nearly four and a half years younger than the Education applicants. Of the larger groups, Arts had proportionally the most female applicants. It also had the smallest percentage of married applicants (41.2%) and the largest percentage of those divorced, separated or widowed (7.5%). The ratio of females to males applying for Law was 1:3 and for Medicine 2:3. Medicine attracted a relatively high proportion of young (average age 28 years) single (55%) applicants.

The increase in the proportion of female to male students in the last fifteen years has been striking. Tapper and Chamberlain (1970) found, in the University of Sussex, for example, that the percentages of mature female and male students in 1970 were 21 and 79 respectively as against those for school-leaver entrants of 35 per cent and 65 per cent. The authors' comments now sound distinctly old-fashioned-almost from another era:

> The difficulties older women face mitigate [*sic*] strongly against their chances of returning to university - their class background, and the fact that they are quite likely to be married and perhaps have children. Social mores erect formidable barriers against the entrance of unmarried female students; it is much easier for older men to interact with younger women than vice-versa.

The proportion of mature students who are single is high compared to that in the general population, which suggests that the idea of taking a full-time degree course is more attractive to those without the responsibilities of marriage. Hopper and Osborn (1975), analysing data for 1970-71, found that, at that time, just over a half (50.9%) their sample of mature students in the social science or arts faculties of three universities and a polytechnic were single, 48.8 per cent were married and 5.3 per cent were divorced, separated or widowed. Ten years later, taking the period l975 to 1980 as a whole, the proportions among the JMB Scheme applicants were similar. Again the single made up about half the sample, with the proportion of divorced, separated or widowed (6.0%) being slightly higher.

Educational Background

The school background of the applicants reflected, to some extent, the changing structure of English secondary education, albeit with a considerable delay. Table 2.11 shows that, in 1980, there was, for the first time, a noticeable decrease in the proportion of applicants from secondary modern schools. Applications from grammar, and independent schools, had begun to decline around 1978, while those from comprehensive schools had shown a corresponding increase.

A change in the application form probably accounts for much of the apparently dramatic rise in 'overseas educated' in 1980. Prior to that year there had been three types of form A, B and C: 'A' for applicants educated and living in the United

Kingdom; ‘B’ for applicants educated wholly or partly overseas but living, at the time of the application, in the United Kingdom; and ‘C’ for applicants educated and living overseas. Applications on forms B and C were not included in the analysis. However, since 1980 a common form has been used and the new criterion adopted for inclusion in the study was an address within the United Kingdom.

Table 2.11: Last School Attended

Year	N	Per Cent					
		Sec Mod	Comp	Grammar	Technical	Independent	Overseas
1975	208	4.8	1.4	0.5	13.0	7.2	0.5
1976	241	14.9	3.7	2.5	15.8	5.0	0.8
1977	317	21.8	2.5	1.3	14.5	2.8	1.3
1978	383	20.0	3.1	0.5	8.1	3.9	0.8
1979	506	17.5	2.2	0.8	10.6	2.6	2.0
1980	502	17.9	4.6	0.4	10.1	3.6	1.6
Total	2157*	17.2	3.1	0.9	11.4	3.8	1.3

* 2 missing cases.

The mean age of leaving school, 16.4 years, remained fairly constant from year to year during the period studied, but this concealed wide variations in the ages at which applicants left school. Table 2.12 shows that two of the older mature candidates, both educated in Eire, indicated that they had left school at 13 years of age. Seventy-four reported leaving at 14 and 425 at 15 when those were the minimum school-leaving ages. In contrast, 188 reported being over 19 when they left school.

Table 2.12: Age Leaving School

Age	13	14	15	16	17	18	19+	Total
N	2	74	425	750	508	277	188	2155*
%	0.1	3.4	19.7	34.8	23.6	12.9	5.5	100.0

* 4 missing cases.

Leaving school early, however, did not mean the end of formal education. The great majority of applicants (84.4%) indicated that they had taken part in some form of further education. For about three per cent this was no more than evening classes at an adult education centre. But 53 per cent, as Table 2.13 shows, had attended full-time, perhaps just for short periods, at either a college of further or higher education. A great range of courses was involved. Some were vocational, for example, shorthand typing, hairdressing, engineering, business studies, and others were academic such as traditional ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels. There were also courses like archaeology and drama, mainly taken out of interest rather than for a qualification.

The effects of secondary re-organisation become even more apparent when a wider time span is considered. Tapper and Chamberlain (1970) had no students from comprehensive schools in their sample. Hopper and Osborn’s (1975) 1970-71 sample contained 3.6 per cent from comprehensive schools, 48.2 per cent from grammar

schools, and a mere 17 per cent from secondary modern schools. Among the applicants for entry through the JMB Scheme there was a smaller percentage from grammar schools and a correspondingly larger percentage from secondary modern schools than in any of the other studies. Nevertheless, even in 1980, unqualified mature entrants were more academically educated than the population as a whole.

Table 2.13: Education Beyond School

Year	N	Per Cent		
		Full Time	Part Time	None
1975	208	57.7	28.9	13.4
1976	241	54.8	28.2	17.0
1977	317	54.9	29.3	15.8
1978	381	57.7	30.2	12.1
1979	506	49.0	32.6	18.4
1980	502	50.6	34.3	15.1
Total	2155*	53.2	31.2	15.6

* 4 missing cases.

There also seems to be a difference between universities and polytechnics. Roderick and Bell (1981) found that, of the mature entrants to Sheffield University and Sheffield Polytechnic in 1977 and 1978, 47 per cent of the university entrants came from grammar schools as compared with 40 per cent of those going to the polytechnic, with the situation reversed for secondary modern and comprehensive schools-31 per cent as against 42 per cent.

Nisbet and Welsh (1972) and Roderick *et al,* (1982) report that 66 per cent and 74 per cent respectively of their samples of mature entrants had undertaken courses of study after leaving school. These figures are both based on 'all' mature students, that is, including students who had 'A' level entry qualifications. The percentage for JMB applicants via the Special Scheme is rather higher than this at 84.4 per cent, probably because, for those without 'A' level qualifications, post-school courses are part of the mature students' necessary evidence of interest in higher education.

Qualifications

As Table 2.14 shows, more than half the applicants had fewer than five 'O' levels, and about one in five had none at all. In contrast, about one in twenty was very highly qualified at this level.

Table 2.14: 'O' level Qualifications

'O' Levels	0	1 or 2	3 or 4	5 or 6	7 or 8	9+	Total
N	398	342	493	538	293	88	2152*
%	18.5	15.9	22.9	25.0	13.6	4.1	100.0

* 7 missing cases

As would be expected, relatively few of the applicants had any 'A' level passes (Table 2.15). Since the JMB Scheme is for mature *unqualified* entrants it may be wondered why any should have two or more. However, not all 'A' levels are acceptable for JMB matriculation, and the 53 applicants with two or more 'A' levels either lacked recognised ones, or the necessary 'O' levels, or did not meet the requirement of an approved test in English or General Studies.

Table 2.15: 'A' level Qualifications

'A' Levels	0	1	2	3	Total
N	1694	405	47	6	2152*
%	78.7	18.8	2.2	0.3	100

* 7 missing cases.

Some of the applicants were taking GCE courses when they applied. About 16 per cent were studying 'O' levels, usually one or two, but more than twice as many (36.6%) were engaged in 'A' level courses, with 16.7 per cent taking one, 14.3 per cent two, and 5.6 per cent three or more. In addition, nearly half the applicants had taken some examinations connected with work or interests. These varied from examinations in office and craft skills to professional examinations such as those for technicians, nurses, police and army. Some four per cent offered passes in Open University courses.

Table 2.16: Qualifications and Subject Area

Subject area	Examinations Passed			
	'O' Levels		'A' Levels	
	N	Mean	N	Mean
Education	371	4.5	370	0.2
Technology	65	2.8	65	0.1
Econ & Soc St	547	3.5	547	0.2
Arts	598	3.9	598	0.3
Law	198	3.6	198	0.3
Music	19	3.1	19	0.3
Science	245	3.5	245	0.2
Medicine	81	4.3	82	0.2
Comb A & S	28	3.7	28	0.3
Total	2152*	3.8	2152*	0.2

* 7 missing cases.

Table 2.16 shows that applicants for Education and Medicine were the best qualified at 'O' level. Applicants for Medicine were also, on the whole, taking more 'A' level courses, and nearly 60 per cent offered vocational qualifications. Those applying for Technology courses were least qualified at 'O' and 'A' level and were below average in the number of 'O' and 'A' level courses embarked on. Over 59 per cent, however, offered vocational qualifications. Arts and Combined Arts and Science applicants

offered the fewest vocational examination passes, while Science applicants offered the most Open University credits.

Analysis of British university entry qualifications for the years 1972 to 1974 by Woodley (1984) shows that while 83 per cent of students under twenty-one years of age entered university on the strength of GCE examinations alone, only 52 per cent of students over 21 years entered with these qualifications. While 57 per cent of those aged 21-25 had GCE qualifications, the percentage declined with age until by 51 and above only 29 per cent of mature students entered by way of GCE examinations. However, since GCE examinations were not instituted until 1951, only those below the age range 39-41 at the time of Woodley's study would have been able to take them at school, those older taking their predecessor, the School Certificate. Not surprisingly, therefore, the position is reversed for 'other UK qualifications' (which include JMB mature entry) so that, while only 14 per cent of the 21-25 age range enter by this route, in the 51 and over category the highest proportion (43%) entered this way.

Social and Economic Background

Social and economic data are particularly difficult to pick up accurately from application forms, especially those not designed for quantification. Candidates were, however, asked to list their employment since leaving school, and the last reported post has been classified using an occupational scale adapted from one used by Goldthorpe and Hope (l974)[8]. On this basis, over 44 per cent were classified as skilled non-manual workers and self-employed (class 3) and nearly 23 per cent as lower professional and managerial (class 2). Skilled manual workers (class 4) accounted for just over 13 per cent of applications.

Table 2.17: Social Standing

Social Rating	Per Cent	
	JMB Applicants (N=2020*)	1971 Census Sample
Non-manual		
1	1.5	8.5
2	22.8	12.1
3	44.3	31.8
Manual		
4	13.3	18.0
5	10.5	20.3
6	7.6	8.1

* 139 could not be classified

[8] The Goldthorpe-Hope social rating scale as used had six classes: 1. Higher professional and managerial e.g. doctors, lawyers, accountants, 2. Lower professional and managerial e.g. teachers, journalists, social workers, 3. Skilled non-manual workers and self-employed e.g. cashiers, secretaries, commercial travellers, 4. Skilled manual workers e.g. locksmiths, engravers, joiners, 5. Semi-skilled workers e. g. lorry drivers, postmen, warehousemen and 6. Unskilled e. g. barmen, porters, cleaners.

Comparisons with the one per cent sample of the male population in 1971 analysed by Goldthorpe and Hope (1974), as in Table 2.17, suggests that JMB applicants are mainly non-manual workers, but they do not come from the highest professional and managerial occupations. Hopper and Osborn (1975) have similarly found that adult students tend to come from non-manual occupations. In their sample no less than 83.1 per cent came from the Registrar-General's non-manual categories against 41 per cent of all adults in their comparison group, the London Metropolitan Region. The JMB can at least claim to be attracting a wider cross-section than that.

When considered by subject areas, as in Table 2.18, it is apparent that Law, particularly, and also Education, attracted applicants from the higher-rated occupations, while Technology applicants came predominantly from Goldthorpe and Hope's (1974) class 4.

Table 2.18: Social Rating and Subject Area

Subject Area	N	%Social Rating					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Education	342	2.0	28.9	49.4	4.1	9.9	5.6
Technology	59	0.0	23.7	20.3	49.1	3.4	3.4
Econ & Soc St	514	1.2	21.2	42.2	15.4	11.3	8.8
Arts	563	1.1	17.1	49.2	12.1	11.2	9.4
Law	191	4.7	29.3	42.4	13.6	7.3	2.6
Music	19	0.0	10.5	57.9	21.1	5.3	5.3
Science	229	0.9	24.9	37.6	15.7	12.2	8.7
Medicine	78	0.0	29.5	34.6	12.8	15.4	7.7
Comb A & S	25	0.0	20.0	60.0	8.0	4.0	8.0
Total	2020*	1.5	22.8	44.3	13.3	10.5	7.6

* 139 could not be classified.

In 1980, when the application form was changed, candidates were asked about their future career plans. (In earlier years, this information was gleaned where possible from elsewhere.) Only just over 13 per cent said that they intended to pursue their present career, more than a third wanted something different and more than a half had not made up their minds. Medicine and Technology applicants seemed to be the clearest about their future careers while those in Arts, Combined Arts and Science, and Music were the vaguest, which is consistent with the nature of the subjects, if one bears in mind that a career in music is such a chancy business.

The Mature Applicant

Who then is applying for admission to the five JMB universities through the Special Entry Scheme? In the period studied, 1975-80, about 75 per cent of the applicants lived in the vicinity of the university they wished to enter. About 80 per cent applied for admission to B.A. or B.Sc. courses, a fifth to BEd courses and only a handful for higher degrees. Arts (27.8%) and Economics and Social Studies (25.4%) attracted most applicants followed by Education (17.2%), Science (11.4%) and Law (9.2%).

Only a few tried for Medicine (3.8%), Technology (3.1%), Combined Arts and Science (1.3%), and Music (0.9%).

The modal age range of applicants was 25 to 34 years (53.5%). Over half (57.8%) had no children. Overall, about three men applied to every two women, but the proportion of women rose from 35 per cent in 1975 to very nearly 50 per cent in 1980. The gender ratio, however, varied with subject area. More men applied for Technology (90.9%), Music (78.9%) and Law (74.2%). Arts (57.2%) was close to the overall average, but applicants for BEd courses were mainly women (70.1%).

In terms of educational background, 58 per cent had no sixth-form experience, but 84.4 per cent had had some further education, and 53 per cent had been in full-time FE, if only for short periods. Applicants most frequently had three to six 'O' levels (47.9%) and no 'A' levels (78.7%), but 36.6 per cent were studying for 'A' levels at the time of their enquiry. Forty-eight per cent had passed vocational examinations and 4.0 per cent Open University courses. Thirty-six per cent had attended grammar, 31.8 per cent secondary modern, and 17.1 per cent comprehensive schools. Since leaving school applicants had held, on average, about three jobs.

Classified by their job at the time of applying, on the modified Goldthorpe-Hope (1974) scale, 44 per cent were skilled non-manual workers or self-employed and 23 per cent were in professional or managerial positions (though not the highest). About 31 per cent were manual workers, under-represented compared with the population as a whole (46%). Applicants for Law, particularly, and also Education, were most likely to have held non-manual occupations. Technology candidates were predominantly skilled manual workers. Overall, only 13 per cent said they intended to follow the same occupation if they were to graduate, about a third wanted something different, but most (51.7%) had not made up their minds.

III. ENQUIRERS WHO DID NOT APPLY

Each year, in response to requests, hundreds of application forms are sent out by the Joint Matriculation Board, but usually fewer than half are returned. In order to investigate the reasons for this relatively low take-up, a special study was made of those who requested information during the admissions year ending 31 March 1980, but proceeded no further[9].

During that year, 1208 application forms were dispatched to addresses in the United Kingdom of which 502 were completed and returned. An attempt was made to contact by questionnaire the 706 (58.4%) who enquired, but did not apply. Brief details of personal and educational background were requested, and questions were included on why the initial enquiry had not been pursued, what alternative arrangements, if any, had been made, and reactions to the application procedures.

Two hundred and seventy-nine replies (39.5%) were received and a further 27 letters came back undelivered. Of those responding, seven enquiries had been for information only by university departments, a college of education, a research worker, and a clergyman on behalf of his parishioners. Twenty-four names had got on to the list by mistake or, more accurately, had not been deleted when application forms had been returned later (usually the next year). Five were received too late to be included.

The remaining 243 (34.4%) were used in the analysis. Considering the questionnaire had been sent out some two-and-a-half years after the initial approach to the JMB, and also bearing in mind that the application form itself had not brought a response, this return was considered to be as good as could be expected.

Enquirers

In order to distinguish between those who enquired but took it no further and those who actually applied for admission, we shall refer to the former as ‘enquirers’ and the latter as ‘applicants.’ Comparisons are made for the application year ending March 1980, and the percentages of applicants are taken, in part, from the entries for that year in the tables of Chapter II.

Geographical Background

The replies to the questionnaire came in much the same proportions from the various parts of the United Kingdom as did the application forms. There was, however, a slight but distinct and statistically significant tendency for enquirers to live further afield than the applicants. There was a greater proportion from Scotland, Wales, the East and South East and a smaller one from areas nearer the universities (the South West was an exception). Distance must be an important factor for mature students with families or home commitments, and doubtless the thought of up-rooting themselves, particularly perhaps to a northern industrial conurbation, could have been

[9] An earlier version of this chapter appeared as Griffin and Smithers (1984).

off-putting. As one respondent from the South West wrote, "I liked the university and the course but could not envisage myself and family in Manchester for three years."

Characteristics

The proportion of men was rather higher among the enquirers (56.2%) than the applicants (50.8%). There was no difference in mean age although there was some suggestion that the enquirers were more likely to come more from the extremes - 30.4 per cent of the enquirers were below 25 years of age compared with 24.5 per cent of the applicants and 3.3 per cent were above 50 as against 1.8 per cent. At 14.0 per cent, about twice as many of the enquirers were divorced, separated or widowed.

Educational Background

If anything, the enquirers were better qualified in terms of GCE passes than those who actually applied - 56.6 per cent of enquirers had passed five or more 'O' levels as compared with 40.3 per cent of applicants, and 15.7 per cent had two or more 'A' levels against only 2.5 per cent. This was due, in part, to enquirers who found they were over-qualified and therefore ineligible for the JMB Scheme.

Enquirers were more likely to have attended a grammar school than applicants (41.1% compared with 30.1%) and less likely to have gone to a comprehensive school (11.2% against 23.5%). As a group they were less likely to have stayed on at school beyond 16 (37.1% against 45.6%), and somewhat less likely to have had experience of full-time further education (47.4% compared to 50.6%).

Socio-Economic Status

Enquirers had had on average more jobs than applicants since leaving school, with 32.6 per cent having had five or more compared with 18.9 per cent. In terms of the modified Goldthorpe-Hope social rating of present or last occupation, the enquirers were less likely (7.6% compared with 22.1%) to come from classes 5 and 6.

Table 3.1: Social Rating

Year	N	Per Cent					
		Unemployed	Housewife	Retired	Full-Time Employment	Part-Time Employment	Student
1979/80	241*	18.3	11.6	-	58.9	7.5	3.7
1983	214*	16.2	5.8	1.2	45.2	7.5	24.1

* 2 missing cases

At the time of asking for details from the JMB, 18.3 per cent were unemployed, 11.6 per cent were full-time housewives, 58.9 per cent were in full-time paid employment and 3.7 per cent were full-time students. Some two and a half years later, at the time of the questionnaire, as Table 3.1 shows, the number of students had risen from 9 to 58 (3.7% to 24.1%). These would appear to have come mainly from the ranks of those in full-time employment and from housewives, although there was a considerable crossing of categories between the two years.

Reasons for Not Pursuing Application

An important item on the questionnaire asked respondents to tell us why they had not followed up their initial enquiry. A wide variety of reasons was given. Some respondents answered in a crisp phrase, while others offered a long paragraph with a detailed explanation. We have grouped the replies into ten categories by the main reason given. These are shown in Table 3.2 together with the numbers and percentages in each group.

Table 3.2 Main Reason for Not Pursuing Enquiry

Reasons	N	Per Cent
Put off by the procedures	47	19.3
Applied elsewhere	34	14.0
Could not afford to take risk	33	13.6
Discouraging response	28	11.5
Special course requirements	23	9.5
Already had entry qualifications	23	9.5
Employment prospects	17	7.0
'A' level route	16	6.6
Personal or family circumstances	14	5.8
Course unavailable	8	3.3
Total	243	100.0

Put off by the Procedures

About one in five of the potential applicants appears to have been put off by the apparent complexity of the procedures. Of these, about half (26) appeared to lose confidence in the face of the difficulties and the rest (21) to turn to courses elsewhere with simpler requirements. Comments included:

> I felt I needed more information and assurance as to whether I would be able to cope if my initial enquiries proved hopeful. In other words I got cold feet through lack of encouragement.
>
> It did give the impression there were many groups to 'please' before acceptance.
>
> I gained the impression that entry to university through the JMB Scheme without holding 'A' levels could be both difficult and complicated. The one thing I needed at the time of the application was some form of personal contact for advice and guidance.

It is not difficult to see why some of the potential applicants could be deterred by the procedures. Unlike normal-entry applicants they can take matriculation for only one course at one JMB university. In addition to applying to the Joint Matriculation Board, they must also send in forms to the Universities Central Council on Admissions. The JMB forwards a copy of the application to the relevant university's

admissions tutor, who may recommend rejection at this stage.[10] For those making the cut, there are interviews. Candidates may also be asked to submit samples of written work in support of the application. Applicants may be accepted on interview only, but most are asked to take a matriculation examination. Places may also be offered subject to a restricted form of mature matriculation plus the successful outcome of a course of study (usually 'O' or 'A' levels).

The mature matriculation examination which, at the time of the study at least (in the light of the research a number of changes have been made), was usually expected to be taken with no syllabus or past papers for reference. Not surprisingly, this could be daunting, particularly for those long out of formal education.

> I could not seem to satisfactorily find out enough about the matriculation. I was told vaguely that it would be in English and music. In short, I felt very unsure and unprepared.
>
> I was nervous about the nature of the mature matriculation exam and about approaching the university department which I would have been interested in joining. [This from a secretary in a university with eight 'O' levels, one 'A' level and vocational qualifications. At the time of the questionnaire she had successfully completed an OU foundation course.

At least one enquirer's lack of confidence was not justified. He had taken year-long revision courses in 'A' level biology and mathematics and achieved grade A in both. He went to another university and, on the results of his first year's examinations, he obtained a place at the University of California on a reciprocal exchange scheme.

Others in this category had reacted against the entry process. "Too long drawn-out with no guarantee of success at the end", as one respondent put it. He preferred "a more direct entry system", and had been accepted on a degree course at a polytechnic. Two enquirers who had successfully completed courses at Ruskin College were particularly aggrieved. One, not realising that the Oxford Diploma is acceptable for matriculation, wrote: "Having already completed two years' full-time education at Ruskin College and successfully taken the examination I felt it unnecessary to sit an entry examination." Another potential applicant having understood that he would be offered an 'unconditional' place at Leeds was then informed by the JMB that he would have to apply through their administrative channels as a mature student. He commented: "I decided to accept a much simpler offer from Nottingham University."

Applied Elsewhere

A second category, which overlaps to some extent with the first, comprised 34 enquirers (14.0%) whose approach to the JMB had been just one of several (those in the first category had originally hoped to attend a JMB university). This group were looking for what suited them best and had not opted for the JMB Scheme.

[10] See Appendix A for details of the procedures followed in each JMB university.

Several commented that they did not want to wait for the mature matriculation procedures were taking too long and had accepted a place elsewhere because it had been offered in the same year as the application had been made. In the JMB Scheme applications are considered only in the period 1 November to 31 March. This is administratively convenient since it leaves ample time for the interviews and examinations which are part of the admissions procedure. However, it does mean that after 31 March would-be applicants have to wait until 1 November with possible entry to university a further year away. One can sympathise with the comment of a potential applicant who preferred to accept an immediate place at Middlesex Polytechnic: "I was impatient to begin studying my chosen subject."

Could Not Afford to Take Risk

For 33 potential applicants the problem was mainly financial. Five had expected secondment from work and had been disappointed, and nine had failed to obtain a grant, which in the case of entrants via the JMB Scheme is discretionary. The rule is that no grant is awarded if one has previously been made for a course requiring 'A' levels as an entry qualification (even if the course has not been completed). Even with a grant, the potential drop in income was mentioned by 16 people who, having thought about it, decided that they could not really afford to go to university.

> Being in full-time employment with a young family and financial commitments, I could not afford to live on a student grant.
>
> The reality (i.e. mortgage and other bills) of the situation would not permit concentration in the right direction.

Three enquirers (two unemployed and one housewife) were deterred by the costs of attending for interview and examination, and the matriculation fees. Two went on to local polytechnics which, presumably, did not levy these charges.

Discouraging Response

Twenty-eight (11.5%) seem to have been put off by their first contact with the JMB university of their choice. One respondent commented at length and, since it was a view commonly expressed, we include it in full.

> The response generally from universities in my experience is not particularly favourable. Certainly their attitude does not reflect claims made in prospectuses about mature students. Indeed in conversations with other OU students they all felt the same. The decision to start further education is a very difficult one if you have not studied for ten years or so. I regret that the booklet tends to sap self-confidence. In comparison, the Open University literature is very clear. The biggest problem for mature students is having faith that they can complete the course. I belong to a group of mature students waiting for 1983 OU entry who have all been rejected or put off by various universities. We have all been doing preparation work and OU advisers tell us our work is well above the standard required.

This was from a 26-year-old male social worker with nine 'O' levels and two 'A' levels, though not ones acceptable for entrance at the JMB universities.

One enquirer (who later gained entry to a polytechnic) was told by a department, which appears unilaterally to have opted out of the Mature Entry Scheme, that she could only be considered in competition with sixth formers by aiming at 'A' level qualifications.

> The policy of the English Department is, as a rule, not to consider applications from candidates who need to sit the mature matriculation examination. Mature matriculation is more difficult for us to assess, since it does not provide evidence of ability to submit to the discipline of study.

Another, who had only one 'O' level (though grade A), was told by someone in the Registry that she would be better advised to go back and gain the required 'O' and 'A' levels. She wrote: "I was confident that, given the chance, I would have passed the mature matriculation, but I got the impression that the registrars [sic] were not in full agreement with that method of entry." So she did not apply. Yet another was advised that anyone in university should be capable of passing 'O' and 'A' levels like a normal applicant!

Although some who complained about discouragement may have held expectations beyond their potential, and a blunt response may have been the kind one to give in the long run, in some cases it seems there were applicants who felt they were not given a chance to show what they could do.

Special Course Requirements

Twenty-three of the potential mature students did not follow through because they found that, in addition to the matriculation process, there were special requirements for the particular courses which they wished to take.

> Mature entrants scheme as described in *A Second Chance at 21+* is only relevant to persons wishing to satisfy [the] General Requirement of [the] JMB and gain access to arts or social science type courses. I am interested in science courses and already satisfy [the] General Requirement. The mature entrants' scheme is not relevant to those like myself who need to satisfy 'course' requirements for science courses.

On learning about the extra hurdle, four gave up the ghost immediately. One applied for a similar course at another university and was accepted. Another, who had originally wanted to study medicine, decided to change direction and is now reading PPE at Oxford. Nine attempted to gain the necessary qualifications, but three found it hard going and gave up for the time being. Two others decided to stay in work and take professional examinations.

Already Had Entry Qualifications

In contrast, a further 23 found on enquiry that they already held acceptable qualifications for matriculation. This not only made them eligible for entry in the

usual way-though in competition with all comers-but also disqualified them from the Mature Entry Scheme.

Employment Prospects

Thirteen did not proceed because employment prospects had improved. In some cases, it was due to obtaining a new job and, in others, the present situation had got brighter.

> I was redundant after 30 years of employment, and having gained employment did not follow through.
>
> When I applied for a place at Manchester I had recently left the BBC and did not see any possibility of starting another job. As it happened, I was offered a job which I did not want to refuse.

A favourable change in working conditions could also be the deciding factor. For one it was "reconciliation of problems within work situation"; for another, there was "an official position-on the Branch Committee [at a colliery]"; for a third, it was a transfer from "a short career" in the Royal Navy to "a pensionable career."

Four others were deterred by fear of future unemployment. "After considering the economic climate I decided that furthering my education was not enough incentive to give up my job."

'A' Level Route

Sixteen enquirers (6.6%), most of whom were already involved in 'A' level courses, seemed to have asked for details to see if the scheme could provide an alternative, or a safety net, in case the courses did not work out. Having made the enquiry they decided to pursue entrance through the 'A' level route.

> After reading the material enclosed in *A Second Chance at 21+* I found it easier to sit two 'A' levels [because the mature matriculation procedure] contained uncertainties as to the chances of being admitted.
>
> I decided to work hard at my 'A' levels and rely on these results. This was mainly because of the fear of the unknown about the examination in the JMB Mature Students Entrance.
>
> I was totally unaware that the university to which I wished to apply would not provide reading lists on which the entrance examination would be based and I felt the need to work to a syllabus - hence I decided to take two 'A' levels in one year.

Although understandable, this could have been a mistake. Anyone obtaining minimum entrance qualifications in terms of 'A' levels is ruled out of the Special Scheme, but mere passing grades may be too low to gain admission in competition with school-leavers.

Personal or Domestic

Personal or domestic reasons were given by 14 enquirers (5.8%). Lack of support at home was a reason offered mainly by women: "Total non-cooperation from my husband who thinks it a complete waste of time and money for a woman aged 49 years to do 'A' level equivalent followed by a three-year B.A. course." And, perhaps, slightly more optimistic: "Decided to postpone for a year or two until situation more settled: husband grumbling."

Women, too, more often had responsibilities for the young, and not so young. One had an adolescent son out of work who was "very unsettled." Family illness led several women, and also men, to postpone or abandon their plans for higher education.

Course Unavailable

Finally, a small group, consisting of eight enquirers (3.3%), could not find a suitable course among those offered by the JMB universities or, in one case, the desired course was already fully subscribed. At the time of the survey, seven had been accommodated elsewhere, but one was still searching for a degree course exploring 'Folklore and Myths of the British Isles'.

Alternatives to Mature Matriculation

Few of the enquiries appear to have been frivolous. Less than a quarter of those not proceeding with a JMB application did not pursue an alternative course of action. Table 3.3 shows what these were.

Table 3.3: Next Steps for Enquirers not Applying

Alternative Actions	N	Per Cent
JMB university on 'A' levels	20	8.2
Other university full-time	37	15.2
Polytechnic	28	11.5
College of Education	5	2.1
Open University	21	8.6
Taking 'A' levels	36	14.8
Further education	22	9.1
Professional examinations	8	3.3
No place found	6	2.5
No further action	60	24.7
Total	243	100.0

Twenty (8.2%) who found they already possessed, or obtained, the necessary 'A' level qualifications entered JMB universities, and 37 (15.2%) took up full-time places at other universities. A further 33 (13.6%) had gained admission to a polytechnic or a college of education, while 36 (14.8%) were working for 'A' levels. Twenty-one (8.6%) were taking courses with the Open University and 30 (12.3%) were continuing

in further education or working for professional examinations. Only six (2.5%) reported failing to obtain a place and giving up for the time being.

Discussion

To choose to take a full-time course at university is a major and difficult decision for anyone. For a person of mature years, with perhaps a background lacking in academic success, the possibility of a university course must seem like a distant dream. Some, usually the older ones, approach the possibility with diffidence and can be deflected; others, perhaps the younger ones, are impatient and tend to baulk at the obstacles and not always find the most sensible way round them.

Lack of confidence was probably the most important reason why approaches to the JMB were not followed up. Even when not directly stated it seems likely that it was this that made so many shrink from the prospect of a mature matriculation examination or be so easily put off by their first contact with university. Mildred (1978), Dare and Henry (1978), and Gough (1979) have all made similar findings. Barrett and Powell (1980) have suggested that an essay assignment and attendance at an induction course may be more appropriate to the circumstances of a mature applicant than an entrance examination, even of the open book variety. Unqualified mature applicants to university do, however, need to show that they have the talent to benefit from a degree course and thorough testing is to the benefit of both the applicant and the university. A similar view is adopted in Australia (Hore and West, 1980) among other countries.

High motivation and impatience to begin, coupled with doubts about the mature matriculation examination, led a number of the respondents to seek more accessible institutions. Some also gave up the idea of entry through the Special Scheme and decided to concentrate on 'A' levels. This could have been a mistake. Applicants can only be considered under the Mature Entry Scheme *if they do not have the minimum entry requirements*. Once they apply on the basis of 'A' levels they must compete on equal terms with school-leavers. Candidates who achieve passing grades, but grades too low to secure admission, exclude themselves from the provisions. And, as Roderick *et al*, (1981) note, 'achieving sufficiently high grades at 'A' level to satisfy university and polytechnic departments is not easy for adults who are doing full-time jobs.' The adult students considered by Hopper and Osborn (1975) spoke similarly of their disadvantage in this respect. Nevertheless, some eight per cent of our sample of enquirers had managed to gain entry to the JMB Universities on the basis of their 'A' levels and it is probable that some of the 15 per cent going to other universities had entered this wat also.

Finance was sometimes the most pressing problem. Mature candidates under the age of 25, if they have not established three years' independence, embarrassingly may find their grants determined by reference to their parents' income, while those who have already attended a course of advanced further education may not be eligible for a grant. Nine of the respondents were refused grants, having been funded for one kind of course or another in the past. The difficulties can sometimes be such that it is widely believed that entrants via the Special Scheme are not entitled to a mandatory

grant. However, we are assured by the Department of Education and Science that they are eligible and have been so since at least 1962.

> If an individual is offered a place on a first-degree course, or any course judged comparable to a first-degree course, at an establishment in the United Kingdom, he [*sic*] may then apply to his local education authority for a mandatory award. If he satisfies all the regulations set down in the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1983, he would then receive a mandatory award by right. The qualifications and age of the individual are not factors considered in determining his eligibility for an award (DES, personal communication, 30 March 1984).

Even with a grant, there is likely to be a big drop in income. Jones and Williams (1979), reviewing the financial obstacles in the way of adult students in higher education, drew attention to the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals' calculation that in 1975-76 a full grant was less than a quarter of the average earnings in manual employment. Grainger (1979) showed that, even with the maximum supplement for two children over the age of 11, a fitter's income would be halved. The situation is likely to be even worse today. In addition, as Tapper and Chamberlain (1970) have discussed, accommodation is likely to prove difficult for married students, especially those with children.

One of the disappointments of mature students is learning the particular requirements of individual departments. Not only are there differences within universities but also similar departments in different universities may require different things. The young, unattached, and usually better qualified, tended to shop around among the universities and polytechnics until they found one to accept them. But the less confident and less mobile were more likely to give up.

Four hundred enquirers who did not make an application did not return our questionnaire and we can only make guesses about them. Woodley and McIntosh (1977) found that: 'the closer a person gets to becoming an Open University student, and the more progress he makes as a student, the more likely he is to respond to a questionnaire.' This also seems likely to have been the case in the present study, with the more successful of the non-applicants being over-represented. However, even if our 243 respondents cannot be considered representative, it is worth emphasising that nearly 40 per cent had found a place on a course leading to a degree and only a quarter had taken no further action. Considering the difficulties and problems that beset a mature unqualified potential student this is a very encouraging.

The high proportion of non-applicants who found places elsewhere suggests that some of the difficulties reported here could be considered particular to the JMB Scheme, but most are of general relevance. In Jones and Williams' (1979) view:

> The whole system is so loaded against mature entrants to full-time higher education that managerial and logistical skills of a very high order are called for before students can contemplate the attempt. In other words the

selection process for them is not simply an academic one, it calls for qualities of character too.

Our evidence provided by potential mature students to the JMB universities who chose not pursue their degree ambitions via the Special Scheme reinforces reinforces this point and further illustrates the maze that would-be entrants have to find their way through.

IV. THE MATRICULATION PROCESS

On receiving completed forms, the JMB forwards copies to its mature matriculation representative in the chosen university. Procedures vary[11] but, in general, the representatives will take the details and then send the forms on to the admissions tutor in the department concerned. The admissions tutor will then decide whether to reject the application or to call the candidate for interview.

Table 4.1 shows that of those who submitted applications in the years 1975-80 about a quarter were rejected either before or after interview. The documentation does not allow these to be separated, but it would appear that the majority of rejections were before interview, although Sheffield apparently 'has a policy of interviewing all applicants, regardless of apparent suitability or otherwise' (Roderick *et al*, 1981).

Table 4.1: Outcome of Application

Year	N	%Rejected Before or After Interview	%Absent from Interview	%Offered Place Subject To			
				Interview Only	Internal Exam	External Exam	Internal & External Exams
1975	208	35.6	8.2	3.8	27.4	4.3	20.7
1976	241	24.5	16.6	10.8	18.3	11.2	18.7
1977	317	21.1	26.2	8.8	33.1	1.6	9.1
1978	384	22.1	13.3	9.4	47.4	1.0	6.8
1979	507	21.7	17.8	10.7	36.5	3.7	9.7
1980	502	28.3	13.7	9.2	37.1	1.0	10.8
Total	2159	24.9	16.2	9.2	35.2	3.2	11.4

Overall, 16 per cent of candidates offered an interview in effect withdrew at this stage by not turning up. Similarly Roderick *et al*, (1981) express their disappointment at the proportion of applicants who failed to keep appointments at Sheffield University not even sending an apology. It is especially galling in view of the difficulty in arranging for all the departmental representatives to be present at an agreed time. As they say "It goes without saying that even departments friendly to the notion of admitting mature students can become disillusioned after one or two similar experiences." The evidence from Chapter III suggests some of the reasons for applicants not turning - 'cold feet' at the last minute, family emergencies, the prospect of a job, or just changing their mind. The reasons of course do not excuse failing to tell the university that the appointment was not going to be kept.

Candidates may be accepted on interview only and, as Table 4.1 shows, about nine per cent of all candidates matriculated in this way. The majority (35.2%) of those interviewed, however, were offered an internal examination and a further 11.4 per cent were offered entry subject to a restricted form of matriculation examination plus the successful outcome of a course of study (usually 'O' or 'A' levels). External

[11] See Appendix A for details of the procedures followed by the universities in 1981.

examination results alone could also be used as the basis for offering a place, as was the case for 3.2 per cent of the applicants.

There is some evidence to suggest that the method of matriculating has varied over the years. Indeed, there would seem to have been a distinct change between 1976 and 1977 when the weight given to external examinations decreased and the internal examination became the main means of matriculating. In addition to those who withdrew before the interview, 6.6 per cent pulled out during the matriculation process. An examination fee (£21.00 in 1984) is payable before a candidate may sit the mature matriculation examination and 4.3 per cent of candidates offered an examination did not so register. The remaining 2.3 per cent either did not turn up for the examination or became discouraged during the examination and failed to complete it. Others offered a place subject to external requirements withdrew without meeting them. Table 4.2 shows the fate of the applicants each year from 1975 to 1980, and in total.

Table 4.2: Outcomes of the Matriculation Process

Year	N	%Passed & Matriculated	%Passed Did Not Register	%Withdrew After Interview	%Failed Internal Exam	%Failed External Exam	%Rejected/ Absent Interview
1975	208	30.8	2.9	9.6	9.6	3.3	43.8
1976	241	35.7	2.5	9.1	3.3	8.3	41.0
1977	317	35.3	3.5	3.8	9.5	0.6	47.3
1978	384	41.9	2.4	7.8	12.0	0.5	35.4
1979	507	37.9	3.5	7.1	10.7	1.4	39.4
1980	502	37.2	3.4	4.4	10.2	2.8	42.0
Total	2159	37.1	3.1	6.6	9.7	2.4	41.1

In 1975, 64 applicants matriculated[12] and by 1980 this had risen to 187, a threefold increase. This may be compared with the twelve per cent increase in new entrants to British universities during this period (DES, 1982, *Statistics of Education*). Not all took up their places however. About eight per cent of those matriculating (about three per cent of the applicants) withdrew. There could have been second thoughts of various kinds, but some may have been planned since a pass could be used to gain entry to other universities where it is accepted as evidence of potential.

Universities Compared

The matriculation procedures employed by each university in 1981 are detailed in Appendix A, and Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show the outcomes of the different approaches.

[12] Paid the fee and received Form R which enables registration for the required course.

Table 4.3: Outcome of Application by University

University	N	%Rejected Before or After Interview	%Absent from Interview	%Offered Place Subject To			
				Interview Only	Internal Exam	External Exam	Internal & External Exams
Manchester	765	31.6	8.4	11.5	29.5	5.1	13.9
Liverpool	338	24.2	19.2	3.6	33.1	2.4	17.5
Leeds	330	21.8	8.5	0.9	54.5	1.8	12.4
Sheffield	354	13.0	27.1	26.0	22.0	4.0	7.9
Birmingham	372	25.5	26.1	0.8	43.8	0.5	3.2
Total	2159	24.9	16.2	9.2	35.2	3.2	11.4

At Birmingham, before being called for interview applicants are required to complete a piece of written work.

> Up to 1500 words on those aspects of particular interest to them in the course they wish to pursue at the University. In addition, they may also submit a sample of any other written work which they have done and which they feel may support their application.

On the evidence of the written work submitted together with the information available on the UCCA form, and bearing in mind the competition for the particular course[13], a quarter of all applicants were rejected at this stage. A further twenty-six per cent failed to present themselves for interview, possibly deterred by the written assignment. Almost all of those interviewed were asked to take the mature matriculation examination. Table 4.4 shows that nearly fifteen per cent failed the internal examination and fewer than twenty-seven per cent satisfied the requirements overall. Of these, 3.1 percent did not matriculate, so only 23.9 per cent of the applicants became eligible for entry.

Table 4.4: Outcome of Matriculation Process by University

Year	N	%Passed & Matriculated	%Passed Did Not Register	%Withdrew After Interview	%Failed Internal Exam	Failed External Exam	Rejected/ Absent Interview
Manchester	765	37.6	2.4	7.2	9.3	3.5	40.0
Liverpool	338	33.1	5.9	6.0	9.5	2.1	43.4
Leeds	330	41.2	3.3	11.5	9.7	4.0	30.3
Sheffield	354	50.0	2.0	1.1	5.4	1.4	40.1
Birmingham	372	23.9	3.0	6.7	14.8	0.0	51.6
Total	2159	37.1	3.1	6.6	9.7	2.4	41.1

[13] The existence of particular course requirements not only bars the unqualified from entrance to many subjects, including some for which places are generally available such as the 'minor' languages, but also channels them into subjects like English, history and some social science courses for which competition is already severe.

At Sheffield, 26 per cent were accepted on interview alone and only 13 per cent rejected at this stage. A half of all Sheffield applicants entered the university and only four, a little more than one per cent, withdrew during the process or failed to register or sit the examination when required. Perhaps the generous policy of offering an interview to all-comers regardless of their surface credibility is responsible for the high proportion (27.1%) who failed to turn up for interview.

Leeds, like Birmingham, used the matriculation examination as the main means of selection and accepted very few on interview only. Nevertheless, 44.5 per cent became eligible to matriculate. Manchester turned down nearly a third of applicants at the interview stage, but 40 per cent became eligible to take up places, 11.5 per cent on the basis of interview only. Liverpool accepted only 3.6 per cent on interview only and used a combination of internal and external examinations more frequently than the other universities. Fifteen per cent of those who became eligible to matriculate at Liverpool did not do so.

Subject Area

When the different subject areas are considered, as in Tables 4.5 and 4.6, wide variation becomes apparent

Table 4.5: Outcome of Application by Subject Area

Subject Area	N	%Rejected Before or After Interview	%Absent From Interview	%Offered Place subject To			
				Interview Only	Internal Exam	External Exam	Internal & External Exams
Education	371	9.9	14.0	11.1	47.1	3.8	14.0
Technology	66	34.8	18.2	7.6	22.7	7.6	9.1
Econ&Soc St	548	17.7	20.6	9.9	36.1	3.1	12.6
Arts	600	25.0	15.8	8.8	37.5	2.0	10.8
Law	198	40.4	13.1	10.6	24.7	2.0	9.1
Music	19	47.4	5.3	10.5	15.8	0.0	21.0
Science	247	31.6	17.0	6.9	28.3	5.7	10.5
Medicine	82	68.3	11.0	2.4	13.4	1.2	3.7
Comb A&S	28	25.0	0.0	10.7	46.4	7.1	10.7
Total	2159	24.9	16.2	9.2	35.2	3.2	11.4

Fewer than ten per cent of applicants for Education were rejected at the interview stage; 11.1 per cent were accepted on interview only and 47.1 per cent were asked to take an internal examination. Fifty per cent eventually fulfilled the matriculation requirements. At the other end of the scale, Medicine rejected over two-thirds of its applicants at the interview stage, and only 18.3 per cent ultimately became eligible for entry.

Economics and Social Studies rejected fewer than 18 per cent of applicants at interview, but a further 20.6 per cent failed to keep their appointments. Over 43 per cent became eligible for entry. Technology rejected about a third of the applicants at

the interview stage and was more likely than other faculties to ask for external qualifications. About 26 per cent of the applicants passed all requirements. In Science, 31.6 per cent were rejected at the interview stage and the same proportion became eligible for entry. Music, and Combined Arts and Science, formed two small atypical groups. Of the nineteen applicants for Music, nine were rejected and one failed to attend interview, five failed some part of the written examination and another withdrew--so only three matriculated. On the other hand, 14 (50%) of Combined Arts and Science applicants matriculated and a further two could have done so but failed to register.

Table 4.6: Outcome of Matriculation Process by Subject Area

Subject Area	N	%Passed & Matriculated	%Passed Did Not Register	%Withdrew After Interview	%Failed Internal Exam	%Failed External Exam	%Rejected/ Absent Interview
Education	371	47.2	2.7	8.9	14.8	2.4	24.0
Technology	66	22.7	3.0	0.0	12.1	9.1	53.0
Econ & Soc St	548	40.1	3.3	7.9	8.8	1.6	38.3
Arts	600	38.5	2.3	5.7	9.7	3.0	40.8
Law	198	30.6	5.6	5.3	4.0	1.0	53.5
Music	19	15.8	0.0	5.3	15.8	10.5	52.6
Science	247	27.9	3.7	8.1	9.7	2.0	48.6
Medicine	82	17.1	1.2	0.0	1.2	1.2	79.3
Comb A & S	28	50.0	7.1	3.6	14.3	0.0	25.0
Total	2159	37.1	3.1	6.6	9.7	2.4	41.1

It is interesting to compare the pattern of applications for entry through the JMB Scheme with university applications overall. The comparative data have been taken from the *Statistics of Education* (1979). Agriculture, Forestry, Veterinary Science, and Education have been omitted so that, as far as possible, like could be compared with like.

Arts, and Economics & Social Studies, were the most popular subject areas, together accounting for 64.2 per cent of applications and 70.3 per cent of registrations. This compares with the national figure of 42.4 per cent[14]. The relatively small percentage of 17.5 of special-scheme applicants to Technology and Science resulted in 15.3 per cent of matriculations, considerably below than the 41.0 per cent of all new first degree entrants in universities. The small percentage of Medicine applicants was reduced further from 4.6 to 2.2 during the matriculation process, while normal-entry medical students comprised 9.3 per cent of the total. Acceptances for Law, on the other hand, at 9.5 per cent of the mature entry, are more than double that of younger entrants on GCE qualifications. In short, the Special Scheme resulted in proportionally more enrolments in Economics and Social Studies, Arts, Arts &

[14] Education omitted from both the JMB and national figures.

Sciences and Law and fewer from Science, Medicine, and Technology than were admitted on GCE qualifications.

Roderick *et al,* (1981) have also analysed data for mature student applications and acceptances at English universities. They found that, in 1980, 40 per cent were successful in gaining entry compared with 55.4 per cent of school-leaver applicants. Our data show that in the same year, only 37.2 per cent of those applying through the JMB Scheme became eligible and registered for entry, and this included Education applicants whose acceptance rate at 50 per cent was considerably above average. The JMB Scheme entrants are thus a highly selected and a rather special group.

V. SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

Do the successful applicants differ in any consistent ways from those who did not get in? In order to try to shed some light on this, further analyses of the application forms in the period 1975-80 were carried out.

For the purposes of this study, the applicants have been allocated to one of five groups[15], the first four of which are included in the analyses:

1. accepted on interview only (N=198, 9.2%);
2. passed internal examination, or external examination, or a combination of the two (N=67, 31.1%);
3. failed examination (N=261, 12.1%);
4. rejected before or after interview (N=537, 24.9%);
5. withdrew at some stage (N=492, 22.8%).

Withdrawal could occur for a variety of reasons, including feelings of inadequacy, family or financial problems, success in gaining entrance elsewhere. Since it does not form the basis of a coherent group, those not going through with their applications have not been included in this part of the study. The effective sample for the analyses of this chapter is therefore 1,667. When the other groups are compared there are telling differences, with quite often a progression from those accepted on interview only, through the other groups, to those rejected at this stage.

Gender

As we saw in Chapter II, taking the period 1975-80 as a whole, the ratio of male to female applicants was not far short of 3:2. However, as Table 5.1 shows, women applicants were the more likely to gain admission (χ^2=12.1, df=1, p<0.001), their proportion increasing at each stage. This is in line with Worrall's (1977) findings for GCE-qualified entrants.

Table 5.1: Applicants and Entrants by Gender

Stage	N	%Women	%Men
Applied	2,159	42.2	57.8
Proceeded	1,667	42.9	57.1
Passed	869	45.7	54.3
Entered	802	47.0	53.0

[15] In terms of the tables of the previous chapter, Group l is the 'on interview only' column and Group 4, the 'rejected before or after interview' column in Table 4.1. Group 3 is a combination of 'failed internal exam' and 'failed external exam' in Table 4.2, and Group 2 the 'passed' columns of Table 4.2 minus those accepted 'on interview only' in Table 4.1. Group 5 is a combination of 'absent from interview' in Table 4.1 and 'withdrew after interview' in Table 4.2.

Age, Marital Status and Children

Successful applicants were more likely to be somewhat older, but still in their thirties, to be married and to have more and older children, and these characteristics, as Tables 5.2 to 5.4 show, tend to be most marked in those accepted on interview only. In reporting hobbies and pastimes, the successful were more likely to refer to intellectual, or intellectual and social interests, and those who did not get in, to sporting pursuits.

Table 5.2: Age

Outcome	N	Mean Age
Accepted on interview only	198	34.0
Passed exams	671	31.8
Failed exams	261	30.4
Rejected at interview stage	537	29.9
Total	1,667	31.2

Table 5.3: Marital Status

Outcome	N	%Married	%Single	Divorced/ %Separated/ Widowed
Accepted on interview only	198	65.1	27.8	7.1
Passed exams	671	57.7	38.0	4.3
Failed exams	261	49.8	42.9	7.3
Rejected at interview stage	537	40.8	53.1	6.0
Total	1,667	51.9	42.4	5.7

Table 5.4: Children

Outcome	N	Mean
Accepted on interview only	198	1.3
Passed exams	671	1.0
Failed exams	261	1.0
Rejected at interview stage	537	0.7
Total	1,667	0.9

Educational Background

Table 5.5 shows that the successful were more likely to have attended a grammar school and less likely to have been educated overseas. Those becoming eligible for matriculation were also, as Table 5.6 shows, the better qualified in having passed more 'O' levels, vocational examinations and Open University courses. While staying on at school into the sixth form appears not to make a difference, evidence of further education was an advantage. Nearly two-thirds (62.6 per cent) of those accepted on interview alone had had experience of full-time further education

compared to only 45.6 per cent of those rejected. Relevant professional experience was also a major factor, with 84 per cent of those accepted on interview having it.

Table 5.5: Last School Attended

Outcome Percentages	N	Sec Mod	Comp	Grammar	Technical	Private	Overseas
Accepted on interview only	198	32.8	16.2	41.9	3.5	4.6	1.0
Passed exams	671	28.3	17.2	40.7	7.0	4.6	2.2
Failed exams	261	37.2	16.1	32.6	6.5	3.4	4.2
Rejected at interview stage	535	31.8	16.3	32.7	6.9	4.3	8.0
Total	1,665*	31.4	16.6	37.0	6.5	4.3	4.2

* 2 missing cases

Table 5.6: Qualifications

Outcome	N	Mean 'O' Levels	%Vocational	%Open University
Accepted on interview only	197	4.2	58.6	5.6
Passed exams	671	4.0	58.2	3.4
Failed exams	261	3.4	47.1	2.3
Rejected at interview stage	535	3.5	43.9	3.9
Total	1,664*	3.9	47.9	3.7

* 3 missing cases

Social Background and Career Intentions

Applicants gaining places tended to come from a somewhat higher social class background and to have held rather more jobs as can be seen in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7: Social Class and Jobs Held

Outcome	Social Rating*		Number of Jobs	
	N	Mean	N	Mean
Accepted on interview only	198	3.0	194	3.6
Passed exams	671	3.5	663	3.4
Failed exams	261	3.8	250	3.0
Rejected at interview stage	535	3.8	534	3.1
Total	1,665**	3.6	1,651***	3.3

* Goldthorpe-Hope Scale – see page 11.

** 2 missing cases.

*** 16 missing cases.

Table 5.8: Career Intentions

Outcome	N	%Same	%Different	%Do Not Know
Accepted on interview only	134	29.1	26.1	44.6
Passed exams	487	12.1	35.5	52.4
Failed exams	192	14.6	34.4	51.0
Rejected at interview stage	392	10.5	37.8	51.8
Total	1,205*	13.9	35.0	51.1

* 462 unavailable

Table 5.8 shows that, of those with clear career intentions, about 70 per cent said they were aiming to change, but for those accepted on interview over half said they were going to remain in the same profession.

Conclusion

The statistics then suggest that the applicant most likely to gain a place through the Special Scheme is a woman in her thirties aiming, as we saw in Chapter IV, for a place in Arts, Economics and Social Studies, or Education. She is likely to be a 'family' person, to have attended grammar school, and to be relatively well-qualified in terms of 'O' level passes and professional examinations. She is likely to have held a job with a higher social rating and to be keen to make a career. Her interests are likely to be intellectual or social rather than sporting. But this is to try to do what we said in Chapter II was impossible: to paint a general picture of the successful applicant. As we have seen, many of the differences are small ones, on average, and a wide diversity of people gain admission to the universities of the JMB through its Special Scheme.

VI. REASONS FOR APPLYING

In this and subsequent chapters we focus on people who applied for entry through the Special Scheme in the year ending 31 March 1980. It will be remembered from Chapter III that, in this particular year, 1,208 requests for application forms were received. Of these, 706 were not proceeded with for reasons which have already been considered. But 502 people did make applications.

Following these through the matriculation process, it emerged that 187 became eligible to enter one of the JMB universities, the others falling out at various points – 111 absented themselves or withdrew from the admissions procedure, 122 were rejected at the interview stage, 51 failed the matriculation examination and 14 failed some external requirement. All of these applicants were sent a questionnaire (particular to their circumstances) and a stratified 20 per cent sub-sample was interviewed.[16] In addition to the 1980 applicants, attempts were made to contact the 86 people who entered in 1976, so that some assessment could be made of the university experience in retrospect.

The questionnaires were first sent out in April 1983 and they were followed up five weeks later by a second one if no reply had been obtained. In all, 314 completed questionnaires were received and 94 were returned undelivered. Of these, 16 were found through university records, one person had died, but 77 could not be traced.

This suggests that 516 people actually received the questionnaire making the response rate 61 per cent. Two of the questionnaires were received too late to be included in the study giving an effective sample of 312. Of the people responding, 262 indicated a willingness to be interviewed and 119 were seen. The composition of the sample is shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Sample

Category	People		Questionnaires Returned		Willing to be Interviewed		Interviewed	
	N	%	N	% Col 1	N	% Col 3	N	% Col 1
Eligible for Entry 1980	187	31.5	141	75.4	128	90.8	44	23.5
Entered 1976	86	14.5	32	37.2	25	78.1	17	19.8
Passed/Not Matriculate*	23	3.9	8	34.8	6	75.0	5	21.7
Failed Matric. Exam	51	8.6	26	51.0	22	84.6	17	33.3
Failed External Exam	14	2.4	4	28.6	4	100.0	2	14.3
Rejected at Interview Stage	122	20.5	46	37.7	32	69.6	15	12.3
Absent or Withdrew	111	18.7	55	49.5	45	81.8	19	17.1
Total	594	100.1	312	52.5	262	84.0	119	20.0

* Includes 6 from the 1976 cohort.

Predictably perhaps those who had been successful were the most willing to co-operate and, of the 187 eligible for entry in 1980, three-quarters returned

[16] Examples of the questionnaires and interview schedules are given in Appendices C and D.

questionnaires and of these 90 per cent were willing to be interviewed. The 1976 entrants were harder to find, their addresses perhaps going back seven years, and 20 per cent of the questionnaires were returned undelivered. In the other categories somewhere between about a third and a half completed questionnaires and of these about three-quarters were willing to be seen.

A sub-sample was chosen to be as representative as possible of applicants to each of the five universities and their affiliated colleges. In each of the larger categories, selection was random within the strata, with the aim being to achieve a one in five sub-sample. With the smaller groups all potential interviewees were approached. The questionnaire explored, as one of its topics, reasons for wanting to go to university.

Reasons for Wanting to Go to University

Respondents were asked to indicate in general terms why they had thought of going to university, and Table 6.2 shows the pattern of replies. Three categories were provided – 'to further career', 'to change career', and 'self-fulfilment' – and about 45 per cent used two, and a further 5 per cent all three.

Table 6.2: Reasons Given

Category	N	% Self-Fulfilment	% Change Career	%Advance Career	% Self-Fulfilment & Change Career	% Self-Fulfilment & Advance Career	%All Three
Eligible for Entry 1980	140	29.3	15.0	8.6	25.0	17.9	4.3
Entered 1976	32	34.4	9.4	9.4	21.9	18.8	6.3
Passed/Not Matriculate*	8	37.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	-	25.0
Failed Matric. Exam	26	23.1	15.4	3.8	26.9	26.9	3.8
Failed External Exam	3	33.3	-	-	33.3	-	33.3
Rejected at Interview Stage	46	15.2	6.5	17.4	23.9	28.3	8.7
Absent or Withdrew	55	38.2	12.7	9.1	27.3	9.1	3.6
Total	310*	29.0	12.6	9.7	24.8	18.0	5.8

- Two missing cases.

Table 6.2 shows that self-fulfilment was given most frequently as the sole reason for applying (29.0%) and when the combined replies are added was mentioned by more than three-quarters of the respondents. Altogether, 43 per cent indicated that they had hoped that going to university would help them to a new career, and 34 per cent that it would help them further their existing career.

Self-Fulfilment

Self-fulfilment, however, is really a 'catch-all' category for those whose motivation was not primarily career-orientated. Usually the expanded replies revealed a desire also for a fulfilling career. As one respondent succinctly put it: "Self-fulfilment entails a change of career" and another: "I wanted to do a job that made for self-fulfilment." More specifically: "Although I decided to attend university primarily because of an interest in economics, which I was studying at evening class, I also hoped in a vague manner that I might be able to gain future employment in this field."

On the other hand, there were those whose main motivation was just wanted to know more.

> I just wanted to know more about the subjects I always liked – art, literature and drama. I certainly never envisaged teaching them (from a fifty-five year old married woman, now after graduating, a part-time lecturer in Liberal Studies at a College of Further Education).
>
> My love of learning has been the main reason for doing the university course, but also the fact that I felt inadequate in myself contributed to my decision to become a student. Since I have had my degree (1980) I have actually been able to start a career.

Proving oneself after early educational failure was also a recurring theme: "I failed the 11+ exam and was considered to be an educational failure. This resulted in a lack of confidence which is only just beginning to improve." And again: "I left school early without qualifications and felt I wanted to prove to myself that I was capable of studying to a higher level."

A rather different slant came from a policeman who, although he had failed the 11+ and had gone to a secondary modern school where CSE was the highest qualification possible, had risen very quickly through the lower ranks and had attended the Police College (Bramshill) and had won a scholarship. He now felt it was extremely important to him to match his intellectual achievements to his career. Having achieved an upper-second honours degree in law he felt satisfied.

Several respondents saw the three years at university as an opportunity to take stock and redirect their lives.

> I wanted to explore and expand my capabilities, to put my life on a different track and university seemed the best way of doing this. Dissatisfaction was my motivation, not any high-flown desire for knowledge and qualifications.
>
> I did not take a degree course as a job ticket, but wanted to do the course for its own sake. I had no idea what I wanted to do but hoped that the course itself would help to give direction.
>
> Being widowed very shortly before, I felt my creative talents and teaching ability were at a low ebb. The course for me was really to recharge the batteries.

Some spoke of the encouragement of evening class lecturers who had awakened interests and unsuspected talent. The following was typical:

> I left school at fifteen without having the opportunity of taking 'O' levels. I did 'O' level English language at evening class about six years ago and found it so easy that I was encouraged to try 'A' level English. My lecturer encouraged several of us to do a degree course and having discovered I had the mental capacity to pass 'A' level I was keen to try.

For one respondent the encouragement came from home.

> Before I began the course for mature students I had no qualifications to do anything. After leaving school at fifteen I worked in a carpet factory until getting married. When my children were at school I found myself with time to spare but little confidence to apply for any type of employment other than factory work which did not appeal because of the school holidays when the children would have to be taken care of by someone else. My husband suggested that I take up studying during the daytime. I am very glad that I did because I found myself not only interested and stimulated by various subjects but also realised that I was capable of doing something more rewarding than factory work.

Some people felt they had gone as far as they could by themselves in their chosen subject and needed to go to university to take it further. Four wished to study some aspect of theology: one had had an interest in near-eastern religions since school days, and another had acquired an interest in eastern religions through the practice of Hatha Yoga. History, English, art, drama and economics all had their devotees, while a desire to read modern Japanese fiction in the original had fired one student who, having gained JMB matriculation, turned it down in favour of the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London.

Change of Career

Career considerations alone were indicated by 69 respondents (22.3%). Rather over half, 39, were hoping for a change of direction. Twelve, of whom six were married women with school-aged children, were thinking about teaching. Three of these women had been employed in secretarial work, one had been an occupational therapist, one an educational welfare assistant, and one a sales assistant. There were also three other women in this group: two single, and one married without children. Two had done secretarial work and one had worked in accountancy; the latter wrote:

> I was in accountancy before going to university and studying for finance and administration examinations. I had always been interested in geography at school. I thought that if I did not do something about it then I never would. (Having received a degree at Sheffield University) I now have a place at London University to do a Postgraduate Certificate in Education.

Three men also wanted to teach; one was a bus driver, one was just completing his term as an inspector in the Royal Hong Kong Police Force, and one was a mechanical engineer.

However, not all married women with children were interested in becoming teachers. One, a theatre sister, wanted to take a B.A. general degree; a district nurse wished to study politics, and a staff nurse hoped to take a degree in psychology. Three women who had been employed in secretarial work wanted to enter the social services, a comptometer operator took a degree in home economics and a dairymaid a B.A.

combined honours course. So while six married women with children were aiming at teaching, there were nine others who were looking elsewhere.

Signifying a desire for a change of career did not always mean that something definite was in view.

> After attempting for ten years to find more satisfying areas of work in industry I made the decision to gain a basic education in the hope of fulfilling that ambition. Initially a university course was not part of the plan, but during a year of full-time education in a further education college it became apparent that gaining access to such a course was possible.

Sheer necessity drove others. Two respondents in engineering wrote of the need to get out of a collapsing industry, and one man who had suffered multiple spinal injuries in an industrial accident was trying to build a new life.

Advancing Career

Thirty of the respondents indicated that their reason for trying to go to university was to further their career. Eight of these were in some area of teaching. Other occupations included banking, nursing, law, police, army, social services, civil service, archaeology, music, librarianship, telecommunications, engineering, medicine and architecture.

Teachers spoke of the lack of career prospects without a degree: “I was Head of Metalwork in the Design Faculty in a High School and I have got to the stage when I can go no further without a degree.” “As an unqualified teacher in the independent sector I wanted to study for a degree followed by a postgraduate certificate course.”

Two respondents had been assisted by their employers. One said: “I was reaching the end of a day-release course at a technical college, the natural progression from this was a degree course.” Another, a policeman, wrote: “I was offered the opportunity to apply after attending a management training course at my employer’s staff college and was awarded an academic scholarship in order to assist my application.”

A nurse had married and had a family. She wished to re-enter her career, but decided to take a B.Sc. in nursing before doing so. An engineer wrote: “All my fellow engineers have degrees so I do feel somewhat inadequate educationally.” And an archaeologist said: “I had been working in archaeology for five years (since leaving school at sixteen) and began to realise that I could not get much further without a degree.”

Self-Fulfilment and Change of Career

Seventy-seven (24.8%) linked self-fulfilment with a change of career. As one might expect, people in this category, generally, were not as sure of their employment plans as those who specified career reasons. Most wanted to get out of their present rut and to undertake something more fulfilling.

> I have always had an ambition to do a degree course. I had reached a point in my career as a journalist when I was a bit disillusioned with it. I thought a degree course would be a good way of changing my career.

It is well established that girls have hitherto been less ambitious than boys in respect of taking 'A' levels and going to university. While the situation is changing, it is still the case that some very able women have drifted into jobs which offer no real challenge. The following was a typical account:

> I worked in an office where the work was extremely boring. I wanted, initially, to spend my time following pursuits that were more self-fulfilling. Although this would have been sufficient in itself, I obviously hope that it can be translated into a more fulfilling career.

Unemployment or the state of an industry could also be the spur. Sometimes it was redundancy:

> After a successful career (in export sales) I was made redundant. Having taken stock I found that my life was unsatisfactory and unfulfilled. I had always had an interest in the sciences and more particularly in the physical world in which we live but felt keenly my lack of knowledge about it. So I decided to change that and at the same time seek a new direction in life. (This respondent took a combined honours degree in astronomy and geology and is, at the time of writing, studying for a Ph.D. part-time.)

Or the decline of an industry:

> A combination of dissatisfaction with my previous life coupled with the decline in engineering (the normal field I worked in) meant I had to change course. I believed I would get both self-fulfilment and a chance to change my lifestyle and employment.

Or it was not being employed:

> I decided that if I was going to have opinions on the misuse of science I ought to back them up with an education. I had also realised by this time that although unemployment gave me plenty of time 'to grow rare potatoes' I did not want to do that for the rest of my natural and a career might be fun.

Self-Fulfilment and Advance Career

Of the fifty-six (18.0%) who linked self-fulfilment with advancing career, thirteen (nearly a quarter) were policemen. Greater Manchester Constabulary sponsor up to six students a year on full pay (with a small additional grant for books) so that in any one year eighteen policemen from that area force alone may be at university or polytechnic. Similar schemes are in operation in other parts of the country. The take-up fluctuates, however, and in 1983, for example, there were only two applications for the scholarships provided in the Greater Manchester force. Policemen taking advantage of the secondment opportunity gave reasons such as:

> Firstly, I considered that a university course would improve my career prospects. Secondly, and equally as important, I felt that a break from my career under the influence of a general broadening experience such as a university course would be of great personal satisfaction to me.
>
> I entered a university course primarily as a means of self-fulfilment, having recognised that I had developed tunnel vision and that the objective approach of university studies would assist me in rectifying this fault. Additionally, it would be naive of me not to hope that the attainment of a university degree would assist me in my career with the police service.

Six respondents were in, or on the fringes of, the teaching profession:

> Having seen my children through university and having been teaching in a part-time capacity, I felt the need for further study. I can now teach English and religious studies to 'O' and 'A' level.

Two respondents had been solicitors' clerks and wished to read law.

> Before giving up work to bring up my daughter I was a solicitor's clerk and always intended to qualify as a solicitor or barrister at some point. However I felt that a degree course would be fulfilling for its own sake and this indeed has proved to be the case.

Several respondents felt they had got as far as they could in their chosen professions. These included civil servants, electronic and electrical engineers and a man who had been in the construction industry for twenty years. He said that new ideas and interests had arisen which required further education and he was afraid of being left behind.

All Three

The eighteen respondents (5.8%) who ticked 'self-fulfilment', 'change of career' and 'furthering career' were hoping that taking a degree would give their life a boost.

> My career had entered a dead end. I thought a degree course would offer challenge and stimulation as well as enhancing my qualifications and offering (I hoped) either a new impetus or direction to my old career or the possibility of a new career.
>
> All three reasons played a significant part in my decision. Self-fulfilment would come first. I had been working in design and advertising for several years and had become increasingly disillusioned and frustrated. I had also developed a more intellectual interest in the arts *per se*. I felt that by going to university, opportunities associated with either furthering or changing my career might arise.
>
> I was becoming bored with the routine of being an ophthalmic nurse and wanted to know more about the background (e.g. physiology) of the ophthalmic conditions. Also I suddenly realised how badly paid nursing is

> and believe the NHS is gradually being phased out so I wanted 'to hedge my bets.'

Discussion

Although constrained somewhat by the (artificial) distinction between self-fulfilment and career considerations, the applicants gave a wide variety of reasons for having wanted to go to university. This has also been the experience of other researchers in the field. West and Eaton (1980) having given a list of eight possible reasons and allowed others to be added wrote:

> The richness provided by their responses would be lost in any attempt to summarise. So it is intended to turn the issue round and consider the factors that are causing the general phenomenon of mature age demand for higher education in the community rather than the reasons influencing individuals.

They proposed four general factors:

- changing attitudes towards education in the community;
- credentialism or - as some people would call it - the qualifications explosion;
- the knowledge explosion;
- the general decline in jobs and life satisfaction.

Each of these has also emerged in the present study.

The importance ascribed to different reasons tends to vary between studies. Nisbet and Welsh (1971) found the major factor to be dissatisfaction with the job (indicated by 55% of their sample). Other frequently given reasons were belief in ability to do well (23%), intellectual interests (12%) and expected financial returns (6%). Roderick *et al,* (1981), on the other hand, state that the most important reason was interest in the subject and a desire to study it to a greater depth. But 63 per cent of their respondents did indicate that it was 'completely true' or 'true to some extent' that mature students took a degree because they wanted to find an interesting job, while 57 per cent said that they hoped a degree would help them find better paid employment, and over a half said they would get no further professionally without a degree.

Moses (1978) compared the motivation of mature unqualified, mature qualified and normal-entry students and noted that only 30 per cent of mature unqualified students gave vocational goals against 38 per cent of qualified students and 42 per cent of normal-entry students. He concluded that:

> Special entry (unqualified mature) students seemed to get more emotional satisfaction out of learning and proving themselves. The self-development motive which was present in all groups had more often an affective component for special entrants than for matriculated (qualified mature) students.

This is borne out by the present study where more of the respondents gave self-fulfilment (29.0%) than either changing (12.6%) or furthering career (9.7%).

Both Raby (1970) and Robinson (1974), researching into the motivations of mature women in colleges of education, found that one of the chief attractions was the prospect of a job which could be combined with looking after a family. Raby suggested that their interest in training to be teachers 'is as much using the educational system to solve that problem as a question of intellectual or personal development.' This, however, is to over-state the case. While teaching does have some advantages for the mother of school-age children, in the present study at least as many married women with families opted for subject degrees as for vocationally-orientated ones like the BEd

Hopper and Osborn (1975) noted the importance of 'bridging factors' in motivating students towards and sustaining them in their decision to return to education. These include the support of employers, the influence of individuals, trade unions, and political contacts. The backing of employers has also emerged in the present study, particularly in the case of policemen. Gould (1978) has suggested that extended provision to enable adults in employment to further their education would not only be intrinsically desirable, but would also create job vacancies for the young.

VII. PERCEPTIONS OF MATURE MATRICULATION

How did the applicants first hear about the JMB Scheme and what did they make of the matriculation process? Items on the questionnaire asked for ratings, on three-point scales, of the overall process, the selection interviews and the examination if taken. Views about the scheme and the entrance procedures were also explored in some depth in interviews.

Sources of Information

An important question broached during the interviews was: how had the prospective students first learned about the scheme? As Table 7.1 shows, over a third said it was from the institution which they had contacted, and for some it was a surprise that there was such a thing as matriculation at all. Many of the other two-thirds indicated that the possibility of a degree course had not even suggested itself until the Scheme was brought to their notice.

Table 7.1: Main Source of Information

Main Source	N	Per Cent
Institution Applied To	41	34.4
Further Education Class	25	21.0
Employers	19	16.0
Acquaintances, Friends	16	13.4
Libraries	7	5.9
Careers Advisory Services	6	5.0
Exhibitions	2	1.7
Newspaper Advertisements	2	1.7
OU Tutor	1	0.8
Total	119*	100.0

* Sub-sample which was interviewed.

For over 20 per cent, tutors in further education colleges and adult education centres had been both the source of information and the encouragement. For 16 per cent, it was employers (mainly the police, but also universities, a local education authority, a public utility company and an engineering firm) who had brought the scheme to the attention of their employees. Thirteen per cent had learned of the scheme from friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Libraries had been the source for six per cent and careers advisory services for five per cent. Newspaper advertisements (a local 'free' and the 'Times Ed.'), public exhibitions and an Open University tutor provided the rest. For many it was a chance encounter and a very common comment was that if there were more publicity there would be many more applicants.

Mature Matriculation Procedures

Ratings of the mature matriculation procedures are shown in Table 7.2. Overall, 29.5 per cent found them 'very straightforward', 55.1 per cent 'fairly straightforward' and 15.4 per cent 'daunting.' Perhaps not surprisingly those who passed were more likely to rate the procedures 'very straightforward', than those who were less successful,

with the percentage reducing further among those who were absent or withdrew. Those rejected at the interview stage were most likely to report the procedures as 'daunting.' Those who matriculated in 1976, at a distance of seven years, seemed to take a more benevolent view than those who entered in 1980 where one in six said they had encountered difficulties.

Table 7.2: Perceptions of Mature Matriculation Procedures

Category	N	%Very Straight Forward	%Fairly Straight Forward	%Daunting
Eligible for Entry 1980	141	35.2	49.3	15.5
Entered 1976	32	54.8	35.5	9.4
Passed/Not Matriculate*	8	37.5	62.5	-
Failed Matric. Exam	26	26.9	53.8	19.2
Failed External Exam	4	25.0	75.0	-
Rejected at Interview Stage	40	15.0	60.0	25.0
Absent or Withdrew	54	11.1	75.9	13.0
Total	305*	29.5	55.1	15.4

* Questionnaire respondents, 7 omitted this item.

In the comments there were some very kind words for the staff involved:

> I found everyone very helpful and encouraging.
>
> I am a disabled student and was permitted to sit the examination at Birmingham on the same day as the interview – most thoughtful.
>
> Shortly before I was to sit the Mature Exam I broke my leg and could not possibly have stayed in Manchester for the period of the exam. Someone came over to York and supervised an abridged version in my home. I was amazed and grateful.
>
> I found everyone most helpful. I got the impression that the college was – and is – enthusiastic in having mature students and the university was most helpful in explaining what was required.

But even some of those who found the procedures 'very straightforward' complained about some aspect. One applicant who withdrew and went to another university said:

> My two credits with the O.U. plus references, interviews etc. were, I thought, sufficient without having to sit another exam before entry. I have done well and expect to get a good upper-second and have been offered a Ph.D. [place] next year. If you can afford to deter students like me with apparently unnecessary exams you don't need to worry why mature students of high calibre refuse to play silly academic games.

The early closing date was mentioned by some, and the chore of form-filling came in for a lot of criticism.

> If you managed to fill in all the forms at the correct time and collect all the various bits of paper then you deserved a degree.
>
> The same information over and over again. Hard to believe we live in a computer age!

One prospective student who eventually gained a first-class honours in English and is now completing a Ph.D. said:

> I was so dismayed about the volume of paperwork that came through my letterbox that I nearly gave the whole thing up.

It was the first steps which seemed the most difficult.

> The task of gathering information prior to the JMB matriculation procedure was daunting. Where to ask? Whom to ask? How to get basic information regarding university/polytechnic entry? Would I even be considered? Which course to follow with regard to future career if I were considered? All those questions were difficult to satisfy. Preliminary enquiries were frustrating and extremely time consuming. Once this barrier was broken, the advice obtained was pertinent and most helpful. JMB and UCCA procedures thereafter posed no problems and the booklet *A Second Chance at 21+* was very helpful indeed.

Interviews

The precise nature of the admissions procedure varies not only from university to university, but from department to department, and from student to student. The range is wide. At one extreme it could consist of a single interview and, at the other, two or three interviews plus a long essay and an examination, and, even in the case of an affiliated college, two separate examinations. The only component in common is at least one interview, but the format of the interview could vary from an apparently informal chat with one person to a formal academic board of eight or nine people.

In rating the interviews, nearly half found them ‘pleasant’, 37 per cent ‘just acceptable’, and 15 per cent ‘alarming.’ Generally, the comments of the applicants showed that they had found the interviews fair, even if they had not been admitted. One who failed the written examination wrote: “Although I felt alarmed at the time and deeply conscious of my mature status, the interviewer seemed friendly and understanding.” Others said, “relaxed and informative” and “I could not have asked for kinder and fairer consideration.” Another student who failed the examination found the interview gave her false confidence: “Too pleasant. Everything was made to look too easy – the examination was just a formality. It made the disappointment worse to bear.” A student who was turned down on interview said: “All concerned were very helpful. Sensible advice was given which I believe is proving correct.” But some found the experience alarming:

> Five people, none of whom I had met before, in a very grand over-powering setting undermines one’s confidence.

> I found my interview rather unpleasant and uncomfortable. My interviewer was a brusque lecturer whose spoken English was to me virtually unintelligible. However, I must admit that I was not prepared for the meeting and perhaps deserved no better than my abrupt rebuttal.

This second respondent was rejected on interview but went to another institution where he gained first-class honours in geography.

Some applicants had multiple interviews. One, who went to an affiliated college, had had three interviews – one with the admissions tutor who was "very helpful", a second with two heads of department, and, finally, at the university with ten people – all men – in a formal setting "like a boardroom." "They all fired questions but the questions were more or less what I had already answered on the form." Another had had two interviews: "The first very relaxed; the second, after submitting an essay, a shattering, awe-inspiring experience. Some of the questions were devastating." He wondered if it was to see how he behaved under stress! He survived and obtained a degree in archaeology and ancient history.

Written Examination

Certainly the most disliked part of the procedures was the written examination which seemed to arouse resentment in those with alternative qualifications, and something akin to fear in those long out of formal education. Of those failing, 57 per cent found the examination 'as expected' and the others 'rather more difficult' or 'extremely difficult.' Among the comments from those rating it 'as expected' were:

> Having been used to exams, I expected it to be fairly difficult. Unfortunately inability to prepare adequately….meant that I was unprepared for particular questions. I feel that the exam is an unfair procedure for mature students, particularly those lacking in examination skills. It merely grades those capable of achieving in an exam situation. It does not tap the potential of the candidate.

> The matriculation exam reflected to a great extent an 'O' or 'A' level type paper. How much this complies with the aim of mature matriculation remains to be seen. I am now a second-year undergraduate at Liverpool Polytechnic studying history as a social science. In contrast to JMB mature matriculation, Liverpool Polytechnic uses a 2,500 word extended essay and interview as a means of selection. Few mature students drop out in the three years' course. I feel that the problem which is paramount in the JMB procedure is that its rigidity makes matriculation a further examination procedure and not the alternative it purports to be.

> I felt that some knowledge of the type and style of the examination would have been useful.

Those rating the examination 'extremely difficult' said:

> I expected the examinations to be searching and they were, but is it necessary to have examinations of that degree of difficulty for applicants

> who have been out of the academic scene for years? I chose English literature for one paper and was tested scholastically on books I had only read for pleasure.
>
> As I had been engaged in a specialist field of telecommunications the examination covered a wider field than I was prepared for.

Many of the applicants who failed the written paper(s) tried elsewhere. One, for example, went to night school for two evenings a week and, after two terms, attained grade B at 'A' level in two subjects (one in which she had failed the mature matriculation examination). She then entered university as a qualified mature student!

The chief complaint about the written examination, even from those who passed, was the lack of information available.

> I was ill-prepared and could not find out what to expect - even the length of the examination.
>
> I spent two months looking up the Kings of England to no avail. They would not even say if I had to take pen and pencil.

This last respondent sat and passed a general paper and an English paper, but claims to have been denied information of any kind in advance. Those who had been able to enter on the basis of an interview and essay recognised that they had fared better. One 1976 entrant wrote:

> 'Fairly straightforward', in that my requirement for acceptance was an essay, the topic of my own choice in collaboration with somebody from the Faculty. Had I been required to sit a formal examination my response would have been 'daunting.'

Discussion

A major problem for would-be mature students is finding out what avenues are open to them. Squires (1981), Hopper and Osborn (1975), Jones and Williams (1979) all point to the need for organised and co-ordinated sources of information. Venables (1976), in a report on continuing education, not only recognised the importance of information and advice, but recommended: 'Trained staff with time to listen to the educational concerns prior to any recommendations about which course or which institution to aim for.' Trained staff, however, are only useful if their potential clients are aware of their existence. As we have seen in the present study, for many it was a chance encounter that alerted them to the possibility of entry to a degree course. Venables (1976) has further suggested that 'information on the range of adult education opportunities locally and nationally needs to be co-ordinated, presented attractively and disseminated widely throughout the community', and this is surely right. It is, however, not only educational information which needs to be readily available, but also information and advice on a whole host of financial problems which can arise when mature students enter full-time education.

Having acquired the initial information, applicants have then to embark on what Jones and Williams (1979) describe as 'a major obstacle calling for managerial and logistic skills of a very high order.' Many of those interviewed spoke of the hours spent filling in forms – all with similar information. But it is not only form-filling that takes up the time. Where entry procedures include two or three interviews, one or more examinations and perhaps three sets of correspondence with the JMB, the process can seem apparently endless.

First contacts with universities when they were with the JMB mature matriculation representatives were almost always reported as "relaxed and informal." Some encounters were evidently felt to be more informative than others. Most applicants were told about university life and its pressures, and about their suitability for the courses available. Others were not. Two interviewees who felt that they had been told very little said that they were "too in awe" to ask. It is not always appreciated by academics how intimidating prospective mature students can find their first encounter with a university.

Interviews that took place after the submission of a long essay or after the written examination were regarded differently, since they were recognised to be part of the assessment procedures. With a large panel, it seemed that it was the size of the panel rather than the nature of the questions (which frequently tended to be of a general nature) that was off-putting. While with only two or three present the interviewees sometimes felt they were being "grilled."

Married women were usually questioned about how they would care for the family while on the course, and this seemed particularly so for entrants to the affiliated colleges. Some applicants accepted this as reasonable while others, particularly those who had been in full-time employment, resented it feeling that men would not be subjected to such interrogation.

A formal written examination, though it may not be more rigorous than other forms of assessment, is seen by many prospective students as the major hurdle to be overcome. Some withdrew because of it and preferred to go to a polytechnic where they could gain admission on the basis of an interview, perhaps together with the production of a satisfactory essay. It is clear in Hamilton and Bell's (1983) listing of higher education mature entry requirements that the polytechnics were less likely than other institutions to set written entrance examinations. Only three of the 31 surveyed used this method compared to 16 of the 55 university institutions and 20 of the 70 colleges (of which about a third are associated with universities and have similar entrance requirements).

In the JMB Scheme, the examination could consist of from one to four three-hour papers, with perhaps an additional paper for a college of education. In some instances, candidates were shown past papers, and sometimes they were given text books on which the questions would be set. On occasions, the form of the examination was discussed and advice on preparation was given. For the majority, however, it seems

that little information was available and sometimes even the length of the papers and other basic points were not divulged.

Although some applicants strongly objected to an examination of any kind, for most it was the lack of information that raised fears. Some universities argue that examination papers are prepared specially for particular candidates and are unique to them, so past papers would be no guide. This does not, however, seem sufficient reason for keeping a candidate 'in the dark' about the form of the examination, the types of questions, or the material to be covered. And whether an admissions examination is required at all is questionable. However, university degrees are awarded on the basis of written examinations and having to face one before entry is salutary. The work of Barrett and Powell (1980), Chapman (1978), Gleeson and Huggan (1978) and Smith (1980) all suggest that the results of unqualified mature students justify a more liberal admissions policy. Walker (1975), Roderick *et al*, (1981) and Woodley (1984) showed that mature students, in terms of degree performance, do at least as well as their younger colleagues.

Mature students have problems over and above those of the school-leaver entry. Initially, there is the need to seek out information and advice not only on institutions and courses, but on financial matters and such things as family accommodation. Unqualified applicants via the JMB Scheme can then face what may seem to be a baffling array of form-filling, interviews and examinations, designed according to cynics to deter all but the most resolute.

The very good results of unqualified adults who do gain entry (see Chapter X) probably reflect, to some extent, the extra difficulties that have had to be overcome, since they will have been a self-selected group in terms of their determination to succeed. (Similar findings have been made with other under-represented groups, for example, working-class students at university by Dale, 1963, and Smithers and Batcock, 1970; and girls in science by Smithers and Collings, 1981.) But what of those who enquired about the Scheme but did not apply to a JMB university or elsewhere? With a little help and encouragement it is possible that many more could benefit from higher education.

VIII. THOSE WHO DID NOT MATRICULATE

In this chapter we consider what happened to the 315 (62.7%) of the 502 applicants in 1980 who did not matriculate. It will be remembered from Chapter VI[17] that:

- 111 (22.1%) did not turn up for the interview or examination, or withdrew their application;
- 122 (24.3%) were rejected at the interview stage;
- 14 (2.8%) failed an external requirement, usually 'A' levels;
- 51 (10.2%) failed the mature matriculation examination;
- 17 (3.4%), although completing requirements, chose not to matriculate[18].

A questionnaire tailored to the circumstances was sent to all those not matriculating. In addition, a one-in-five sub-sample was interviewed[19].

Absent or Application Withdrawn

The 111 falling into this category went one stage beyond the 706 enquirers of Chapter III who asked for, but did not return, application forms. Nevertheless they did not proceed with their applications. The reasons given, shown in Table 8.1, are broadly similar to those given by those who enquired, but did not apply[20].

Table 8.1: Reasons for Discontinuing Application

Reason	N	Per Cent
Preferred Course Elsewhere	31	56.4
Lacked Confidence	8	14.5
Family Commitment	8	14.5
Other	8	14.5
Total	55	100.0

More than half (56.4%) preferred to go to other universities or colleges, while the rest mainly withdrew either because they lacked the confidence to proceed or because they had decided they could juggle the course requirements and family commitments. Other prospective students were put off by the cost or had changed plans for a variety of reasons.

Course Elsewhere

Twenty-eight (50.9% of withdrawals) had by the time of the survey in 1983 become full-time students elsewhere – 12 in universities, 14 in polytechnics and two in colleges of education. Three more (5.5%) were studying part-time, one with the Open University and two at technical colleges.

[17] Details given in Table 6.1, page 68.
[18] Six applicants who elected not to matriculate in 1976 having satisfied the requirements are also considered.
[19] Examples of the questionnaires and interview schedules are given in Appendices C and D.
[20] See Chapter III.

One respondent who went elsewhere had been asked to obtain an ‘A’ level. Another was advised by the university not to apply under the Scheme but to complete ‘A’ levels. A third was asked to write some preliminary essays which in his view required research; somewhat nonplussed, he withdrew. One college transferred from the aegis of a university to CNAA validation, and so the applicant merely withdrew from the Scheme and applied direct.

Interviews at the university or affiliated college sometimes led to applicants withdrawing. One person said she had been made to feel small and was treated as a bored middle-class lady. In fact, she was a nurse with an impressive array of qualifications. The outcome of the interview was that she was advised to apply the following year after ‘A’ levels, but enrolled at the local polytechnic for a part-time B.Sc. in nursing which, she thinks, probably suited her better.

Lacked Confidence

Eight respondents (14.5% of withdrawals) said they had lost confidence in their applications. One was interviewed at another university and found the level of questioning so difficult that he withdrew his JMB application before being seen and decided to embark on an ‘A’ level course. Another was given an offer conditional on acquiring an ‘A’ level in his main subject but, since he was over fifty years of age, he did not think he had it in him to start from scratch.

Two applicants were overwhelmed. One contacted a university department and was given to understand that she would first have to write an essay. She misunderstood the instructions and was too much in awe to go back to enquire. When no further details arrived she just gave up! The other applied direct to the university and was offered a place subject to achieving two grade B’s at ‘A’ level, but was also steered towards the JMB representative. The prospective student, feeling that he would never be admitted without ‘A’ levels and not understanding about the mature matriculation examination, did not attend the interview. Instead he set about attempting to obtain ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels at night school. The whole thing proved too much and he had a nervous breakdown.

Family Commitments

Family commitments were given as the main reason for withdrawal by eight respondents (l4.5%). One man felt obliged to stay at home to support his parents when his father’s health deteriorated considerably. The husband of another intending student died suddenly. A prospective student with three school-aged sons came to the conclusion that he would just not be able to manage on the grant he would receive.

Other

Eight students (14.5%) gave other reasons. One said he was deterred by the cost of fees and travelling. Another could not cope with working full-time and ‘A’ level studies so he gave up and decided to travel abroad. He has since returned and entered another university which accepted him without any conditions. Two withdrew because of illness; another had booked a holiday abroad for the time of the

examination, and someone else found that the course he hoped to take at a college of education had been cancelled.

Rejected at Interview Stage

Fifteen turned down after interviews were interviewed for this project. In particular, they were asked why they thought they had not been offered a place and whether they thought the selection process was reasonable and fair. Three rationalised the situation, blaming the shortage of places and the supposed limited number for mature students allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis. One said it had made her more determined than ever to enter and was taking 'A' levels; another felt that he had not been prepared for a university course and thought the rejection fair. One who entered a college of education said she had felt a bit frustrated and rather second-class at not getting her first option, but thought she was better suited to the college she went to probably, being less academic.

Of the 15, seven had graduated by the time they were seen, three with honours – one with first-class honours and another who was now taking an M.A. All were quite satisfied with the alternative courses they had taken. Only one had engaged in no further formal study. He had been too disheartened. Even to approach a university had been a great step for him; he said:

> A university is quite a separate institution. It is quite frightening when you are outside it. The fact that I considered going to university is totally alien to the people I work with, it would not even enter their heads. University life is quite frightening when you are not used to it. The day I went to the university I was very nervous and when I came out I was very disheartened. I never felt welcomed.

Most said that they would have liked to have been given the reason for their rejection and most would have welcomed advice about other opportunities and courses.

Failed External Requirement

Of the four who failed an external requirement who were drawn for interview, one went to another university, one at the time of our interview had not passed the required 'O' level maths for entry to a BEd course but was about to attempt it for the third time. One had remained in industry. The fourth did not get back to us.

Failed Matriculation Examination

Twenty-six (51.0%) of the 51 people who failed the mature matriculation requirement responded to the questionnaire, and 17 were interviewed. Ten had become full-time students at the time of the enquiry. Two were at JMB universities having met entry requirements by obtaining A-levels. One of the two learned of her passing the required grades at 'A' level shortly after hearing she had failed the matriculation examination. The other went to night school for two evenings a week for eight months and achieved grade B in two subjects. She entered university the following year.

A common response to being asked why they thought they had failed the examination was being unclear about what was required. One said she thought she had been misled and had spent weeks swotting up the wrong things. She thought she could tackle any examination given a clear idea of what was required. Another wrote:

> Because of my lack of essay training I had no idea what they were looking for. It was a fair examination if you had the relevant experience in essay writing and answering examination questions.

Three felt ill-advised about the subjects they had opted to take. One said: "The English literature examination was quite above my head. I had only read for pleasure." He thought that it was quite unfair to be subjected to such an examination. He did not think it was a reasonable method of selection and that it did not measure potential. He went along to the local polytechnic and enrolled, without examination, for a law degree course. He has since graduated with an upper-second. Another who felt he was ill-advised, opted to take a paper in mathematics. He realised too late that it would have been better to have taken his chosen subject, geology.

Sometimes it was the form of the examination that was the problem:

> I would have liked a mature matric course that was continuously assessed, rather than being thrust into an examination situation totally unprepared.

Most of the interviewees, quite unprompted, volunteered their disappointment at the standard rejection letter. They expressed their feelings of inadequacy at being turned down without explanation. One commented that she now feels stupid and wants to opt out of any further examinations. Another said: "It is not right if you are given no information on how you can rectify things." But one failing candidate took the initiative and wrote to enquire if, in view of her failure, there was any point in attempting 'A' levels. She received a long and detailed reply with encouragement to try again. She did and the following year entered on her A-level qualifications.

Deferring or Refusing Place

Only eight (34.8%) of the twenty-three in this group returned completed questionnaires and five were interviewed. Two respondents had refused offers in favour of other universities. Four had deferred for financial, family or health reasons, but three of these had since entered the university of their choice and the fourth had already graduated. Two others had remained in full-time employment.

The reasons for deferment or refusal even in this small group show the range of problems mature students face. One, a policeman, found he could not afford to accept leave without pay, but was happily able to get secondment on full pay the following year and graduated in 1981. Of the two women who deferred, both of whom were in full-time employment, one was forced to postpone her studies because of the serious illness of an adolescent daughter, while the other, who was determined not to cause any financial strain on the family, and had waited several years in order to save up enough money so that she could keep up her household commitments, found that although her son was at university he still needed her financial support. The fourth

deferrer was a man who had suffered multiple spinal injuries as a result of an industrial accident. His recovery was not as quick as expected and he had to defer for a year.

Of the two who did not take up places offered, one said it was because of "family and financial commitments", and the other, a woman, told us that she had been left to bring up three small children single-handed and had two mortgages. She could not manage on a student grant and had had to take a job.

Alternative Arrangements

Table 8.2 shows that about half the non-matriculating students had entered full-time higher education by the time of the questionnaire survey in April/May, 1983, compared to 37 per cent of the enquirers at the time they were followed up in summer 1982. Most of the others were still following some form of education, with less than a quarter not in education at all.

Table 8.2: Alternative Arrangements

Destinations	%Enquirers* (N=243)	% Applicants Not Matriculating (N=138)
University	23.4	19.6
Polytechnic	11.5	25.4
College of Education	2.1	4.3
Open University	8.6	1.4
Further Education	9.1	10.1
'A' levels	14.8	10.1
Other	3.3	9.4
None	27.2	19.6

* Those who expressed an interest but did not apply; see Chapter III for details.

As might be expected, those who passed the requirements but chose not to matriculate were most likely to go to university (37.5%). Among the other groups, a polytechnic (25.4%) was a popular alternative, possibly because of the different admissions procedures.

Discussion

Only just over half those not matriculating among the 1980 applicants returned our questionnaire, and even allowing for the large number, 77 (13%), who could not be traced, the sample must be regarded as a self-selected and not a representative one. The work of Woodley and McIntosh (1977) and Fulton and Lamley (1983) suggests that those who had fared best would be the most likely to reply.

Nevertheless, it is evident that not matriculating for many did not mean the end of the education road. About half went on to degree courses elsewhere. Some were remarkably successful. One student rejected at the interview stage went to another university and gained a first-class honours degree in geography. Probably the most

important factor influencing the withdrawal of candidates from the matriculation process was the written examination. The time taken for processing the applications also contributed, to some extent, since institutions admitting students without examination were able to get in first.

That there must be selection when university places are greatly over-subscribed is obvious. Mature matriculation is essentially a qualifying procedure and whether it is fit for purpose, particularly in view of the academic success elsewhere of those not gaining admission, should perhaps be considered. More flexible procedures for selecting unqualified mature students have been advocated by Hopper and Osborn (1975), Roderick *et al,* (1982) and Squires (1982). Squires suggests it could be on the basis of 'optional aptitude and other tests related to entry', which is the approach used in Australia. The use of the Scholastic Aptitude Test there, however, has been seriously questioned by Leadbetter *et al,* (1979).

Jones and Williams (1979) suggest that 'the eye of the selector should be on what the student will become by the end of his course, instead of the present tendency to select students on the basis of what they show they know already.' Barrett and Powell (1980), however, like the idea of a short 'obstacle course designed to discourage those who are inadequately motivated towards advanced study.'

Preparatory courses are also sometimes used as a selection device. Smith and Collins (1977) and Smith (1980) report that at the University of Newcastle in Australia a six months' part-time foundation course open to any person aged twenty-two or over is provided. Lectures are by university staff. There is continuous assessment and an end-of-course examination. All those who complete the course and achieve the required standard are offered a place. The Division of Continuing Education at Sheffield University in this country offers a part-time course designed to prepare mature students for further study at undergraduate level. The course, which is of two years' duration, has been commended by several respondents, but others felt it was too long and delayed university entrance unnecessarily.

No selection procedure is perfect and, in view of the great range of attainment and potential among mature students, a variety of approaches would seem desirable. The academic success elsewhere of those not admitted by the JMB entrance procedures suggests that the methods should perhaps be looked at again.

IX. THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

What was it like to be a mature student at university? In order to learn something about their experiences, the 187 of the 502 applicants in 1980 who had matriculated and entered one of the JMB universities, and also the 86 who had taken up a place in 1976, were approached during 1983.

Of those who matriculated in1980, 141 (75.4%) completed our questionnaire in what was for most of them the last term at university or college. The students were 'full' of their courses, memories were vivid and the blank spaces on the questionnaires were often crammed with comments. Interviews with 44 (23.5%) took place during the summer and autumn of 1983, just after their courses had ended, with results and awards still very new. There was still some euphoria and almost a disbelief that the goal had been accomplished. In the few cases where results had been disappointing, or career prospects looked bleak, some reaction had set in.

Only 32 of the 1976 entrants could be contacted in 1983, and 17 (19.8%) were interviewed. Distance had lent some tranquillity, and the pains and delights seemed to be felt less sharply.

Expectations

Unqualified mature students are likely to enter university with expectations largely based on hearsay. We have seen[21] that about a quarter of applicants through the JMB Scheme had left school before the age of sixteen and more than half had had no experience of sixth-form study. Although most candidates had undertaken some form of adult education, and over a half had attended full-time courses, these were often for short periods and vocational in nature. Nevertheless, as Table 9.1 shows, the great majority felt that their expectations had been fully or partly realised.

Table 9.1: Extent Expectations Fulfilled

Rating	N	Per Cent
Fully	56	40.0
In part	77	55.0
Hardly	1	0.7
Not at all	4	2.9
Did not know	2	1.4
Total	140*	100.0

* Questionnaire responses of 1980 entrants; one did not complete this item.

A few were totally satisfied:

> I found the course both satisfying and challenging. It fulfilled my expectations in every way.

[21] Table 2.12, page 27.

> The course was everything – this is in terms of possibilities of the mind – that I had hoped for. It expanded my mind, bringing to the fore and making usable parts of my intellectual potential which would otherwise have remained undeveloped. I wish I could do it again.

But usually there was some qualification, if only slight:

> After an initial adjustment I found the course standard to be comfortably within my intellectual capabilities. The course has far exceeded my expectations in thoroughness, individual interest, academic variety and practical application.
>
> In as far as I knew what to expect I was not disappointed.

Those who indicated that their expectations had only been partly fulfilled tended to have reservations related to their reasons for taking their course. Those who had a definite career in mind, or were furthering their existing career, were sometimes impatient of what they saw as the "academic" or "irrelevant" aspects of the course, An engineer regarded some topics as "lacking in utility", while a married woman on a BEd course found: "Certain aspects of the course very boring and elementary and a waste of time when I had so much to do trying to run a home and look after a family as well."

For those whose main reason for going to university was love of a particular subject, or even the need to feel they had been 'educated', the university system was sometimes disappointing:

> There were far more lectures and fewer seminars than I had expected. The lectures were to very large numbers of students and questions were not expected. The lecture topics were not necessarily followed up in the seminars.
>
> I was disappointed at the lack of time to have more discussion. It is always a rush to complete the syllabus and there is no time to go into a subject thoroughly. I expected much smaller groups and more lecture-guided discussion.

The examination system was generally disliked:

> The course is completely examination-orientated. Up to now this has not caused me any particular problems, but it does not encourage meaningful participation in seminars and tutorials.
>
> The fact that the course, like many others, was geared to exams, meant that I could not get all I wanted from my three years at university.
>
> The course has only come up to what I expected in part because I think there has been too much emphasis on rote learning and the exams are mainly a test of memory. I would have liked to have seen more in the way of internal assessment.

For many a compromise had to be struck between what would have been ideal and what was possible:

> I adjusted my expectations to the reality and tried to extract the maximum from the course. I concentrated first on learning what I wanted to and second on achieving a high mark. Getting what I wanted was more important than satisfying the university's desire for high academic achievement. The system does not allow for both.

One of the very few who confessed to feeling wholly disappointed said that it had not lived up to what he had been hoping for:

> I thought university would be full of intelligent people thirsting after knowledge. I thought you would have to think for yourself. I was very disappointed.

But, overall, the expectations of those who had entered via the Special Scheme seem to have been largely met, and this has also emerged in some other studies. Moses (1978) compared 391 mature special entry students with 122 mature qualified and 84 normal-entry students in the University of Queensland. All groups reported that what they experienced did not match up to what they had ideally wanted, but the gap was smallest for the mature unqualified group, possibly because they had become more realistic over the years.

Martin (1977) and Barrett and Powell (1980), however, found that the mature students also tended to have reservations. They found that the students in Australia, like some in the present study, resented having to 'play the system' and were disappointed that they could not go into more depth in an area which they found of particular interest because of the need to get through the course material. In Britain, Nisbet and Welsh (1972) found 23 per cent of their sample of mature students at the University of Aberdeen were disappointed to discover university was not what they expected it to be. They complained that it was "ordinary" and not the unique intellectual experience they had been expecting; that it was not "a quiet place of learning"; and many said that all that was required of them was to memorise lecture notes, to regurgitate them in examinations and never to attempt to question a lecturer's views.

The exam system was also a source of concern in the present study. Exams were blamed for having to learn by rote, and the superficial treatment of topics. It was particularly disliked because many mature students felt that they lacked the retentive memories of their younger colleagues. Mildred (1976), however, warns that it is a mistake to suppose that if formal examinations were to be abolished the stresses associated with assessment would somehow disappear. He points out that, increasingly, students are finding that continuous assessment imposes its own form of pressure throughout the course. Nevertheless, the common view was that it would be preferable to existing arrangements.

Returning to Study

The study techniques honed in the sixth form by 'A'-level entrants have to be acquired by many of the unqualified mature students during their university courses. About three-quarters (72.9%) reported encountering problems with regard to study methods and examination techniques.

For some it was the lack of requisite skills: note-taking, the speed of writing required, and especially essay writing. Over 40 per cent of those interviewed admitted to some difficulty with essays: how to express themselves, how to structure an argument and, initially, just to know what standard was required. One student found essays "an unexpected problem" and another "quite worrying at first." One admitted to having taken two years "to acquire the skills of school-leavers (note-taking and essay writing)." Three students blamed failing first-year exams on their lack of technique. Several commented that a course on handling information would have been useful. One confessed: "I started skipping lectures because, in a lot of cases, my notes were useless. I tended to work more from text-books than from notes in contrast to younger students."

Some university departments, and particularly colleges with sizable numbers of mature students, had put on courses on study skills and examination techniques, and these were, without exception, much appreciated:

> Being a mature student, it had been a long time since I had prepared essays and I was not sure what was expected – standard, format etc. I was in the third year before one department decided we all needed help on the format of replies to examination questions. Thank goodness that department took the initiative before we came to our final examinations.
>
> The university was most helpful in providing assistance to mature students, especially during the first year. Emphasis was laid on improving the confidence of mature students.

It was not just the acquisition of the necessary techniques which proved difficult for some, but the adjustment to a whole new way of life: "Initial disorientation - so different from work." And from a woman used to being at home with her family: "At first I felt isolated and adjustment was difficult and frustrating. My family life was certainly disrupted and, on reflection, this left me with a sense of guilt."

Some policemen on secondment found the different lifestyle alien, and sometimes positively alarming:

> It was difficult to adjust from a direct action type of job. At first, I thought I would not survive! Study was much deeper than I'd expected. I felt guilty about being away from work and missed the comradeship of the force. I felt completely alone. I had to prove myself as an individual and not just part of an outfit. I felt inactive just sitting in a room taking notes; I had been a commander with my own team.

Problems arising from mature students' lack of practice in study skills and examination techniques have been well documented (Cleugh, 1972; Nisbet and Welsh, 1972; Challis, 1976; West and Boon, 1980; Lawler and Hore, I980; Roderick *et al*, 1981; Isaacs, 1982; MacDonald *et al*, 1983). Roderick *et al*, (1981) suggest that the difficulties reported by mature students in note-taking and essay writing may reflect the greater willingness of older students to admit their deficiencies. Challis (1976) also found this, but points out that this response is no less rational than the relative unconcern shown by the school-leaver entrants. Mildred (1978) takes the view that even though in an objective sense the anxieties experienced by mature students may be unfounded this does not reduce the subjective feelings of discomfort.

The interpretation of Lawler and Hore (1980) is that the problems are 'but intensive and overt examples of a pervasive trauma in making the transition to university study. The practical difficulties, however, also exist in their own right. West and Boon (1980) report that the faculties of Monash University (in Melbourne, Australia) which they studied are of the opinion that, because of poor examination techniques, the average performance of mature students would be much higher if assessed purely on the basis of 'project work, tutorial papers, essays, etc.'

It does appear, therefore, both from the present research and the literature that, even though the reports of study difficulties among mature students may come from greater awareness of the problem, they are nevertheless real. Anything that universities and colleges can do to help through induction courses, extra support, information and feedback would be valuable in allaying the mature students' fears and could improve academic results as well.

Relationships with Normal-Entry Students

Generally, the difference in age between the mature students and school-leaver entrants was not great. Nearly half the mature students were under 30 and almost three-quarters under 35. On the whole, mature students appeared to find being with younger people stimulating and rejuvenating:

> The normal-entry students accepted me right away. I was not much older than they and I think it helped. Perhaps it would have been better if I had been older. I might have gone home more often! I had a great social life. I got on with most people and there was a group of eight or nine of us who used to be very good friends. I would go with them at night and have family interests at weekends.
>
> Like having ten years lopped off your age.
>
> Being a mature student in a youthful environment was stimulating and enjoyable.

On the other hand, older students sometimes seemed to enjoy being a parent-figure:

> I mixed quite a lot with normal-entry students. It was just like being with my daughter's friends. I made friends with other 'matures' on the course

> and in other disciplines. Younger ones looked to me when they were settling in and brought me their problems. Although I was not into the disco/party scene, normal-entry students were very good about inviting me.
>
> Got on well with normal-entry students. I thought being a senior police officer would not work with younger students but I was able to relax and be 'off-duty' with them. I got on remarkably well and made good friends. Once it was found that I was approachable I became a father figure and was sought out for advice and guidance.

In about ten per cent of cases, however, mature students reported that they had felt isolated and more than one spoke of loneliness. This happened most often when there were no other mature students on the course.

> I found it difficult to make friends, a problem I had never encountered before. A very alienating experience which badly affected my performance.
>
> I never thought of myself as anti-social. I was surprised at the difficulty of making friends. People with little experience outside school make too many assumptions about married women and the way they should act.

Some were able to adjust:

> Being so close to the usual age of students, but having had 'broadening' experiences from the 'outside world', I found first contact with students very tiring and the loss of responsibility and respect very frustrating. Tutors at first seemed very patronising. But the fault was with me and after personal adjustments these problems are next to non-existent.

But others were less successful:

> I did expect a social life to emerge, but was deeply disappointed when none materialised. I wanted to get into student life, but found it did not exist. I found eighteen-year-olds young and naive. I don't think they saw me as older but I felt the age gap.

One policeman described his first two years as "traumatic." He read politics and modern history and found it very difficult to fit in with unconventional youngsters whom he saw as the "lunatic fringe." He admitted to being "not in tune with the atmosphere" and to "going about it all the wrong way." Not unnaturally he felt "an outsider" for the first eighteen months. But he came to terms with university life in the third year, made good friends and declared it was the best time in his life. He would do it again!

Although for the substantial majority, mixing with normal-entry students could be both refreshing and stimulating, there was also a minority who did not find the acceptance they sought. Age and sex both appeared to be factors. Many of the younger men went about with their school-leaver colleagues and felt part of the group.

Younger women, at least in our study, seemed to find it harder to fit in. Married mature students rarely wished to fraternise in the evenings and probably found the casual camaraderie of the group all they had expected.

Lawler and Hore (1980) found all the comments they received 'at least stressed the friendliness between younger and older students.' But their mature students were nearly all 'part-timers' probably requiring, as did the married students in this research, no more than friendly acquaintances. Roderick *et al,* (1981) reported that more than half their mature students claimed that they had no problems. Even so, 58 per cent supported the idea of a special student society for themselves, and the reason given by over a half of these was "to prevent isolation."

Looking at it from the other side, Challis (1976) found some hostility to mature students among about 45 per cent of the normal age entry. Younger students said they had expected to be treated like grown-ups and resented being referred to as 'the youngsters' by mature students. Others thought that mature students were "out of place" in a young student world. Not surprisingly, isolated mature students in the college found it "a great relief" to meet contemporaries.

Criticisms did not, however, come from only one side. In the Sheffield study (Roderick *et al,* (1981)), mature students' disappointment at the standard of tutorials was attributed by them to the apathy of younger students who appeared unwilling to contribute to the discussion and this tended to exacerbate an already existing sense of separation between some of the younger and older students.

Although, generally, relationships between mature and younger students seem to have been good, possible sources of difficulty have emerged. There is also the risk that individual mature students may come to feel lonely and different. This could be ameliorated to some extent by a mature students' society, and where none exists, consideration should be given to establishing one. Many of the students interviewed in the present research would have welcomed the opportunity of belonging to such an association.

Tutors

Mature students are often the same age or even older than their tutors. For most the similarity in age mattered little. One student said he saw them as "fellow human beings - not as younger students viewed them." One or two felt they were being treated as children, and one found tutors younger than himself very difficult to accept and criticism from them unpalatable. Older tutors, he thought, were "like a breath of fresh air." Most found the staff a mixed bunch, rating them from the superb, talented and gifted to very dull, boring and "rubbish."

Many of the mature students considered lecturers to be very helpful, for example, in being willing to allow children into lectures when schools were on holiday and other arrangements had fallen through. Appreciation of the good lecturer was sometimes unrestrainedly generous. One English literature student described the lectures of the best tutors as "a sacramental experience."

Robinson (1974) and Lawler and Hore (1980) noted that the qualities their mature students praised in lecturers were approachability and sympathetic understanding of the demands upon mature students. Willingness to extend essay deadlines was also appreciated. As in the present study, the students sometimes commended the staff for their personal help, yet were critical of their teaching.

Most of the research concerning mature students' interaction with lecturers has, however, centred on lecturers' perceptions of mature students. West and Boon (1980) noted what they considered to be a 'peculiar phenomenon' in that mature age students tended to set higher standards both for themselves and academic staff. Many of the staff were inclined to explain it in terms of the higher motivation and generally stronger intellectual curiosity which older students could show. It is also clear, however, that mature students tended to add to staff workload, not only because of their higher standards, but also because some appeared to need more supervision, additional prescriptive material, and more support and reassurance.

Challis (1976) has suggested that mature students experience higher education as other students do, only with 'heightened awareness.' Many of the staff studied by West and Boon (1980) reacted to this sharper interest as 'an exciting challenge', and others thought it had a generally beneficial effect on the whole class. Chapman (1978) considered it to be a stimulus to academic staff also.

But West and Boon (I980) noted that several lecturers referred to mature students' inflexible attitude towards their subject. The researchers commented that 'whether inflexibility is due to age and maturity or is simply a function of disparity between the experiences of academic staff in the subject and the experiences of these students in real life remains debatable.' Lawler and Hore (1980) recognised a tendency among mature students to dominate in tutorials, but they said that it was equally clear that tutors relied heavily on mature students and their interests and confidence to keep a tutorial going. The lecturers in Challis' (1976) research found mature students' participation helpful. They found them 'easier to talk to' and one lecturer admitted that he was often 'fighting for a wavelength' with younger students.

While the presence of mature students may be seen as a stimulus, Mildred (1978) suggests that they can also pose a conscious or unwitting threat to members of staff, particularly those who are younger. For example, he suggests that it takes confidence, as well as a sure grasp of the topic, for a young lecturer to teach experienced mothers about child development.

Family Commitments

About one in five of the 1980 entrants completing a questionnaire reported having problems caused by family commitments. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this particularly involved married women. Thirty-seven per cent considered that they had 'severe problems' in this respect. By contrast, 90 per cent of single men and 63 per cent of single women gave 'negligible' as their response.

Men with families sometimes stayed at university after lectures, because it was difficult to get time for uninterrupted study at home: “If I am at home I am, by definition, not at work.” Women, on the other hand, frequently had to dash off home in order to receive children from school. Study was often fitted in when the children were in bed. One woman said that she rarely started her university work before nine in the evening and frequently stayed up all night when she had an essay deadline to meet. Not all men, by any means, opted out of family commitments – indeed 21 per cent of men with families considered their problems ‘severe’, and one confessed to writing many an essay with a baby on his lap. He incidentally gained first-class honours.

The successful were able to come to terms with the situation:

> Some problems with family commitments until I got my priorities sorted out – husband and kids first – housework can wait until I have finished the course. I suffered quite a guilt problem in the first year.

Others succumbed:

> It was a combination of course and family commitments which eventually led to a severe problem of exhaustion. As a one-parent family, my prime commitment is to the family. This produced disappointment at my inability to find time to do the course work.
>
> There were no concessions for mature students’ problems. Husband and children resented my constant studying and I felt torn between my responsibility to them and to the college. This affected my health and nearly caused a nervous breakdown. Very reluctantly, I withdrew from the course after two months of the second year.

A supportive spouse could make all the difference:

> Family commitments have been heavy during my course. Two of my children took ‘O’ and ‘A’ level examinations. I had a major operation which I fitted in during my holiday period. Lack of time for study and time with the family was a major problem. I could not have completed the course without my husband’s encouragement and patience.

Previous experience of coping with a job and family seemed to help, though the demands could be enormous: “Family commitments slotted in easily, much more easily than when I was working. Money was not really adequate. I worked during the holidays and eked out with part-time jobs.” This woman had three children aged eleven, ten and six, and one ‘on the way’. Even she admitted to feeling the pressure when ‘finals’ loomed.

A three-year full-time course of university study makes considerable demands on any student; on mature students with family responsibilities, the costs mentally and physically can be great, sometimes leading to near exhaustion. West and Boon (1980) noted that most of the problems experienced by mature students are due to the

difficulty of trying to reconcile their various roles. Academic staff pointed out that the economic and social roles of mature age students often seem to take precedence over the role of student and that this can adversely affect their study. It would be surprising if it were not so. When family sickness or other emergencies strike, the problem is exacerbated. Robinson (1974) reports 'knock-on' effects, with the spouse sometimes having to take time off work.

Most of the mature students interviewed did not wish to be regarded as 'special cases', but at some time during their course many needed some recognition of, or allowance to be made for, their particular circumstances. An investigation, such as that undertaken by Isaacs (1982) in Australia, into how institutions treat their mature students, would be useful in identifying ways through which students with family commitments could be helped.

Time and Facilities for Study

Facilities for study did not seem to pose a major problem, except perhaps for women with families, some of whom said they studied at the living-room table while keeping an eye on the washing machine or the evening meal. Family commitments, however, could mean that women had to go home immediately after lectures and were not able to use library facilities as much as they would have wished. Mature students praised the 'short loan system' which enabled them to borrow selected books overnight, which would normally be for reference only. Usually though the short loan was not available until after four or even five p.m. – too late for parents who needed to meet children from school. Sometimes, expensive books, which could otherwise have been borrowed from the library, had to be bought.

Most mature students lived at home and, although this could mean commuting up to forty miles, very few complained. The time spent commuting meant less for study. One student who travelled for four hours a day admitted to being "shattered" by the end of the week and of being "too tired to study." Another owned a very old car which he could not afford to replace and which frequently let him down so that he missed lectures. This he felt was a contributory factor in his failing one of his final examinations. In addition to the time and energy spent travelling, the cost of petrol was a considerable burden. For students with homes to maintain and families to look after, time for study was especially precious. Isaacs (1982) identified lack of time as 'the ineradicable problem' for mature students. Lawler and Hore (1980) asked mature students to indicate what they felt had been the major cost to them of returning to education, in whatever terms - financial, emotional, social, or personal – they chose. Nearly all gave the same answer: lack of time prevented them from participating as they would have wished in family, and, to some extent, in personal activities. This could cause tension and frustration, and lead to the student having to restrict the time devoted to study to spend more time with the children and on household chores.

But it is not just the lack of available time; it is also the spread of work throughout the day. Of the 51 students interviewed by Lawler and Hore (1980), 40 (78.4%) spoke of attendance difficulties, which in 18 cases had limited subject choices. In the case of the JMB students interviewed, it was particularly early or late lectures, restrictive

times for the library's short-term loans, and school holidays which did not coincide with university vacations that created problems. While some of these are probably inevitable, there are areas like library access, facilities for child-minding, and timetabling, where universities could probably do more.

Finance

Students with families suffered most financially. Single students sometimes gave up relatively well-paid jobs to go to university and had to make drastic alterations in their living standards, but this was almost always done cheerfully: "I was no different from other students-all students are poor."

Married women who had not had a paid post and who were supported by their husbands also had little difficulty in coping. But for the single-parent family, for the working wife who had always contributed to the family income, for the married man with young children, and most of all when husband and wife were both students, the situation was quite different. One couple described their circumstances as follows:

> We have suffered great material deprivation throughout our years in education. In part, because the grants we receive are totally inadequate and added to this, the pitiful amount allowed for our children. Seeking and finding suitable accommodation has presented serious difficulties. We have had to resort to the private sector and, currently, half our total income goes on rent.

Even in one-student families, where the student has been the 'breadwinner', the situation could be dire:

> Severe illness in the family and deprivation due to a grossly unfair grant system (the student had two children at university) has had me on the brink of starvation at times. I had to work at night during the last term to pay my way.
>
> The problem of receiving a 'dole level' income with the pay check arriving just three times a year has caused severe financial restrictions. The combined problems of being non-resident and having family commitments has made studying difficult and put me at a disadvantage.

Another student with financial problems commented on the difficulty of raising money:

> Society, especially away from a university town, cannot seem to accept mature students. This makes it very difficult when trying to get 'hire purchase' or to borrow money.

The amount of financial support available to a mature student will depend on his or her circumstances. Age, marital status, the number and ages of children, whether or not the student was employed prior to university and for how long, and whether the student has a mortgage will all affect what can be claimed and from where.

A mature student's grant entitlement is defined by the regulations which apply to student grants generally. In 1984[22], a maintenance grant of £1,775 was payable to students living away from home, plus an extra £325 for those in London, with an age allowance rising from £165 at twenty-six to a maximum of £685 at twenty-nine. This grant is calculated to cover a period of thirty weeks and three days, and extra weeks of required attendance are allowable at a rate of £37.80 outside London (London rate: £48.60). Local authorities are also empowered to make weekly payments during the vacation up to a maximum of £39.65 for students who would otherwise suffer hardship.

Mature students are likely to have an advantage over other students in that they will probably qualify for independent status by virtue of having reached the age of twenty-five or by having been self-supporting from earnings for any three years before the first year of the course. This means that the grant is not calculated by reference to parents' income, though spouse's income is taken into account. A married student is able to claim a sum of £1,115 for a dependant spouse and allowances for children depending on their age rising from £215 for those under eleven to £850 for those 18 or over with no income. If a student has to maintain a second home while attending the course a sum of £400 is payable, and disabled students are able to claim reimbursement of up to £540 for any additional costs incurred by reason of the disability and as a result of attending the course.

All this may appear generous, but it can be substantially below what the student would be entitled to receive on supplementary benefit. Let us take as an example a married student over 29 years of age with two children between eleven and sixteen who has a mortgage of £20,000. The grant here would be £4,445. However, the same person (assuming a net mortgage interest rate of eight per cent and a ground rent payable of £10) would be entitled to a supplementary benefit payment of £106.44 per week which amounts to £5,534.88 over the year. In addition, a person on supplementary benefit may be able to claim a heating allowance of up to £5.20 a week, a laundry allowance, interest payments on items such as cookers and television sets, and an urgent-needs contributions towards such things as cooking utensils and bedding.

The difference in value between student grant and supplementary benefit payments largely depends on the fact that *mortgage interest is taken into account for supplementary benefit purposes, but is not provided for in student grants*, even those for mature students. Since the student can declare him/herself available for work during the vacations, he/she may be able to top up the grant with supplementary benefit. How much may be available from the DHSS depends on whether or not the student has been employed in the period prior to going to university. A person who has been employed would be able to claim unemployment benefit which is paid without deductions relating to the portion of the grant given for the short vacations. Unemployment benefit is paid by giro a fortnight in arrears so that for the first two weeks of each vacation a student would also be able to claim supplementary benefit.

[22] All the amounts quoted in this section apply to 1984. They are reviewed each year.

Therefore by clever timing a student might be able to claim six weeks benefit for a four weeks' vacation. A student with children who has been employed for the twelve months prior to going to university may also be able to claim Family Income Supplement, which is payable for the whole year on an initial assessment and brings with it entitlement to free school meals, prescriptions, dental treatment, glasses and some other things.

A student who has not been employed prior to university would be able to claim supplementary benefit but this is considerably reduced in the short vacations by the portion of the grant deemed to relate to those periods. A mature student, therefore, might be able to obtain at best mortgage interest payments for some five months of the year, but for the remaining seven months he/she would be receiving less than if they were unemployed. (It is possible that in some circumstances a spouse might be able to claim supplementary benefit and the student obtain a contribution to mortgage interest payments in this way, but calculations show that this is very unlikely.)

For students in other circumstances the comparison between the mature student grant and supplementary benefits works out differently. In the case of the young student aged 21-25, without a mortgage, the discrepancy is not so great. The basic student grant in 1984 was £1,775 a year; supplementary benefit calculated at the 'long term scale rate' would have been £1,970.64. A single parent with children under sixteen does not have to make him/herself available for work and can therefore claim to have a student grant brought up to supplementary benefit levels.

Support is available, but the system is complex and it is possible that mature students are not claiming all to which they are entitled. It would be useful, therefore, if the DES and the DHSS were to jointly prepare a booklet for the information of mature students setting out their entitlements. At the moment the DES makes available a publication dealing with grants to students[23] and the DHSS provides a guide[24] to social security. These are both intended for all students. The mature student who is likely to have concerns over and above those of the normal-age-entry students is not specifically catered for. Since quite complicated calculations are involved in deciding, for example, whether it would be better to approach the local authority for a discretionary grant during the vacation or to sign on at the supplementary benefits office, it would be extremely useful to have the information brought together in one publication.

It would also be very helpful if an advice centre for mature students could be established, locally or nationally, which could, as one of its functions, accumulate a body of expertise and case law relating to what can be claimed. Students could then be advised on what to do to their best advantage and not have to spend a great deal of time in involved calculations and going from office to office. Although the mature student grant does contain provision for dependents and some other aspects of the student's personal circumstances, the grants could be much more carefully tailored

[23] DES (1984). *Grants to Students*. Publications Dept., Stanmore, Middlesex.

[24] DHSS (1984). *Going to college or university?* HMSO, London.

to individual needs. In particular, consideration should be given to including an allowance to cover the net interest on a mortgage and some of the other benefits, for example, the heating additions, which are available on supplementary benefit.

Even though it is unlikely that a keen potential mature student is going to be put off by the difference between what could be obtained as a student grant and going on the dole, it seems ironic that we should make more money available to keep people idle. Whatever else it is, education is an excellent way of occupying time. As Jones and Williams (1979) comment:

> A balance sheet of total social cost which takes account of the cost of unemployment, of over-manning in declining industries, of actuarial assessments of the consequences of early retirement schemes, and of the other devices for alleviating the shortage of work, must be constructed before a true estimate can be made of the [actual cost] of educational provisions.

It must be surely worth the State's while to support a mature student at least to the extent of social security payments. A level of support which encouraged people of mature years to take advantage of the opportunities of higher education would have a number of benefits both personal and social.

X. OUTCOMES

We have seen that, in 1980, 1,208 people asked for information about the JMB Mature Entry Scheme, 502 made applications, and 187 became eligible to enter. Of these, 174 actually took up their places. In this chapter we consider how well they did at university/college. Table 10.1 shows the outcomes in comparison with the results of the 1980 undergraduate entry into the University of Manchester.

Table 10.1: Degree Results of 1980 Entrants

Outcome	Special Scheme		Undergraduate Entry	
	N	Per Cent	N	Per Cent
Honours Degree	107	61.5	2,801	73.6
Other Degree	44	25.3	263	6.9
Diploma	1	0.6	10	0.3
Continuing	5	2.9	271	7.1
Fail	7	4.0	39	1.0
Withdrawal	10	5.7	421	11.1
Total	174	100.0	3,805	100.0

The comparison can only be approximate since we are looking at all special scheme entrants against the intake into just one JMB university. (The difference in proportions taking 'other' degrees can be accounted for partly in this way since these are offered mainly in the affiliated colleges.) But it does serve to emphasise that special scheme entrants were no more likely than school-lever entrants to fail or withdraw.[25]

Of the special scheme entrants, nearly nine out of every ten had obtained an honours or some other degree by 1985. Of the honours degrees, 3 (2.8%) were firsts, 35 (32.7%) were upper-seconds, 54 (50.5%) were lower-seconds, 9 (8.1%) were thirds and six (5.6%) were pass degrees. Of the 'other' degrees, one (2.3%) was awarded with distinction, six (13.6%) with credit, and 37 (84.1%) were passes.

Degree Results of Those Entering in 1975-1980

In order to have a large enough sample to see how entrants through the Mature Entry Scheme compared with those entering on the basis of 'A' levels, degree results for entrants in the period 1975 to 1980 were analysed. Only courses with mature students have been included. A wide range of degrees is offered and there are many differences between the five JMB Universities, but for the purposes of Tables 10.2 to 10.6 some broad general categories have been arrived at. Honours degrees have been considered separately from ordinary or unclassified general degrees. The award of a degree without honours in honours finals has been treated as a pass. Four of the universities

[25] These categories overlap considerably since, at the time of the study, no record was kept of the reason for leaving of students who completed the first or second year of their course, but who failed to re-register for the following academic year. They appear in statistics as 'withdrawals' even though they may have left through failing examinations.

(Sheffield is the exception) offer ordinary degrees in certain subjects, some of which can be awarded with distinction, credit or both. Liverpool also retains a general degree which can be awarded with distinction.

Table 10.2 shows that the mature unqualified students did at least as well as the other students in the same subjects at honours degree level, and obtained proportionally more distinctions and credits in 'other' degrees. We also saw in Table 10.1 that 'fails' and 'withdrawals' among the special scheme entrants in 1980 at 9.7 per cent were, if anything, slightly lower than for Manchester students generally, where the proportion was around twelve per cent.

Table 10.2: Degree Results of Those Entering in 1975-80

Honours Degree	**Per Cent**				
	1st	**2i**	**2ii**	**3rd**	**Pass**
Special Scheme (N=460)	3.9	34.1	48.7	9.4	3.9
Other Entrants (N=13,290)	2.9	32.8	50.5	8.2	5.6
Other Degree*		**Distinction**	**Credit**	**Pass**	
Special Scheme (N=151)		10.6	19.9	69.5	
Other Entrants (N=3,017)		7.5	8.4	84.1	

* Difference between Special Scheme and Other Entrants statistically significant beyond 0.1 per cent level.

On honours degree courses the special scheme entrants tended to get slightly more firsts and upper-seconds, but also more thirds. Table 10.3 shows the results by type of degree. It is apparent that those admitted via the Mature Entry Scheme obtained slightly more firsts on BA, BSO and LLB courses and did well overall in law degrees, although the difference from the normal-entry is not statistically significant. On BEd honours courses, however, the mature students did obtain significantly more good degrees.

Table 10.3: Honours Degree Results by Type of Degree

Honours Degrees	**Per Cent**				
	1st	**2i**	**2ii**	**3rd**	**Pass**
BA					
Special Scheme (N=295)	4.1	35.6	48.8	9.8	1.7
Other Entrants (N=7488)	3.0	36.8	52.0	7.4	0.8
LLB					
Special Scheme (N=58)	3.5	34.5	51.7	10.3	-
Other Entrants (N=2803)	1.4	30.9	56.7	8.3	2.7
BSc					
Special Scheme (N=62)	6.5	30.6	45.2	11.3	6.4
Other Entrants (N=1592)	5.8	32.3	45.1	11.7	5.1
BEd*					
Special Scheme (N=45)	-	28.9	48.9	2.2	20.0
Other Entrants (N=1407)	1.3	9.3	32.6	26.3	30.5

* Difference between special scheme and other entrants statistically significant beyond 0.5 per cent level.

Table 10.4 shows that the special scheme entrants were also more likely to be awarded a higher-level BA ordinary or general degree, and there was also some tendency for them to do better on BEd ordinary degrees. Their advantage at this level may have been because they were more likely to have set out on such courses in the first place rather than being relegated to them after one year at college or university.

Table 10.4: Ordinary and General Degree Results by Type of Degree

Ordinary & General Degrees	Per Cent		
	Distinction	Credit	Pass
BA*			
Special Scheme (N=55)	10.9	21.8	67.3
Other Entrants (N=1,334)	2.2	6.4	91.4
BSc			
Special Scheme (N=4)	-	25.0	75.0
Other Entrants (N=48)	12.5	16.7	70.8
BEd			
Special Scheme (N=92)	10.9	18.5	70.6
Other Entrants (N=1,635)	11.6	9.9	78.5

* Difference between special scheme and other entrants statistically significant beyond 0.1 per cent level.

When university is considered, as in Table 10.5, it emerges that the mature unqualified students tended to obtain better honours degrees than other students in the same subjects at Liverpool and Leeds, and also to do somewhat better in terms of firsts and upper-seconds at Manchester.

Table 10.5: Honours Degree Results by University

Degree	Per Cent				
	1st	2i	2ii	3rd	Pass
Manchester					
Special Scheme (N=120)	6.7	38.3	49.2	0.8	5.0
Other Entrants (N=4310)	4.0	36.5	49.7	8.2	1.6
Liverpool*					
Special Scheme (N=75)	4.0	38.7	38.7	9.3	9.3
Other Entrants (N=2290)	1.5	26.7	50.6	8.6	12.6
Leeds*					
Special Scheme (N=67)	7.5	29.9	49.2	13.4	-
Other Entrants (N=1908)	1.7	26.6	56.6	13.4	1.7
Sheffield*					
Special Scheme (N=133)	1.5	34.6	50.4	12.8	0.7
Other Entrants (N=2393)	2.9	41.2	45.8	5.8	1.3
Birmingham					
Special Scheme (N=65)	-	24.6	55.4	13.8	6.2
Other Entrants (N=2389)	3.0	28.5	48.9	6.2	13.4

* Difference between special scheme and other entrants statistically significant beyond 5 per cent level.

At Sheffield, entrants through the Mature Entry Scheme did rather less well overall than other students. This is their only adverse result. It may be due to the liberal admissions policy operated at Sheffield or, more likely, it reflects the absence of a BEd, on which the special scheme entrants tended to excel. Sheffield also differs from the other JMB universities in not offering an ordinary or a general degree. Table 10.6 shows that the overall difference in favour of mature entrants on 'other' degrees is entirely due to their results at Manchester University and its affiliated colleges.

Table 10.6: Ordinary and General Degree Results by University

Degree	Per Cent		
	Distinction	**Credit**	**Pass**
Manchester*			
Special Scheme (N=88)	15.9	34.1	50.0
Other Entrants (N=1190)	13.4	21.4	65.2
Liverpool			
Special Scheme (N=12)	-	-	100.0
Other Entrants (N=711)	-	-	100.0
Leeds			
Special Scheme (N=27)	-	-	100.0
Other Entrants (N=602)	-	-	100.0
Birmingham			
Special Scheme (N=24)	8.3	-	91.7
Other Entrants (N=514)	13.0	-	87.0

* Difference between special scheme and other entrants statistically significant beyond 5 per cent level.

The present research shows that mature unqualified students tended to do at least as well as other students at the honours degree level and rather better on 'other' degrees. This is borne out by research elsewhere. Eaton and West (1980) reviewing studies in Britain, Australia and other countries concluded that 'mature age entrants, *per se*, admitted to higher education are likely to perform better than normal age students direct from school.'

There are, however, as we have seen, differences with course and university. Walker (1975), researching at Warwick University, found that mature students in the Faculties of Arts and Social Studies tended to obtain better degree results than other students in those two faculties, while the degree results of mature students in the Faculty of Science tended to be rather lower. But only in the Faculty of Arts was the difference significant. Walker compared the degree results of mature students who satisfied the General Entry Requirement and those who did not (i.e. in our terms were unqualified) and found no significant difference. He also obtained no significant difference between the proportions of the two groups who left university without a degree or between either of the two groups and the rest.

Hopper and Osborn (1975) compared the degree results of Birkbeck College (a college for mature students) with those of the University of London as a whole and found that the proportion of Birkbeck students who obtained 'good degrees' was

slightly lower (34.6%, against 38.2%). Comparing the results of adult and school-leaver entrants at the London School of Economics and Reading University, they also found that, at Reading, for comparable areas of study, mature students tended to do better, and at L.S.E. almost as well. Summing up the evidence they concluded that, measured by examination results, the academic success of mature students is not very different from that of school-leaver entrants.

At Sussex, Tapper and Chamberlain (1970) found that mature students tended to be awarded a lower proportion of firsts and upper seconds than did the others. But, at Sheffield, Roderick *et al*, (1981) report that, while the proportion of all mature students obtaining 'good' degrees (firsts and upper-seconds) in 1978 was almost identical to that of other students, rather more obtained poor degrees (thirds or pass degrees) or failed. The higher proportion of thirds was confirmed in the present study, but the results for the other four JMB universities are more encouraging.

Factors Related to Success

In order to see if there were any indications on the application form of a student's likely performance, stepwise multiple regression analyses were carried out with class of degree as the criterion variable. This was operationalised by assigning 1 for a first, 2 for an upper-second, down to 5 for a pass. Honours degrees and 'other' degrees were entered separately with the latter being scored l for a distinction, 2 for a credit and 3 for a pass. From the application forms the following variables were entered: the number and average age of children; age leaving school; the social rating of last occupation; number of jobs; 'O' and 'A' levels passed; 'O' and 'A' levels to be taken; age; and career intentions.

Honours Degrees

The best prediction of performance on honours degrees involved four variables: the number of 'O' levels passed; the average age of children; the number of 'A' levels to be taken; and the number of children. This gave a multiple r of 0.245 ($F=3.38$, $P< 0.01$). The major contributor was the number of 'O' levels passed ($r=0.126$) followed by the average age of children ($r=0.109$), with those with younger families doing better. The result for 'O' levels is consistent with the body of evidence which relates degree success to academic predictors (Smithers and Batcock, 1970; Smithers and Dann, 1974). 'Age of children' can perhaps be interpreted as an indicator of the age of the student, which as we shall be seeing is, if anything, non-linearly related to success. The more successful students also had somewhat larger families and were taking fewer 'A' levels at the time of application.

Although in the analysis of the whole data set, sex was not a significant factor, and there were no significant sex differences in the mean classes of either honours or 'other' degrees, a separate analysis was undertaken for males and females. With the sexes treated separately the patterns to emerge were slightly different.

There was no discernible pattern for women on honours degrees, but for men the largest significant grouping (multiple r=0.299, F=3.7, P<0.05) involved three variables: number of 'O' levels passed; number of jobs held; and number of children. In addition, men who were looking to change their careers tended to obtain a lower mean class of degree than those who were wishing to further their careers (P< 0.001) or who were leaving their options open (P<0.001). A picture thus emerges of the successful male mature unqualified entrants at honours degree level being a steady family person with a good record of 'O' levels.

'Other' Degrees

There was no statistically significant pattern for the rather small number of men taking 'other' degrees, but for women, who were predominantly on arts, social science and education courses, a grouping with a multiple r of 0.473 was obtained (F=3.34, P<0.0l). This involved five variables: number of children; age; social rating of last occupation; average age of children; and number of jobs held. This suggests that the distinctions and credits were obtained by the somewhat older students who had held jobs of higher social standing and had relatively large families. The relationship between age of children and degree result deviated from linearity. Women with children under two fared relatively poorly while those with children between 16 and 18 were the most successful. However, between 2 and 16, it was those with the younger children who tended to do better.

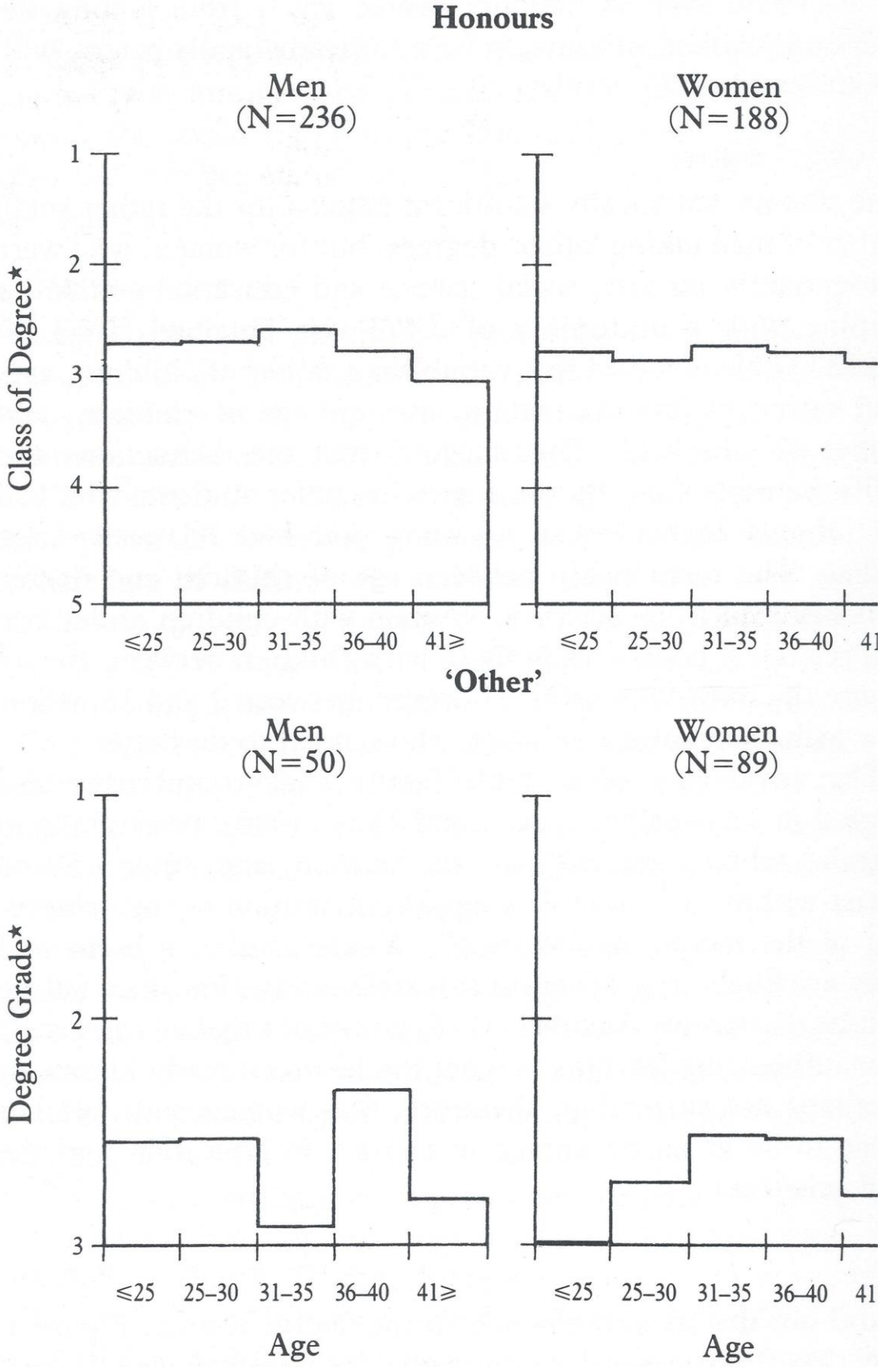
The advantages of a stable family background have also emerged in the work of Lawler and Hore (1980), researching in Australia, who recognised that 'the harmony and support found to exist within the family is a large contribution to the achievement of the mature age student.' A home and family are also likely to provide considerable motivation since failure could be disastrous. Ausubel (1978) points out that an important factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that women with families appear to be at an advantage in courses in education and the social sciences.

Age

Age did not feature prominently in explaining the degree results. Figure 1 (only those graduating included) shows that there was a slight tendency for students aged 41 and above on entry to do less well than those in their thirties, but it was not significant. The rather few students over 50 tended to obtain less good degrees than those in their forties, but again the difference was very small.

Elsewhere, stronger relationships with age have emerged. Walker (1975) found those aged 26-30 tended to do best and this was supported by Woodley (1984) for mature students entering on GCEs. However, for those entering without formal qualifications, as in the present study, the 31-40 age range tended to be the most successful though the relationship was complex depending, among other things, on sex and subject studied. These findings are consistent with Bromley's (1974) observations concerning the mid-thirties as the age of optimal achievement.

Figure 1: Age on Entry and Degree Result



Career Destinations

Table 10.7 shows the results of a study of the career destinations of the 1979 graduates, with apparently little difference from other graduates in that year. Government figures for 'first destination', however, do not include graduates whose degrees were obtained in colleges of higher education, even though the degrees are validated by a university. When graduates from the affiliated colleges are taken out of the JMB totals, the percentages become research or academic study 20 per cent, further education or training 30 per cent, and permanent employment 50 per cent, indicating that the mature students were more likely to continue with their studies after graduating than other students.

Table 10.7: Destination of Graduates at 31 December, 1979

Destination	JMB Mature Entrants		All UK Graduates*	
	N	Per Cent	N	Per Cent
Research or Academic Study	4	12.9	6,913	12.2
Further Education or Training (including. Teacher Training)	6	19.4	9,444	16.7
Permanent Employment (including Secondment)	19	61.3	33,150	58.7
Unemployed or Temporary Employment	2	6.5	6,957	12.3
Total	31	100.0	56,464	100.0

* Adapted from *Statistics of Education*, 1982.

Those returning to employment tended to go mainly into public service and schools as can be seen from Table 10.8. This is driven in part by the secondment opportunities for police officers, and the desire for qualifications among teachers.

Table 10.8: Employment

Employment	JMB Mature Entrants		All UK Graduates*	
	N	Per Cent	N	Per Cent
Public service	7	36.8	7,854	23.7
Schools and Other Education	10	52.7	1,659	5.0
Other	2	10.5	23,637	71.3
Total	19	100.0	33,150	100.0

* Adapted from *Statistics of Education*, 1982.

Conclusion

In terms of degree results the JMB Scheme appears to be working well. On honours degree courses, the mature students certainly did no worse than school-leaver entrants and, if anything, were more likely to get a good degree and less likely to drop out. They also obtained the better ordinary and general degrees with the difference here being more clearcut.

For those on honours degree courses, 'O' level performance emerged as the best predictor of degree result, although not strongly, while for women on general degrees

in education and the social sciences it was experience. Age seemed relatively unimportant. Employment prospects for the mature graduates appear to be at least as good as those of their fellows and possibly slightly better. Universities should not have any misgivings about admitting carefully selected unqualified adults.

XI. RETROSPECT

A university course for the normal-entry student is, in many ways, a natural progression from, and a development of, school education. But for those entering later in life it can entail major re-socialisation. In order to assess how the mature students saw the university experience as affecting them and their circumstances a follow –up study was conducted on two groups of entrants. Forty-four of the 1980 entrants, the group that we have monitored the whole way through, were interviewed in late 1983 and early 1984, just after they had completed their courses. In addition, 17 of the 1979 graduates were interviewed.

For most, going to university seems to have been a great success. In rating their experience on a five-point scale ranging from 'very worthwhile' to 'very disappointing', the mid-point of the scale, 'reasonably satisfactory', was the lowest point used and that by only one person. Thirteen per cent indicated 'worthwhile' and a massive 85.2 per cent said that it was 'very worthwhile.' Additionally, 28 mature graduates (46.0%) rated it 'the best thing I ever did' and a further 15 (24.6%) 'one of the best things'.

Rosenberg's 'investment' theory (1957), suggests that these ratings may have been coloured by the sheer time and effort that had gone into getting a degree. But when the mature graduates' perceptions of their personal development, the effects on relationships, and consequences for employment are looked at in detail, the picture that emerges is more complex.

Changes in Outlook

Those graduating tended to see themselves as having become more self-confident. But, at the same time, they indicated they were less sure that there were definite answers to questions. They also felt they were more able to see other points of view and were aware of the vast areas of knowledge they had barely touched. Married women, in particular, saw themselves, apparently for the first time in some cases, as individuals able to look beyond day-to-day matters:

> See myself as a very different person, more of an individual. I stand up for myself. Possibly a difficulty at home.
>
> Tend to look at things from different angles and not come to decisions so readily.
>
> More confident, more ambitious. The course has helped me realise my potential. I discovered more resources than I thought I had.
>
> I would find it difficult to be a housewife again.
>
> The course has given me time to develop.

Policemen, in particular, seemed to find their courses liberating:

> You start to assess your practices and attitudes in a different light. One cannot always affect the way certain practices are carried out. As an

inspector I can instil into the men I work with the ethos I want. I may say that I want even-handed treatment for blacks and whites - which I have done and there will be even-handed treatment. But I cannot affect another inspector. The course has changed my views very much. I had tended to realise that situations were not black and white but the course has reinforced that. I now realise that there are other issues behind crime and behind social unrest than just someone waiting to go out there and thieve etc. Perceptions changed. I had always looked upon people with orange hair and men with earrings as though there was something wrong with them, but one tends to find that they are quite down-to-earth people.

The course has made me more outgoing-not as narrow. I had not realised I was narrow. I am a bit more flexible. I appreciate what folk are about. I appreciate that there are a lot of dedicated people - not just the police. There are a lot of nice people coping. I am more stable, more objective and I have a wider outlook. I had a shield of cynicism. I thought theory and practice were quite different. Now I realise one must have ideals, and that theories are right - although it is hard work in practice.

Effects on Relationships

This broadening of outlook sometimes led to important changes in relationships. There was some tendency to 'outgrow' one's early friends and acquaintances and to value only those who had a 'wider view' of life (although those who had graduated three years earlier sometimes said that they had overcome their earlier intolerance). Developing beyond acquaintances is one thing, but when one's spouse and family are affected it is more serious:

The course has opened up many possibilities. In personal life I am both more and less tolerant. I like to converse with people who can talk about more serious things. I am less tolerant with friends and with my husband (who is a mechanic). This worries me. There has been a terrific strain on my relationship. My husband worries that I am moving away from him. I don't think so. He has a refreshingly down-to-earth approach and I feel our relationship is still strong.

I will never be the same person again. I think a lot more about all aspects of life - I listen and talk to people a lot more. My husband and children had to pull together when I was away. This has made my husband more independent and I feel a person in my own right. It has enhanced our marriage. However, being at university has affected my younger daughter who obviously missed me. During the second year when I was very heavily committed she pretended she was ill and did not want to go to school.

The course separates you a little from your children.

You grow away from some people. You develop new ways of looking at things. Values have changed.

Sometimes this can lead to divorce:

> My husband resented the fact that I would no longer just drop everything and spend all my time with him when he came home [husband worked away]. I was now with a group of people he did not know. He could not accept that I had a life of my own. We are now divorced.

But there could also be benefits:

> I took things for granted before. Now I have an insight into what makes a good marriage. People I normally went around with reacted to me differently. Many saw me as doing something they would have liked to have done. I felt some resentment from housewife friends. I come from a classic working-class family and find it increasingly difficult to talk to my sisters. Although they are proud of me, they resent me talking about college.
>
> Family support is important. Children have become more independent; they have benefited. My approach to academic learning has rubbed off on them. Now they talk of going to university.

On occasions, the partner seemed to be hoping that now the course was finished everything would be getting back to 'normal' again:

> Quite apart from the course, college life has taught me to be more thorough and to assess things in depth. It has given me confidence. I have proved the point that I am as good as the next. It has been a great strain on my wife. She did not understand the necessity to study or understand or sympathise with student life. My wife is happier now that I am back at work; she feels I am a worker again.

Employment Prospects

Sometimes, especially where there was a close connection between the degree course and a particular career, the students reported that their career prospects had been enhanced:

> Doors have been opened as a result of my degree [engineering]. I have already had two promotions. Qualifications seem all important to get on. There are no more barriers.
>
> The course has given me the qualifications to do a job which I enjoy and which I can see myself doing for the rest of my life [teaching]. My social and family life have improved without a doubt.

This was not, however, always the case, and giving up one's job to go on to university is a risk. One graduate found that he could not get employment, nor could he claim unemployment pay because he had not been in employment during the preceding three years. He was told he would have to pay some £500-£600 to get up-to-date with his insurance stamps. Because of his wife's part-time job he was not able to claim

social security benefits. With two small children and a mortgage the immediate future looked bleak.

Even graduates who had been seconded did not always find their degrees an advantage and this seemed especially to be the case for policemen:

> I went for self-fulfilment. Going to university hinders your career. You are out of the pecking order for three years. But the real problem is jealousy. People you are facing on a promotion board have to be convinced. They have nearly all got there without a university education. There is the feeling that 'I have got here without a university education and I am certainly not going to give you a leg up' because you have a degree. It is understandable. One has to accept it. If you are thinking purely of your career you would be far better doing a part-time course and staying with the force. The police force pays a lot of lip-service to degrees, but deep down it believes there is no substitute for experience. You have to prove yourself again. Even so, I would do it again.
>
> It was terrible going back. I had been a policeman for fourteen years and I was moved when I went back. I had to face the barrage of 'intellectual clown.' I still get it, there is a very anti-academic lobby. I then spent two years on the staff of the police college – a tremendous step – almost unbelievable. From there I went on to further promotion. I feel a lot happier about life now. I don't get 'het up' about things. I suppose I was always making superficial judgments before. It takes a lot to worry me now. I can that what I used to think of as important is not the be-all-and end-all – even promotion.
>
> I have taken a slight step backwards. I was detective inspector, now I am back in uniform. In the short term it has not aided my career but in the long term it might be advantageous.

One police graduate felt particularly aggrieved. He was told on returning that promotion was unlikely for about three years. He knew that he had been due for promotion when he went on the course. Before going he had been a public relations officer – on returning he was made a uniformed patrol sergeant, a job he had been doing before his last promotion. He left the force and joined a firm of solicitors.

Those graduates trying to change career sometimes found that age was a positive disadvantage:

> One of the problems of being a mature graduate is that you are competing for jobs with younger graduates whose financial requirements are so different. Very often a mature graduate with no work experience does not fit into the salary structure.
>
> I would have liked to have been a journalist but I have been rejected twice because of age [26]. This is the age for full-scale payment.

Discussion

The generally favourable reactions of the graduates to their courses found in the present research echo those of other studies (Robinson, 1974; McDonald *et al*, 1983). That so many appear to be aware of changes in their attitudes and ways of thinking can be taken as a sign of success, not only of the courses they took, but also the whole university experience.

Interviews revealed that changes in attitude could affect marital relationships, but not to the extent suggested by Tapper and Chamberlain (1970), who, when writing of the traditional working-class mature student at the University of Sussex, noted that 'if divorce or separation has not already occurred, it will probably take place during or shortly after the course.' Barrett (1975), on the other hand, suggests that domestic problems are often the stimulus for entry to, rather than a consequence of, a university course. The present research provides some support for this view. As one interviewee put it, "I saw a cloud on the horizon and thought I ought to be prepared and become independent."

Many students, however, acknowledge the support of their spouse or partner as having been essential. As Lawler and Hore (1980) comment, the mature age student is not only much busier, but is busy with activity which often leads to changes in personal attitudes and beliefs. While the potentially damaging consequences of these pressures cannot be ignored, the results emphasise the positive aspects of the domestic sphere. It can be hypothesised that the harmony and support found to exist within the family is a large contribution to the achievements of mature age students'. Whether the course has a disruptive or a strengthening influence on family relationships seems to depend very much on the state of those relationships at the outset.

McDonald *et al*, (1983) found that the great majority of mature students who said they had entered university for personal reasons felt they had achieved what they wanted. Of those who said they had entered for career-related reasons, more than two-thirds said that they felt their degrees had helped them in their work. Even though some had resigned jobs in order to study and then found themselves unemployed for a period after graduation, many still felt that they had benefited personally. The outcomes most commonly referred to were: increase in self-confidence; intellectual growth; becoming more critically aware of surroundings; a broadened view of life; a more enquiring mind; an ability to think more critically; and an increase in tolerance. Bowker *et al*, (1979) have also found that mature students tended to value the opportunities for intellectual development especially.

In the present study, the policemen are a particularly interesting group. Although there are generous secondment arrangements, going to university does not appear to help their careers, in the short run at least. Moreover, some felt that their outlook had been changed considerably. Tapper and Chamberlain (1970), in their research at Sussex, highlight the potentially disturbing influence of university. They report that some mature students cannot return to their original occupational roles. The university's socialising effects, it is argued, will have introduced new dilemmas

which are not easy to resolve, and people who have been mature students are likely to remain suspended between the worlds of work and education for some considerable time.

Some of the graduates looking for new jobs found that age was a problem. Squires (1982) commented that there were reasons for thinking that older mature graduates who had taken a full-time degree found it more difficult to get a job than their younger counterparts. Upper age limits, explicit or implicit, still exist in many employment sectors. The fact that older graduates are more expensive is an obstacle. It is also the case that having given up a secure job to study, may have made them suspect. But for the younger ones, maturity is possibly a bonus. As one of those interviewed in the present study put it: “maturity coupled with experience increases credibility in the market place.” He found differences from job to job: “my present job I got because of my age - others I missed because of my age.”

Notwithstanding possible employment difficulties and personal problems, almost all of the mature students in the present study rated their university experience as having been worthwhile. Over seventy per cent said it had been one of the best things they had ever done.

XII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the past decade applications for entry to the JMB universities through the Mature Entry Scheme for those lacking recognised qualifications have more than doubled. The increase has outstripped that of any other group. Applications from women have gone up about twice as fast as those from men. It is evident, therefore, that, in spite of all the changes that have been made to open up opportunities, there is an increasing number of adults who did not continue in formal education on leaving school, but who now wish to do so.

People interested in the Scheme are not a homogeneous group. They include young men and women, barely out of their teens, who after a taste of the outside world realise that going to university would be an advantage to their careers or to them personally; men and women in their twenties and thirties wishing to change direction, perhaps for personal or financial reasons; women with families looking, often for the first time, beyond the home; and men and women on the verge of retirement wishing to make use of the time now available to them to study something in depth. Predominantly, however, applicants are young, 84 per cent were under forty and almost a half were under thirty. More than a half were married, and 43 per cent have children.

Among the applicants, manual workers are under-represented, but more than half had left school at sixteen or younger. They had acquired, on average, four 'O' levels, but few had 'A' levels. Nearly 85 per cent had taken part in some form of further education. For over a half this had been full-time, although not infrequently for just short periods.

Applications were received for over seventy different courses, but in the main they were for Economics and Social Studies, Arts and Education. These fields attracted over seventy per cent of applications, with Science being the next most popular at 11.4 per cent.

Increasingly, a lifelong view of education is being taken. Abrahamsson (1979), Erickson (1982), Entwistle (1983) and Evans (1984) have all argued that adulthood is a time of change which should be supported by its own educational opportunities. Age can be an advantage in some areas of intellectual endeavour. Bromley (1974) points out that although certain intellectual capacities tend to decline as the years go by, others are enhanced by experience, and he cites research which suggests that the period around 35 is the age at which the capacity for achievement peaks. In Abrahamsson's (1979) words:

> Adult learners have a rich spectrum of life and work experiences, which they bring to the learning process, and the social competence and goal orientation, which stimulates them to participate more actively in learning.

The subjects of our study are only a small sample of those who get to the when they wish to, and feel able to, continue their interrupted formal education. While the capacity of older adults to acquire new concepts and to apply existing ones quickly

and accurately to existing circumstances may diminish somewhat, mature students have the advantage of a richer variety of life's experiences to draw upon. What then is being done to facilitate the path of interested older adults into higher education?

On Becoming a Mature Student

Research has shown that publicity about the possibility of gaining entry to university as an unqualified adult could be greatly improved. As Elsey (1978) pithily puts it, in another context, 'the process of becoming a mature student is largely a matter of self-selected educational opportunities mediated by luck and randomness'. Most people just do not know that it is possible to enter university without full entry qualifications. Many people are not even aware that it is possible for qualified adults to go to university! It seems to be largely a matter of meeting the right person at the right time, perhaps hearing of someone who has been successful in gaining entry. Clearly, the further away one is from those who are conversant with university entrance requirements, the less likely one is to hear about the possibilities. It is, therefore, not surprising, that manual workers form such a small proportion of applicants. If universities are serious about giving equal opportunities to all adults, then getting out the information to where it can reach those who would benefit must be a priority, to trade unions and work places in addition to the usual libraries and evening institutes.

Information about entry procedures is only the first step. For an adult with possibly a spouse, a family and a home, to enter university is a formidable undertaking. Many of those interested in becoming mature students seem to approach the nearest university, probably because finding and paying for accommodation away from home, or of moving house, on a student grant is a tall order. As we saw in Chapter IX, financial support is available in most cases, if one knows where to look for it. What can be claimed, however, depends very much on personal circumstances and may involve approaches to a number of different offices. The Department of Education and Science provides a useful booklet about grants[26] and the Department of Health and Social Security makes available an introductory guide for students to social security[27], but what would be really useful in the present context would be a special publication for mature students making them aware of all their entitlements. We should like to suggest that the DES and DHSS consider producing jointly such a booklet covering in addition to the information in *Grants to Students* advice on the range of addition benefits that a mature student might be able to claim both during term time and vacations.

The research has also highlighted some of the complexities of the mature entry procedures. Mature students are notoriously lacking in self-confidence and universities can seem awe-inspiring places. Much of the apparent aloofness, however, was not borne out in practice. Many of those actually approaching universities commented on the informality and kindness with which they had been received. And mature matriculation is under continuing scrutiny by the universities with a view to making it more accessible. (Preliminary results from the present study have already

[26] DES (1984).*Grants to Students*. Publications Dept., Stanmore, Middlesex.

[27] DHSS (1984). *Going to College or University?* HMSO, London.

led to changes in, for example, the amount of information given about the written examinations.) Nevertheless, faced with the possibility of a series of interviews, and unseen and uncircumscribed entry examinations, many potential students withdraw. Some try for institutions with simpler-seeming entry procedures, but others appear to be lost to the system.

Among those deciding to go ahead with applications, interviews, particularly if they involved going before large panels, could be unnerving, but the major worry appeared to be the written examination itself. With no set syllabus, no past papers for guidance and perhaps no detailed information on the form of the papers or the questions, how can this not be an intimidating experience? The JMB universities should seriously consider whether unseen written papers are necessary or whether they could perhaps be replaced by some other form of assessment, such as long essays. If it is decided to retain the written examination, guidelines should be established for clearly informing candidates about the ground to be covered and the nature of the questions.

Making information accessible to prospective mature students is a general problem. Prospectuses can seem rather unhelpful to those long out of formal education and, in any case, the idea of going to university at the outset may not be clearly formed. The wherewithal to turn the dream into reality may seem forever out of reach, with a seemingly endless catalogue of issues – academic, financial, personal - to be solved. Ideally, one would like to see readily available informal guidance and counselling without commitment, not only on aspects of university entrance and the availability of grants, but on the content and demands of courses, and of university life generally. There is a strong case for establishing, either locally or nationally, a mature students' advice centre.

Unqualified Mature Students in Universities and Colleges

Except perhaps for the few who have undertaken 'A' level studies or their equivalent, returning to study in a formal situation can be especially demanding for mature students. During the first year they may have to battle with unaccustomed note-taking, essay writing of a form and standard with which they are largely unfamiliar, and the discipline of personal study. The first year of a degree course can be difficult enough without being held back by unpractised study skills. There is a strong argument, therefore, for making available to mature students a short induction course in study skills rather in the way that some universities provide pre-session courses in the use of English for overseas students. The mature students we interviewed during our study would have welcomed such an introduction, and felt that it would have given them greater confidence to face the first year. Alternatively, the students could perhaps be recommended to take before entering the study techniques component of the Access to Higher Education or Open College courses[28] currently offered by a number of further education colleges. They do last for six months, however, which might be considered too long. In any case, they would not be specifically tailored to the needs of university students. But there is progress. The Extramural Department

[28] See, for example, *Handbook of Open College Federation of the North West*, University of Lancaster.

of Manchester University has just instituted a preparatory course along the lines we have suggested.

One thing all mature students realise is that a university course entails mixing with young people. So presumably those who would find this an anathema are not likely to apply. Certainly most of those interviewed seemed to enjoy the company of young people. Solitary mature students did, however, miss the support of those of a similar age. Where there were mature student societies these were welcomed – provided always that the student had time to attend. Relationships with tutors were also rarely considered a problem even when the student was older than the lecturer.

Mature students, however, do frequently encounter difficulties over and above those of the younger entrants. There can be an enormous burden of family commitments. Women, in particular, frequently to have to continue to cope with housekeeping and school-age families, fitting in their studies around the household chores. Then there can be the travelling. Some commute, perhaps for considerable distances, to remain living at home. Assistance used to be provided with travelling expenses, but a flat rate sum is now contained within the main grant, and so comes into competition with other demands.

Facilities and time for study may also be unduly limited. Mature students frequently have to make do with the kitchen table or a desk in the bedroom and, for those with young children, time for study can be restricted to after the children have gone to bed, with consequent very late hours. The necessity for parents to be home to meet small school-age children could also mean that some mature students are not able to take advantage of the special facilities provided by some university libraries for overnight loans for books in demand. Early or late lectures can also be very inconvenient, but perhaps most difficult of all are half-term holidays which do not coincide with university vacations.

Where the student had been the main breadwinner, the financial position of the families could become precarious. In one case, the family moved to a smaller house to raise money to support the student. Many students resorted to loans, and overdrafts seemed to be the rule rather than the exception. Several students, including some with family responsibilities, already with too many calls on their time, had had to take on part-time, evening or vacation work in an attempt to make ends meet. Savings were most likely to run out in the last year when the student should have been concentrating on Finals.

The pressures on students with families can be so great that one can only wonder at their courage and tenacity. Two-fifths of all the unqualified mature students had families, and the proportion of married women is growing rapidly. The students, themselves, were not demanding special treatment. Most felt privileged to be at university. But it was obvious that some were working in very difficult circumstances and support should be available.

What then could be done in universities and colleges? We should like to suggest that each faculty should designate a tutor to be responsible for mature students, someone

to whom they felt they could turn if they needed advice, and who could liaise with other lecturers.

As for other practical measures, there are a number of possibilities. Early or late lectures, which tend to clash with family responsibilities such as looking after children, should if possible be avoided. Some discretion could be allowed in relation to assignments and tutors could be alerted if a mature student had very heavy personal responsibilities. Many lecturers are already helpful in, for example, allowing older children to attend lectures with their parents at half-term. This may not always be convenient or feasible, but university crèches could be asked to extend their facilities to mature students at certain periods. Voluntary 'Half-term play schemes such as that organised by the Manchester Students' Union should be encouraged. Libraries could also be asked to allow mature students extended access in the overnight loan service.

A great many of the problems of mature students with families could of course be solved if their grants were raised to more realistic levels. The funding of mature students through their grants should show greater recognition of their individual needs, particularly in relation to mortgage interest, making it unnecessary to juggle with supplementary and unemployment benefits during vacations and having to rely on the spouse during term time.

Degree Results

Unqualified adults admitted through the Mature Entry Scheme were found, on average, to do rather better than the other students in qualifications achieved. This was especially evident in fields where experience is an asset, such as education, the social sciences, and also law. The most successful students tended to be those in their thirties with families and with stable career backgrounds and prospects. Even among these 'unqualified' students, 'O' level achievement emerged as an indicator of degree performance. The picture varied somewhat for males and females, but there were no statistically significant differences. Curiously, the most successful students as a group were those identified in the previous section as having to face the severest problems.

Changing Lives

Education is about change and it might be considered that adults, already moulded by life's experiences, would be less likely to be affected by their courses and university than a young person just out of school. Nevertheless, the mature students perceived themselves as having been changed in a number of important ways. Greater confidence was perhaps the most commonly reported gain. As graduates, they seemed to feel that they now could go out and tackle almost anything. Perhaps even more important were the widening of horizons, the acknowledgement that there are no easy answers, and the awareness of other points of view. Life experience is not all good; it can lead to a closing in of horizons and, as one interviewee put it, to "tunnel vision". To say that mature students left their courses as 'better' people is to claim too much. But many recognised that going to university had been very important in their lives.

It was not all benefit, however. Some went back to domestic situations that they now experienced as too limiting and narrow, and this led to a sense of dissatisfaction on

the part of the graduate, the spouse or both. Some encountered employment problems, and with debts accruing over three or more years of study, there could be financial difficulties. All the same, overwhelmingly, those who graduated reckoned their university experience to be very worthwhile, and many said it was the best thing they had ever done.

Recommendations

On the basis of the evidence we have collected, we should like to offer some suggestions for improving the Mature Matriculation Scheme:

1. More thought to be given to the **dissemination of information** about the Scheme, particularly to a wider cross-section of the adult population, through trade unions and work places as well as the more usual outlets. Details should be provided not only about the Scheme itself, but also on grants and courses.

2. Simplification, where possible, of the entrance procedures and examinations. In particular, the form of **the matriculation examination** and the information available about it should be re-considered.

3. Grants for mature students should take more account of their individual needs, particularly mortgage interest, and the DES should be urged to produce, in conjunction with the DHSS, **A Guide to Grants and Benefits for Mature Students** setting out the full range of support which is available to mature students and their families.

4. The possibility of establishing, either locally or nationally, a **Mature Students' Advice Centre** should be examined. This would advise on university and college entrance procedures, grants available and bodies likely to be of help, and such things as the content and demands of courses.

5. Consideration should be given to establishing for mature entrants, where no suitable provision exists, short **pre-session courses** in study skills and other aspects of university work.

6. Faculties should examine the possibility of designating a **mature students' tutor** who could offer advice on the particular problems that they seem to have over and above those of other university students and who could liaise with other tutors.

7. Encouragement should be given to the establishment of a university **mature students' society** where none already exists.

Overall Conclusion

Increasingly, people who were unable or unready to go to university as a school-leaver now want to. They may lack formal qualifications, but many seem prepared to suffer considerable hardship in order that they may become full-time students. Our research suggests that once they have found their way through the admissions procedures they do at least as well as normal-entry students and, in some subject areas, better; and they rate their experiences highly.

With the University Grants Committee now specifying the number of students that universities can take, and with the qualified applicants chasing fewer places, potential mature students are coming into ever greater competition with school-leavers. Some universities do informally seem to keep open some places for mature students, but it may be necessary to offer the Special Scheme some further measure of protection. One possibility would be to treat unqualified mature students in a similar fashion to overseas students and leave them out of the UGC-imposed quotas. There would then be a financial advantage to the hard-pressed universities in recruiting them, and they would be actively courted.

Opening up our universities to capable, but unqualified, adults deserves every support and encouragement.

REFERENCES

Abrahamsson, K. (1979). *Adult Learners in Post-Secondary Study Programmes*. National Board of Universities and Colleges.

Ausubel, D.P. (1978). *Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York.

Barrett, E.M. (1975). *Maturity Brings Success*. Macquarie University, New South Wales, Red Paper No. 37.

Barrett, E. and Powell, J.P. (1980). Mature aged unmatriculated students and the justification of a more liberal admissions policy. *Higher Education, 9,* 365-383.

Bowker, E., Gough, S., Isaacs, G., Moses, I., Rose, E., Western, J. and Yeates, H. (1979). *Mature Entry To The Faculty Of Arts, 1977*. Tertiary Education Institute, University of Queensland.

Bromley, D.B. (1974). *The Psychology of Human Ageing*, Pelican Books Ltd., Harmondsworth.

Blumer, J. (1962). *The Effects of Long Term Residential Adult Education in Post-War Britain.* Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford.

Challis, R. (1976). The experience of mature students. *Studies in Higher Education, 1,* 209-222.

Chapman, T.G. (1978). Mature aged civil engineering students in R.M.C. Duntroon. Paper given at a conference, *Returning to Study*, University of Sydney.

Chickering, A.W. (ed.) (1981). *The Modern American College*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco.

Cleugh, M.F. (1956). The reactions of adult students to written examinations. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 26,* 51-65.

Cleugh, M.F. (1972). Stresses of mature students. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 20,* 76-90.

Collier, P. and Mayer, C. (1983). The Great Oxbridge Lottery, *The Observer*, 16 October.

Dale, R.R. (1963). Reflections on the influence of social class on student performance at the university. *Sociological Review Monographs, 7,* 131-140.

Dare, A.J. and Henry, N.W. (1978). The importance of group processes in fostering self-confidence and other positive attitudes in adults contemplating tertiary study. Paper given at a conference, *Returning to Study*, University of Sydney.

Department of Education and Science (1979). *Statistics of Education (Further Education)*, HMSO, London.

Department of Education and Science (1982). *Statistics of Education (Further Education)*, HMSO, London.

Department of Education and Science (1984). *Grants to Students: A Brief Guide.* Publications, Stanmore, Middlesex.

Department of Health and Social Security FB23 (1984). *Going to College or University: A Pocket Guide to Social Security*, HMSO, London.

Department of Health and Social Security SB9 (1984). *Supplementary Benefit for Unemployed People*, HMSO, London.

Department of Health and Social Security SP21 (1984). *Cash Help*, HMSO, London.

Eaton, E.G. and West, L.H.T. (1980). Academic performance of mature age students. Recent research in Australia. In *Mature Age Students in Australian Higher Education* (ed. Hore, T. and West, L.H.T.). Higher Education Advisory and Research Unit, Monash University.

Elsey, B. (1978). *The Social and Educational Backgrounds of Mature Students at University.* Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Nottingham.

Entwistle, N. (1983). Learning and teaching in universities. The challenge of the part-time adult student. In *Conference Report. Part-time Degrees in Universities*, Goldsmith College, University of London.

Erickson, S.E. (1982). *The Life Cycle Completed*, W.H. Norton, New York.

Evans, N. (1984). *Post Education Society: Recognising Adults as Leaners*, Croom Helm, Beckenham.

Fulton, O. and Lamley, S.A.C. (1983). *University Entry: The Candidates' View. Report of a Survey of UCCA Candidates, 1980*. The Universities Central Council on Admissions, Cheltenham.

Gleeson, J. and Huggan, N.W.T. (1978). The performance of mature age business students at a college of advanced education. Paper given at a conference, *Returning to Study*, University of Sydney.

Goldthorpe, J.H. and Hope, K. (1974). *The Social Grading of Occupations*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Gough, J.E. (1979). Distance education, mature age, open entry and counselling, *Open Campus*, No. 2, 7-14.

Gould, A. (1978). Education for adults, jobs for the young. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 2*, 18-26.

Grainger, P.R.W. (1979). Working class mature students and full-time higher education. *Adult Education, 52*, 237-242.

Griffin, A. and Smithers, A.G. (1984). Prospective mature students: those who did not apply. *Studies in Higher Education, 9*, 73-81.

Hamilton, S. and Bell, J. (1983). *Access to Higher Education for Mature Students.* The Open University, NW Region, Manchester.

Hopper, E. and Osborn, M. (1975). *Adult Students: Education, Selection and Social Control*, Frances Pinter, London.

Hore, T. and West, L.H.T. (1980). *Mature Age Students in Australian Higher Education*. Higher Education Advisory and Research Unit, Monash University.

Hurman, A. (1970). Survey of married women training for technical college teaching. *Vocational Aspect of Education, 22*, 13-18.

Hutchinson, E. (1971). Few women at the top. *Adult Education, 44*, 241-244.

Isaacs, G. (1982). *Mature Age University Students*, Tertiary Education Institute, University of Queensland.

Jones, H.A. and Williams, K.E. (1979). *Adult Students and Higher Education*. ACACE, Leicester.

Kelsall, R.K., Pool, A. and Kuhn, A. (1970). *Six Years After*. Higher Education Research Unit, Sheffield.

Kirk, P. (1977). The tip of the iceberg. Some effects of university study on married students. *Teaching at a Distance,* no. 10, 19-27.

Lawler, N. and Hore, T. (1980). Problems, costs and benefits. In *Mature Age Students in Australian Higher Education* (ed. Hore, T. and West, L.H.T.). Higher Education Advisory and Research Unit, Monash University.

Leadbetter, D.B., Linke, R.D., Proctor, C. and Sedgewick, P.P. (1979). *The Flinders University of South Australia: Mature Entry Scheme, 1973-1978*. Educational Research Unit, Flinders University.

MacDonald, R. and Knight, G. (1979). Returning to study: the mature age student. *Programmed Learning, 16*, 101-105.

MacDonald, R., Knight, G., Everall, B., Quilty, A. and Sansom, D. (1983). Mature age study. Was it worth the effort? *Higher Education Research and Development, 2*, 147-153.

McIntosh, N.E., Calder, J.A. and Swift, B. (1976). *Degree of Difference. A Study of the First-Years Intake to the Open University of the United Kingdom*. Society for Research in Higher Education, London.

Martin, G. (1967). Mature entrants to teaching. Paper given at a conference of the Council for Educational Advance. (cited in Robinson, 1974).

Martin, J. (1977). *Women Return to Study.* Tertiary Education Research Centre, University of South Wales.

Mildred, G. (1978). Meeting the academic and personal needs of mature teacher education students in the United Kingdom. Paper given at a conference, *Returning to Study*, University of Sydney.

Miles, H.B. (1956). *Some Determinants of Academic Performance among Adult Students.* Unpublished M.Sc., University College, Cardiff.

Moses, I. (1978). Mature age students – are they really different? Paper given at a conference, *Returning to Study*, University of Sydney.

Nisbet, J. and Welsh, J. (1972). The mature student. *Educational Research, 14*, 204-207.

Raby, L. (1970). *Motivations of Students in a College of Education*. Unpublished M.Ed. thesis, University of Keele.

Robinson, P.B. (1974). *Motivations and Expectations of Mature Women Students Entering a College of Education.* Unpublished. M.Phil., Nottingham University.

Roderick, G., Bell, J., Dickinson, R., Turner, R. and Welling, A. (1981). *Mature Students in Further and Higher Education*. University of Sheffield, Division of Continuing Education.

Roderick, G. and Bell, J.M. (1981). Unqualified mature students at the University of Sheffield. *Studies in Higher Education, 6*, 123-129.

Roderick, G., Bilham, T. and Bell, J. (1982). The intake of mature students to undergraduate degree courses at British universities: trends. *Studies in Higher Education, 7*, 119-131.

Rogers, H.S. (1976). *Review of the Early Leavers' Scheme in the School of Humanities.* La Trobe University, Melbourne. (Cited in Hore and West, 1980).

Rogers, J. (1977). *Adults Learning*. Open University Press, Milton Keynes.

Rosenberg, M. (1957). *Occupations and Values*. Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois.

Smith, B. (1980). Mature age entry-the Newcastle response. *Studies in Continuing Education*, no. 5, 50.

Smith, B. and Collins, J. (1977). *The Open Foundation Course. A Report on a New Approach by the University of Newcastle to the Selection and Admission of Mature Age Students.* T.U.N.R.A. for the Higher Education Research Unit, University of Newcastle, N.S.W.

Smithers, A.G. and Batcock, A. (1970). Success and failure among social scientists and health scientists at a technological university. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 40,* 144-53.

Smithers, A.G. and Collings, J.A. (1981). Girls studying science in the sixth form. In *The Missing Half* (ed. A. Kelly). University Press, Manchester.

Smithers, A.G. and Dann, S. (1974). Success and failure among engineers, physical scientists and linguists at a technological university. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 44,* 241-47.

Squires, G. (1981). *Higher Education and Working Life: Review of Studies in the U.K.* Paris, OECD.

Squires, G. (1982). Mature entry. In *Access to Higher Education* (ed. Fulton, O.). Research into Higher Education Monographs, SRHE, London.

Tapper, E. and Chamberlain, A. (1970). *Mature Students at the University of Sussex.* Unpublished.

Tinkler, G. (1976). *CNAA Degrees. Entrance Qualifications and Academic Performance*. Unpublished M.Ed. thesis, University of Manchester.

Venables (1976). *Report of the Committee on Continuing Education*. Open University, Milton Keynes.

Walker, P. (1975). The university performance of mature students. *Research in Education,* no. 14, 1-13.

West, L.H.T. and Boon, P.K. (1980). A profile of mature age entering students. In *Mature Age Students in Australian Higher Education* (ed. Hore, T. and West, L.H.T.). Higher Education Advisory and Research Unit, Monash University.

West, L.H.T. and Eaton, E.G. (1980). Reasons for mature age entry. In *Mature Age Students in Australian Higher Education* (ed. Hore, T. and West, L.H.T.). Higher Education Advisory and Research Unit, Monash University.

Wilson, V. (1977). Escape from the doll's house. *Scottish Journal of Adult Education, 3,* 21-27.

Woodley, A. (1984). The older the better? A study of mature student performance in British universities. *Research in Education,* no. 32, 32-50.

Woodley, A. and McIntosh, N. (1977). People who decide not to apply to the Open University. *Teaching at a Distance*, no. 9, 18-26.

Worrall, S.M. (1977). *Mature Women Students: A Study of Social and Educational Factors Determining their Entry to University Studies*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Leeds University.

APPENDIX A: MATURE MATRICULATION ENTRY PROCEDURES IN THE JMB UNIVERSITIES (1981)

These descriptions of procedures as they operated in 1981 were provided by the universities themselves.

University of Manchester

After acceptance by the appropriate admissions officer all candidates are interviewed by the mature matriculation representative. Interviews are normally last about 30 minutes. Candidates fall into three categories:

Deemed to have Matriculated by Interview

These are people with long experience in their own field who have gained qualifications, sometimes involving promotional examinations, appropriate to their occupations. The majority of these candidates are police (rank of inspector, having attended Police College etc.) and teachers (usually of long service in areas of craft and design, business studies or other traditionally non-academic areas).

Matriculate by Essay

An intermediate group, difficult to define on paper. Now applied to a number of candidates who up until 1981 would have matriculated by interview and a few others who up until 1981 would perhaps have been examined.

Matriculation Examination Candidates

Normally have very few recognised academic qualifications and often young (21-26 years old). Examined in two academic subjects, the subject discipline can be anything normally taught in the university to which range is added through the General Paper. Thirty-eight different papers were set in 1979. Those without 'O' level English language are also subject to a Use of English Test.

Candidates are interviewed throughout the year as part of the operation of the Manchester Educational Advisory Network. They are hence sometimes seen both pre-application and post-acceptance. The system is monitored and mediated by a matriculation committee composed of the University JMB representatives and the tutors to matriculation candidates.

University of Liverpool

Application forms are received by the mature matriculation representative, photocopied for reference then sent out to the appropriate Faculty/Department/ Affiliated College for assessment by the admissions tutor, with a covering letter requesting an advisory interview with the candidate. On return of the form the admissions tutors' recommendations are scrutinised and there may be a consultation about any queries which may arise from their assessment and recommendation. If a candidate is rejected, the form is returned to the JMB with an explanation.

In early March, the files of accepted candidates, together with their acceptance cards, are collated by the administrative officer responsible for the arrangement of the

interviews and the examinations. He makes the necessary arrangements for the setting and invigilation of any written examinations particularly requested by individual Faculties/Departments/Affiliated Colleges and prepares a timetable for the examination procedures. Interviews with the University's Mature Matriculation Committee and written examinations are held in the second week of May:

Interviews

All candidates are interviewed by the JMB representative who, together with the appropriate Faculty Sub-Deans, constitute the University's Mature Matriculation Committee. Every effort is made to interview candidates from further afield on the first day and to arrange for any written examinations to be taken by them on that first day. Such has been the increase in mature matriculation candidates in the past two years, however, that we are likely to need two interviewing committees in future, each of which will have two JMB representatives.

General Paper

This is now required of all candidates. It is set and marked in the University, usually by two members of staff, one of whom has a special interest in English Language.

The JMB representative and, where appropriate, Sub-Deans, meet to consider the examination results within about a week or ten days of the examinations being conducted. After this meeting, a list of successful and unsuccessful candidates is sent to the JMB. Interviews are encouraged where it is felt they might be of use, but with the proviso that the mature matriculation leaflet is always sent out first, together with the appropriate university prospectus if a candidate has a particular institution in mind. In interviewing a prospective candidate, it is often possible to arrange an early, or even an immediate, follow-up interview with the admissions tutor in the Faculty/Department/College of choice. An applicant not yet ready for university study is usually advised on suitable preparatory studies and passed on, wherever possible, to other agencies.

University of Leeds

Application forms are received from JMB, photocopied and then sent out to the admissions tutors in the appropriate departments/colleges. The photocopies are filed. If a department or college wishes to reject a candidate, the form is returned to JMB and no further action is taken. If they wish to make the offer of a place, Certificate II is completed and the form is returned to JMB. A card index system is used, with one card for each candidate, so that the situation at any point in time can be evaluated. The mature matriculation examination, for those who need to take it, comprises three components:

General Paper

This is taken by all candidates and is set and marked within the University by a member of staff from an appropriate department.

English Language

This examination is taken by all those candidates who do not possess a recognised English language qualification, such as a pass at 'O' level. Only a small minority of candidates come into this category, and the University Test in English from some selected previous year is used.

The Interview

All candidates are interviewed by two members of staff from the University, one being drawn from Science and Applied Science and the other from Arts and Social Studies. All the interviews are held on the same afternoon, and a panel of interviewers is drawn together for this purpose. Criteria for the assessment of students on the basis of the interview are sent to each of the interviewers, who proceed to grade the candidates in accordance with the set criteria.

Following the examinations, the University's four JMB representatives meet, together with the examiners, to consider the results. A candidate is deemed to have matriculated if he satisfies all components of the examination. The interview grade is particularly useful in assessing candidates whose examination marks appear to be somewhat borderline. Following the examiners' meeting a final list of successful and unsuccessful applicants is sent to the JMB.

University of Sheffield

The arrangements in Sheffield are under the control of the mature matriculation representative. The general philosophy is to treat each candidate as an individual applicant and, to this end, as soon as the application form is received it is matched up with the UCCA form, and in February or March individual interviews are arranged. These interviews used to take place between the candidate and the Board's representative, plus a representative from the department or departments which the candidate wishes to enter. Owing to the large number of candidates in the past few years, the Board's representative farms out some of the interviews to experienced assistants in those departments which generate the most applications.

As a result of this personal interview, which usually lasts about half an hour, but which can be extended, one of a number of courses of action is decided upon. If the candidate has impressed the interviewers, he or she can be offered a place and be matriculated on interview alone. (It is assumed at Sheffield that a university place automatically goes with matriculation under the mature entry scheme.) Or a candidate can be entered for one or more examinations which are internal to the university, and set by the departments themselves. These are subject examinations in the candidate's field of interest, and if there is some doubt about literacy, the candidate can also be asked to sit a Use of English examination. Occasionally, instead of an examination, the candidate may be asked to write one or two long essays on subjects determined by the departments. On rare occasions, if a candidate is already taking 'A' level courses, an offer may be made on the results of the 'A' level grades, although this is rarely done.

The whole object of this procedure is to treat each applicant as an individual and to make sure that the tests that are devised are appropriate to any background or training that they may have had. As might be imagined this is a long and intricate process, but the University is convinced that it produces the best and most just result in the end.

University of Birmingham

Candidates are invited to complete a piece of written work at home and return it to the Registrar by 31 March. They are asked to write up to 1,500 words on those aspects of particular interest to them in the course which they wish to pursue at the University. In addition, they may also submit a sample of any other written work which they have done and which they feel may support their application.

The Registrar forwards a copy of the written work to the admissions tutor in the University department which the candidate wishes to enter. If the admissions tutor is prepared to consider the applicant for admission, he interviews the candidate and, if the interview is satisfactory, he completes Part I of the JMB's application form. The application form is forwarded to the Registrar, who acts as the JMB's representative in the University. The Registrar interviews the candidate and, if satisfied, he completes Part II of the JMB's application form and returns it to the JMB.

The candidate is interviewed by the University's Mature Matriculation Panel whose members are the four University JMB representatives and the University's Tutor for Mature Students. Normally at least three members of the Panel are present at any interview. Panel members are provided with copies of the candidate's written work in advance of the interview. After the interview the Panel may arrive at one of three conclusions: (a) to recommend the candidate to the JMB for matriculation; (b) to reject the candidate for matriculation; or (c) to ask the candidate to sit one or more examination papers specifically designed for mature applicants. After the examination papers have been marked, the full panel meets to determine the results.

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ENQUIRERS WHO DID NOT APPLY

Where a ☐ is provided for your answer please ✓ as appropriate.

Where additional space is provided it would be very helpful if you would give details or explanations.

1. Surname ..... 2. Initials .....

3. Address .....

.....

1. We would be most interested to know why you did not follow through your initial enquiry.

.....

.....

.....

5. What alternative educational arrangements did you make, if any?

.....

.....

.....

6. Did you find the procedures outlined in the booklet *A Second Chance at 21+*

straightforward? ☐

reasonable? ☐

daunting? ☐

.....

.....

.....

.....

7. Did you find the application form

straightforward? ☐

reasonable? ☐

daunting? ☐

.....

.....

.....

8. Sex: Male ☐ Female ☐

9. Date of Birth .....

10. Marital status: Single ☐

Married ☐

Divorced, Separated, Widowed ☐

11. If you have children please give their ages.....

.....

12. Last school you attended:

Secondary modern ☐

Grammar ☐

Comprehensive ☐

Technical ☐

Independent/Private ☐

Overseas ☐

13. Age leaving school: 14 ☐ 15 ☐ 16 ☐ 17 ☐ 18 ☐ 19 ☐

14. Further education since leaving school:

Adult education centre ☐

College of further education ☐

College of education (teacher training) ☐

Vocational college ☐

Other ☐

No further education ☐

15. If you attended further education was it

    full-time? ☐

    part-time? ☐

    day-release (from work)? ☐

    evenings only? ☐

16. When you sent for an application form were you

    unemployed? ☐

    a housewife? ☐

    in full-time paid employment? ☐

    in part-time paid employment? ☐

17. If in paid employment please describe your occupation.

    .....

    .....

    .....

    .....

18. If your situation has changed since sending application form, are you now

    unemployed? ☐

    a housewife? ☐

    in full-time paid employment? ☐

    in part-time paid employment? ☐

19. Examinations passed at *the time of your application*:

    Number of 'O' levels (grade C or above only or, grade 6 and above on old scale). CSE grade 1 counts as an 'O' level .....

    Number of 'A' levels .....

    Vocational examinations Yes ☐ No ☐

    Open University courses Yes ☐ No ☐

20. Number of jobs since leaving school .....

Thank you for your help

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THOSE MATRICULATING[29]

Where a ☐ is provided for your answer please ✓ as appropriate.

Where additional space is provided it would be helpful if you would give details or explanations.

1. Name ..... 2. Initials .....

3. Address .....

.....

.....

.....

4. Did you find the mature matriculation procedures

very straightforward? ☐

fairly straightforward? ☐

daunting? ☐

Do you have any comments on the procedures? .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

5. Why did you wish to enter a university course

to further career? ☐

to change career? ☐

self-fulfilment? ☐

Please expand if appropriate.....

.....

.....

.....

[29] Parallel versions for other outcomes.

Did the course fulfil your expectations

fully? ☐

in part? ☐

not at all? ☐

Please expand.....

.....

.....

.....

6. Were the problems you encountered concerned with

	Severe	reasonable	negligible
the course?	☐	☐	☐
family commitments?	☐	☐	☐
being a mature student?	☐	☐	☐

Please expand.....

.....

.....

.....

7. Would you be prepared to be interviewed at a time and place to suit your convenience?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'yes' please give telephone number (or address, if different from one already given) for contact.

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for your help

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEWER'S SCHEDULE FOR THOSE MATRICULATING[30]

Reasons for applying

When did you first decide to apply to university?

What were your reasons for applying

- left school early?
- without qualifications?
- change of career?
- self fulfilment?
- change in home, family, personal, business or career circumstances?

What made you apply at that particular time?

JMB Scheme
How did you find out about the scheme?

What do you think of it?

Was your first contact with the university helpful?

Did they give advice and information about courses, university life and pressures?

Pre-University Courses
Did you take any preparation courses?

How did you find out about them?

Were they helpful?

In what way?

How could they be improved?

University Entrance
Tell me about the interview.

How many people were present?

Were you helped to feel relaxed?

What kind of questions were you asked?

[30] Parallel versions for other outcomes.

What were you told about the mature matriculation examination?

How do you think the interview could be improved?

What did you think about the examination?

What did it consist of?

Was it relevant to your course?

Was it pitched at about the right level?

How do you think it could be improved?

What about examination fees and expenses eg travelling to university/college?

Do you think they were reasonable?

How long did it take from first writing to the JMB to matriculating?

How do you think the system could be improved?

The Course

Did you have any problems with the course?

- difficulty writing essays?
- time and facilities for study?
- travelling (commuting)?
- books?

What were your impressions of the course?

Was it demanding?

Were the lecturers stimulating? Helpful? Dull?

Did the course fulfil your expectations; requirements?

In what ways?

Personal and Family Life

Did having to study affect your personal/family life?

Did it affect your social life outside the university?

Did the course put a strain on relationships? How?

[If so try to find out if there had been a satisfactory relationship before the course. Was the course perhaps a response to an already unsatisfactory situation?

Were you able to manage financially?

Did your financial circumstances cause difficulties?

In what way has the course affected your outlook on life?

University Life (or College as appropriate)
To what extent did you mix socially with younger students?

- in your group?
- generally?

What part did you play in university activities?

What were they?

To what extent do you think university life generally, as distinct from just taking the course, has been an important part of the total experience?

How has being at university affected your

-outlook?

-social life?

-family life?

Did being older make a difference in your relations with

-younger students?

-lecturers?

Possible Improvements
Can you think of any way in which things could be made easier for mature students in relation to

(a) the work involved (pre-university courses? special coaching?)

(b) more flexible hours to help with family commitments?

(c) finance?

(d) social life in the university?

(e) any other?

Evaluation in Relation to Expectations
If 'self-fulfilment' (see questionnaire), has the course helped you to realise your potential? In what ways?

If 'further career' or 'change career' (see questionnaire), has the course lived up to expectations?

In what ways do you expect your life in future to be changed because of the course? Because of the university experience?

Have your wishes and expectations changed since entering university? If so, in what ways?

Taking all things into account was going to university (college) a worthwhile experience? Please rate:

Very Worthwhile	Worthwhile	Reasonably Satisfactory	Rather Disappointing	Very Disappointing

If ‘very worthwhile’, then was it ‘the best thing I ever did’?

If ‘very disappointing’, then was it ‘a complete waste of time’?

Additional Information
Anything you would like to tell me?

Full details of university/college course, and degree obtained.

Thank you for your help

The Joint Matriculation Board - which serves the Universities of Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham - has since 1920 operated a scheme of mature entry for those lacking recognised qualifications. Since its inception many people have benefited from its provisions and an increasing number are coming forward. With the generous support of the Leverhulme Trust, Professor Alan Smithers and Mrs. Alice Griffin have made a detailed study of the scheme. The Progress of Mature Students brings out what it is to want to be, to be, and to have been, a mature student at university - the hopes and fears, the achievements and problems, the benefits and costs. By focusing on the particular, it sheds light on the lot of mature students generally. Those who do get in usually do well and report very favourably on their experiences. Opening up universities to capable, but 'unqualified', adults deserves every support and encouragement.

Joint Matriculation Board
Manchester M15 6EU