

Who are our Education Studies (Primary) concurrent students?

This project sets out to respond to a significant increase in the numbers of concurrent students in the Education Studies (Primary) Q94 qualification and the growing anecdotal evidence about the nature and motivations of these students. Outcomes on this qualification, where 47% of student study concurrently, are consistently well-above OU averages.

Introduction

Wild (2018) explored the motivations, experiences and challenges for Level 1 OU concurrent students whilst. Penny looked at the support that might be offered to concurrent psychology students. This project looks across the three levels within Education Studies (Primary) broadening and deepening our understanding of concurrent students' motivations and experiences by researching through the lens of student narratives and the perspectives of Associate Lecturers.

Project aims

- To develop a deeper and richer understanding of the learning experience of students completing Q94 at high intensity (studying two 60-credit modules concurrently)
- To draw on the data collected to develop vignettes that share the stories of the students who opted to study concurrently
- To build on previous Open University studies, with a clear focus on better understanding who our students are

Research Approach

A mixed methods approach was adopted. Quantitative analysis focused on anonymised data regarding study intensity, declaration of disability and ethnicity and module outcome for each concurrent student registered on the core qualification modules from 2018/19 to 2020/21.

 **249**
Student and Associate Lecturer questionnaires

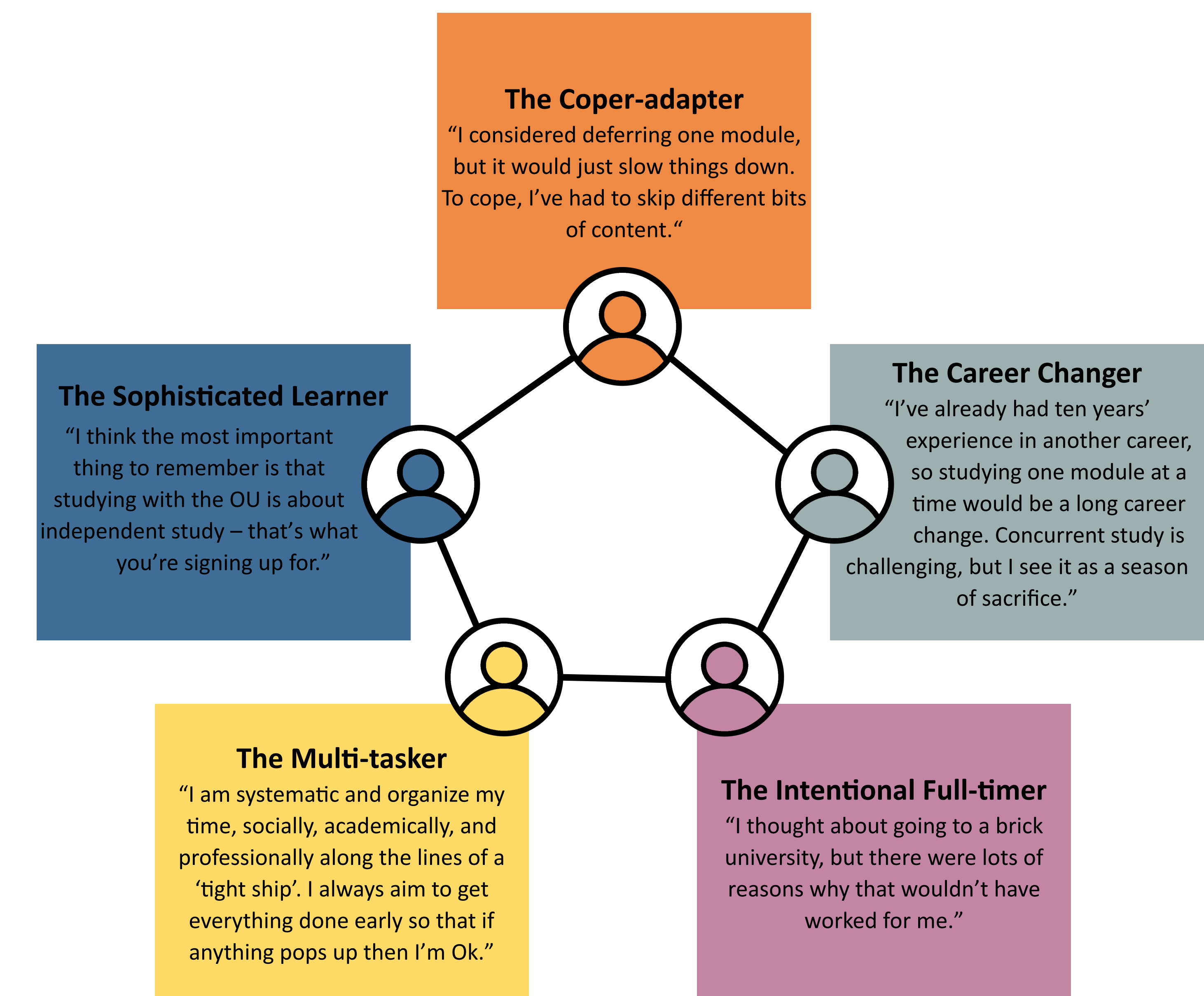
Qualitative methods included student and Associate Lecturer questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and the creation of vignettes, exploring the social, political, cultural and economic forces that impact student experiences and reasons for study. This reflexive approach (Flyvbjerg, 2013) to the rich data allowed us to read our findings through multiple personal and theoretical perspectives.


 **37**
Interviews


 **5**
Student vignettes


Data Analysis and findings


To ensure a fully rounded analysis, the project team was drawn from a diverse range of staff who support students, and the students themselves. The result is a multi-layered and multi-vocal analysis that can inform how we understand students and their motivations, while also challenging preconceptions that act as barriers to a more nuanced appreciation of the student experience. Following separate analysis of questionnaire, interview and quantitative data there was a process of 'bringing together' and weaving the fragmented and more complete stories. Thematic coding of interview data revealed a range of reasons why students opt for concurrent study, along with rich stories about students' approaches and experiences. We identified five general student 'types'. Further detail from qualitative student questionnaire data was integrated. For example, those who responded that a prime motivation for concurrent study was to graduate as soon as possible were categorised as 'career changers'. We tracked these students' other questionnaire responses to add to the overall picture of this cohort. This process continued until the level of repetition and overlap in student responses suggested we had reached a natural saturation point. Brief descriptions of the student types are shown (right) in a form that captures their interrelatedness.



Why are students choosing to study full time? 

What was their decision making process? 

What is their experience of studying at full time intensity? 

What should the OU be doing differently in regard to these students? 

Conclusion

The heterogeneity of the concurrent Education Studies (Primary) cohort is apparent in all of the data. This leads to the recommendation that legacy narratives about concurrent students should be challenged in all forums.



Project outputs to date include recorded professional development sessions for Associate Lecturers, alongside a qualification-wide recorded tutorial which shares student tips for concurrent study.

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References Cooke et al. (2021) Who are our Education Studies (Primary) concurrent students? Open University Scholarship Exchange. Available at <https://tinyurl.com/2p8z7k6z> (accessed 20/01/22)
Flyvbjerg, B. (2013) 'Case Study'. In Denzin, N.K., and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.) *Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Sage, London
Penny, R. (no date) Developing support for students studying at high intensity (OU report). <https://learn3.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=301169> (accessed 22.11.21)

Poster produced 21 January 2022
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