Leading the campaign for part-time students

Part-time study often grabbed the headlines last year thanks to Birkbeck’s community.

In 2013, many of you supported the ‘Part-Time Matters’ campaign, launched by a coalition of organisations, including Birkbeck, to promote the benefits of part-time higher education.

Thanks to the letters that you sent to your MPs, an Early Day Motion was signed by 68 MPs from across the political spectrum, recognising the “vital role of adult learning” that part-time study plays, and its “transformative effect”.

Many of you shared your own stories via the campaign website. Each of these adds weight to our arguments about the value and importance of the part-time sector.

A renewed focus on part-time study

2013 saw unprecedented levels of attention being paid to part-time study.

David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science, commissioned a review that brought together vice-chancellors from universities across the UK, senior figures from business and representatives of the National Union of Students, under the leadership of Sir Eric Thomas, Vice-Chancellor of Bristol University and former President of Universities UK.

The resulting report, published in October 2013 and called The Power of Part-time, gave a strong and positive representation of the part-time sector’s contribution to the economy, to society and to social mobility.

It clearly outlined the areas that government, universities and other sector organisations need to focus on, in order to protect and support part-time study.

In July 2013, the Confederation of British Industry published a report entitled Tomorrow’s Growth: New Routes to Higher Skills, which called for more opportunities for students to earn while they learn, and which recognised the need for those already working to have opportunities to reskill and to upskill. This recognition of the economic importance of part-time study from the UK’s top business lobbying organisation was strongly welcomed by the College. The report left no doubt that part-time study opportunities will be key to the future economic growth of the country.

New policies

As a result of sustained calls for the Government to protect part-time study, we have seen two key commitments made by Mr Willetts.

The first was to address poor communication about part-time study and student loans, by extending the ‘student finance tour’ run by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to include information about part-time study options and to visit further education colleges as well as secondary schools. BIS also launched a national communications campaign in October 2013, which incorporated part-time messages and moved towards more inclusive language and messages to communicate the benefits of higher education to all prospective students.

In October 2013, Mr Willetts announced that the Government would be making student loans available to students studying part-time at university for the second time on engineering, technology, and computer science courses. This is a welcome step in the right direction, as we know that part-time education is vital to students wishing to reskill or change career during their working lives. We are calling on the Government to extend this loan availability to second-time students studying a broader group of subjects.

A renewed focus on part-time study, government commitment to adult education, and policies that provide opportunities to retrain or change career during working lives are all vital to Birkbeck’s ability to recruit students and provide the life-changing benefits of part-time study.

This year has seen encouraging stories for the ‘Part-Time Matters’ campaign in 2013

Hundred of you shared your stories for the ‘Part-Time Matters’ campaign in 2013

Monique Zahavi, BSc Psychology (left)

“I remember being hungry for knowledge, but suffered from a lack of direction in a school where further education at the local sixth form college was as far as it ever got for most. In January 2012, when in my forties, I turned up for an interview at Birkbeck. I began a BSc in Psychology two weeks later. I have never felt so utterly certain that this was the right move. Every time I attend a lecture, my mind is left spinning and humming with complete excitement. It took me 25 years, but here I am, a student, along with both of my children studying at other universities.

‘Birkbeck is nothing short of superb and I love the fact that one can live in the city and visit the university, it is like a second home. It is a constant reminder that I am surrounded by the best young minds in the country. I have been inspired by the passionate and interesting lecturers that I have come across. I am grateful for the time and effort that is put into lectures so that students can learn. I feel very lucky to be involved in a university with such passion for learning. I have been taught the most enjoyable four years of my life, but I also discovered a lifelong love of learning that I’ve taken into a successful teaching career I’ve had for more than 20 years now.”

Simon Tilbrook, BA History

“I made a hash of my first degree, and ended up in series of dead-end jobs and feeling like I’d wasted my talents and could find no way out; I was the first member of my family ever to go to university, and I’d blown it.

‘Then, I went to Birkbeck and did another degree, this time part-time, and it changed my life. Not only were they the most enjoyable four years of my life, but I also discovered a lifelong love of learning that I’ve taken into a successful teaching career. I’ve had for more than 20 years now. Birkbeck changed my life: part-time education matters.”

Alison Stamps, BA Film and Media

“In my early thirties someone told me about Birkbeck, and the experience changed who I am. I took my BA Film and Media over a period of six years, giving to class between two and three times a week after work. I worked full-time throughout the part-time degree and had to defer my second year to care for my sick mother. I made a hash of my first degree, and ended up in series of dead-end jobs and feeling like I’d wasted my talents and could find no way out; I was the first member of my family ever to go to university, and I’d blown it.

‘Then, I went to Birkbeck and did another degree, this time part-time, and it changed my life. Not only were they the most enjoyable four years of my life, but I also discovered a lifelong love of learning that I’ve taken into a successful teaching career. I’ve had for more than 20 years now. Birkbeck changed my life: part-time education matters.”

Monique Zahavi, BSc Psychology (left)