

Institution: Birkbeck, University of London

Unit of Assessment: 23 Sociology

Title of case study: Influencing changes in student funding for part-time undergraduates in England

1. Summary of the impact

Professor Claire Callender's timely research has informed the policy debate about financial support for part-time undergraduates in England. Her research significantly raised awareness and understanding within government, and more widely, about the case for reform by highlighting the deleterious effects of the pre-2012/13 funding system on the supply of, and demand for, part-time study. It influenced major changes in student funding arrangements for part-time undergraduates introduced in 2012/13, and modified their on-going development. Policymakers have benefitted from her research, alongside higher education (HE) institutions, HE stakeholders and practitioners, and part-time students eligible for the new loans.

2. Underpinning research

Callender is one of very few UK academics undertaking large-scale national quantitative studies of part-time undergraduate education. She started in 1997 with research on the 'student experience' for Dearing's National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education. In parallel, she conducted studies of student finance, bringing together both topics in a Universities UK study (2006) while at London South Bank University. Since joining Birkbeck in 2008, Callender has developed these research areas significantly through three studies that underpin the impact discussed here. All were interdisciplinary collaborations with economists, David Wilkinson and Geoff Mason (National Institute of Economic and Social Research), with Callender as Principal Investigator:

1. A unique longitudinal multi-method study (*Futuretrack*) that involved a nationally representative sample of 3,704 part-time UK undergraduates, half of whom were in their first year of study when first surveyed in 2008 and half in their final year, and who were re-surveyed two years later. *Futuretrack* followed these students' career development, how they funded their studies, their experience of study and its outcomes. Findings were disseminated widely to stakeholders, including David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science, before their publication in three reports (refs. 1, 2, 3 & 6).
2. Callender *et al's* (ref. 4) study exploring factors affecting the supply and future growth of part-time undergraduate HE included a statistical review of part-time students and provision, bringing together various datasets, and 17 case studies of universities.
3. Callender and Wilkinson's (ref. 5) analysis of HESA's Longitudinal Destination of Leavers from Higher Education compared the labour market outcomes for graduates of part- and full-time study – the first time such an analysis had been undertaken.

This body of research demonstrates the nature and consequences of the inadequacies of part-time undergraduate financial support and its adverse effects on the supply of, and demand for, part-time study. It provided the following evidence for reforming part-time undergraduate finances:

- Skill acquisition through part-time study enhances employability, earnings, labour market progression and brings other economic and wider social returns, contributing to the government's HE and skills agendas. However, enrolments nationally have declined.
- Key determinants of part-time provision and demand for it are funding (including HEFCE's funding model), tuition fee levels, and student financial support.
- Government policies favour full-time HE and school-leavers at the expense of part-time study and mature students, and are based on two flawed assumptions: a) employers pay their employees' HE tuition fees; b) because most part-time students (81%) are employed, HE is affordable.
- Most part-time students pay their up-front tuition fees themselves. Two in five received employer support but employers favoured those least in need of funding. Only a minority qualified for the inadequate government-funded fee grants (14%) and course grants (19%).

Impact case study (REF3b)

- Government funding arrangements hampered access, deterred participation, depressed the fee levels universities charged, and inhibited innovation in courses combining work and study.
- These perverse incentives encouraged students to study full-time (where feasible) to access support, and institutions to focus on full-time undergraduate programmes while reducing part-time provision, limiting part-time opportunities and contributing to declining enrolment.

In sum, the research suggested that funding policies need to acknowledge the distinctive characteristics of the part-time undergraduate population, and the differing employment and wage effects of part- and full-time study.

3. References to the research (All research reports cited were peer reviewed)

1. Callender, C., Hopkin, R., and Wilkinson D. (2010) [*Futuretrack: part-time students career decision-making and career development of part-time higher education students*](#), Manchester: HECSU, 132 pp.
2. Callender, C. and Wilkinson, D. (2012) [*Futuretrack: Part-Time Higher Education Students - the benefits of part-time higher education after three years of study*](#), Manchester: HECSU. pp 93
3. Callender, C. and Wilkinson, D. (2013) [*Future track: Part-Time Higher Education Students: The Impact of Part-Time Learning Two Years After Graduation*](#), Manchester: HECSU, pp.103
4. Callender, C., Mason, G., and Jamieson, A. (2010) [*The Supply of Part-Time Provision in Higher Education in the UK*](#), London: Universities UK, 72 pp
5. Callender, C. and Wilkinson, D. (2011) [*The Impact of Higher Education for Part-time Students Evidence Report 36*](#), London: UK Commission for Employment and Skills, pp 126
6. Callender, C. (2011) [*Widening participation, social justice and injustice: part-time students in higher education in England*](#), *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 30:4, 469-487.

The research was funded through three grants:

- July 2007 – 30 November 2012, £399,412 *Career Decision-making and Career Development* Sponsor: Higher Education Careers Services Unit, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), and Foundation Degree Forward; Grant holder - Claire Callender.
- 6 March – 28 September 2009, £32,308, *The Supply of Part-Time Provision in UK Higher Education*. Sponsor: Universities UK; Grant holder - Claire Callender.
- 22 November 2010 – 31 March 2011, £39,654, *Impact of Higher Education for Part Time Students* Sponsor: UK Commission for Employment and Skills; Grant holder – Claire Callender.

4. Details of the impact

Callender's research informed the policy debate about financial support for part-time undergraduates. It fed into the policy-making process in two stages. In stage 1, she used it (refs. 1, 4) to raise awareness and understanding about the case for reform, directly influencing the policy agendas of government, think-tanks, HE stakeholders, HEIs and others, who then endorsed and promoted changes to the financing of part-time study. She modelled and disseminated policy options to policymakers, think-tanks, and stakeholders. In stage 2, once the government announced the introduction of part-time student loans in 2010, Callender utilized her research (refs. 2, 5) to recommend changes, leading directly to improved provision. Policymakers, HE stakeholders, HEIs and part-time students in England have benefitted from this, with an estimated one-third of part-time undergraduates (N=175,000), studying at about 120 English HEIs, receiving the new loans, double the proportion awarded fee grants prior to the reforms.

Stage 1: Putting part-time student funding issues on the policy agenda and informing the case for reform

Professor Christine King (VC, Staffordshire University) consulted Callender extensively and cited her research as part of John Denham's (Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, DIUS) review of the future of HE (9/08). David Lammy (Minister of State for HE and Intellectual Property) invited Callender to meet to discuss flexibility in HE delivery and improving the student experience (27/2/09). Between autumn 2008 and the 2010 general election, Callender had six private meetings with David Willetts (Shadow Minister for HE) and his Special Adviser about part-time student funding, and she modelled policy options for them. The Special Adviser confirms *that the impact of her work was influential on the*

Conservative Party... the resources of any opposition party...that can be devoted to policymaking are necessarily relatively small and, without the civil service to call upon, accessible academic work can take on an additional importance' (**source 1**). Callender advocated student funding changes and outlined policy choices in a book for think-tank, IPPR (**source 6**), and in a pamphlet for think-tank Policy Exchange (**source 7**). Willetts used this in a speech at the CBI's HE Summit (20/10/09) to argue for the inclusion of part-time students in the Browne Review: *'I have been struck by the inability of part-time students to access fair funding for teaching and maintenance. A recent Policy Exchange report by Professor Claire Callender of Birkbeck rightly described this as "One of the greatest and most glossed-over injustices in the English higher education system." And that's why we think part-time support should be considered in the student finance review'* (**source 8**).

There were concerns that the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance, chaired by Lord Browne – set up in November 2009 to review fees policy and financial support – would focus exclusively on full-time students. Drawing on her research (refs.1, 4), Callender responded personally to the Review's 'call for evidence' (7/12/09-31/1/10), and co-authored the Birkbeck-Open University joint submission to the Review (**source 9**). She was invited to brief Universities UK, the 1994 Mission group, Million +, the National Union of Students and Universities and Colleges Union. She demonstrated the limitations of the current financial arrangements, highlighting the need for reform, and advised on policy options. This had a direct impact on these organisations' submissions to the Browne Review, all of which expressed support for changes to part-time student funding (e.g. **sources 2 and 3**). Her research (refs. 1, 6) was the focus of a Times Higher Education feature on part-time student funding, and she was frequently cited in the national press (**source 8**).

The Deputy Director, Higher Education Analysis, at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) testifies that Callender's *'evidence contributed strongly to the case for reform of funding for part-time students'* (**source 4**). Her expertise was sought by other UK policymakers, including DIUS/BIS; HEFCE, the Treasury, and the CBI, as well as by international policy advisers from the OECD, Japan and the Netherlands. She gave keynotes at numerous stakeholder conferences including: the Association for University Administrators; British Universities Finance Directors Group; Consumer Financial Education Body; Guardian Summit on HE; National Association of Student Money Advisers; National Institute of Adult Continuing Education; NUS; Parliamentary Universities Group; Student Loans Company; and Universities Association for Lifelong Learning.

Browne's overview of the first 'call for evidence' echoed Callender's arguments in confirming the Review's intention to recommend funding changes, which had been the focus of her awareness raising activities, and is testament to her research's impact.

Stage 2: Influencing and modifying the new funding arrangements and loans for part-time undergraduates

Following the Browne Review's 'call for proposals' for future funding (15/3/10-14/5/10), Callender co-authored the Birkbeck-Open University joint submission calling for grants and loans for part-time students, and she submitted, in confidence, alternative costed policy options (**source 9**). She was one of the few academics (as against HE stakeholders) to give evidence at the Review's public hearings and had private meetings with its secretariat. A Review member says she was *'a phenomenal source of data, expertise and insight...Her evidence has shifted our higher education system in the direction of flexibility, access and choice for all'* (**source 5**).

She was invited to advise the new Coalition government's HE Strategy Group (Vince Cable, Secretary of State for BIS; David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science; and Departmental officials). Willett's Special Parliamentary Adviser verifies that Callender's research *'was influential throughout the Coalition's recent higher education policy-making ... [A]mong those who do focus on higher education there are a tiny handful whose work is fit for direct application to the policymaking process. Professor Callender is at the forefront of this small group and the only one I am aware of who focuses above all on the under-researched area of part-time study. She has displayed a good understanding of the policymaking process without ever veering from academic excellence in the way that pure policymakers are often forced to'* (**sources 1, 10**).

Impact case study (REF3b)

When, in November 2010, the government announced its student funding reforms including, for the first time, loans for part-time students to cover increased tuition fees, Callender discussed with Willetts' Special Parliamentary Adviser the limitations of these loans and proposed changes to extend their eligibility criteria, including reducing students' intensity of study from 33% of the full-time equivalent to 25%. This change was introduced on 8 December 2010. She recommended to him and Baroness Britton (who was leading a Lords debate) that part-time students should start to repay their loans 4½ years instead of 3½ years after commencing a course, so that fewer would make repayments while still studying. This change was introduced on 26 November 2011. The Special Parliamentary Adviser confirms Callender's role in bringing about these policy changes saying, '*After the initial announcement of extending loans to part-time students, the details of the loans were altered....Professor Callender was also influential in this partial u-turn by Government*' (**source 1**).

The impact of Callender's research is further substantiated by HE stakeholders, such as the Assistant Policy Director of NUS who asserts: '*Professor Callender's research made a significant and lasting impact on the development of public policy in this area by raising awareness of the limitations of the existing student support offer for part-time students. ... I think I could count on the fingers of two hands the people who genuinely "make waves" in the debate on part-time students... and Professor Callender is one of them*' (**source 3**). The Director of Policy, Universities UK, discussing the reach of Callender's research, states '*she promotes it to a very wide audience, including UUK officers, UUK members, staff in UUK institutions and government officials*' (**source 2**).

Callender's research continues to contribute significantly to discussions of part-time student funding (**source 10**). Since HEFCE announced (14/3/13) the fall in part-time enrolments following the 2012 reforms (which Callender had predicted, **source 8**), she has met with: Willetts and his Special Parliamentary Adviser (14/3/13; 17/7/13); Universities UUK, HEFCE; OFFA; BIS officials; the Parliamentary Universities Group and IPPR. At these meetings she proposed further changes to the restrictive loan eligibility criteria, in particular, extending the availability of loans to part-time students who already hold a degree in a different discipline. Willetts has accepted this idea, but he only announced the policy change after the REF impact deadline, publically attributing it to Callender's influence at the launch of a UUK report on part-time students (16/10/13) – a report which also draws heavily on her research.

5 Sources to corroborate the impact

Testimonials

1. Special Parliamentary Adviser to David Willetts (Minister for Universities and Science).
2. Director of Policy, Universities UK
3. Assistant Policy Director, NUS
4. Deputy Director, Higher Education Analysis, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
5. Member of the Browne Review

Other sources of evidence

6. **Callender C.** and Heller, D. (2009) *The Future of Student Funding in K. Withers (ed) [First Class? Challenges and opportunities for the UK's university sector](#)*, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), London pp. 56-72. Chapter will be supplied on request
7. Fazackerley, A., **Callender, C.**, Chant, J., and Wilkinson, D. (2009) [Educating Rita? A model to address inadequate state support for part-time students](#) Research Note, London: Policy Exchange
8. A selection of articles by Callender in non-academic periodicals, and citations in media including Guardian 15/10/12; 29/03/11; 30/04/10; THE 10/06/10; 30/09/10; Willetts' CBI speech
9. The Birkbeck-Open University joint submissions to the Browne Review (Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance) and Callender's own submissions (including a confidential one) available on request
10. Citations in BIS Economics Paper No.14 [Supporting Analysis for the Higher Education White Paper](#), Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, June 2011 and [parliamentary debate on education: part-time study 24 July 2013](#) (Hansard: Column GC515).