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**A critical reflection on the research into the motives and choice behaviour of mature, non-national students enrolling and progressing in a part-time, night time hospitality management program within the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, Technological University Dublin.**

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**A critical reflection on the research into the motives and choice behaviour of mature, non-national students enrolling and progressing in a part-time, night time hospitality management program within the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, Dublin Institute of Technology.**

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## Introduction

The higher education system in Ireland is broad in scope and encompasses the university sector, the technological sector, the colleges of education and private, independent colleges. Ireland is a society undergoing major change economically, but also demographically through recent migration and mobility of workers from all over Europe and beyond<sup>1</sup>. In an economy as open as Ireland's it is vital that higher education operate to a maximum effectiveness responding to changing societal needs.

In these recessionary times, governments are encouraging the return to education and knowledge development as an important economic asset (Rowley, 2003, 248) as education is expected to serve the needs of society. When that society is undergoing significant changes pressures emerge to improve the alignment of education and society. Participation in education is both for the betterment of the individual, society or community within which they live and/or work and eventually the economy (National Competitiveness Council (NCC), 2009: 9). Participation on lifelong learning courses bring with it the pride of gaining qualifications, and it can also contribute to new opportunities, access to better employment and ultimately an improved better quality of life. Lifelong learning can also provide the individual the autonomy to be able to shape their own educational programmes and subsequently their own lives (Usher and Edwards, 1994; Edwards *et al*, 2002). Qualifications are indispensable assets seen as cultural capital (Stevenson, 2001: 2; Hannam, 2003: 7) and passports into both education and work and out of state welfare dependence (Blair, 1998: 9; Martin, 2003: 567).

Higher education institutions are increasingly recognizing that the education they provide to students is becoming more of a service and that the students who enroll with them are becoming more like customers (DeShields, Kara and Kaynak, 2005: 130; Brown, Varley and Pal, 2009, 311). Students research different colleges and weigh up their options. They have expectations of what the course, college, other students and academic staff will be like and after undergoing some evaluation they make their choice. They hope to get accepted after obtaining the right number of points for the course or having being interviewed, and accepted for the course pay registration fees<sup>2</sup>.

Increasing competition among colleges offering the same or similar courses have forced educational institutions to adopt a more market orientated strategy involving second level institutions in their marketing before students decide on their Central Administration (CAO) forms, and also involving a

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<sup>1</sup> Especially since accession states joined since May 2004

<sup>2</sup> At the moment there are no college fees for full time students, only registration and examination fees. Part time students must pay all fees as do all non EU students.

partnership or endorsements with industry to gain a competitive advantage in the eyes of potential students who may view the course connected to industry as a better choice than one which is not<sup>3</sup>.

What is most important for all educational institutions in this current changing economic climate is not only to attract and enroll students on courses in September and January of each year, but also to retain these students on the courses and hopefully progress onto further courses once their initial course of study has been completed, such as higher degrees, masters and research.

Tinto's US research, arguably one of the more influential theorists in the area of retention and attrition, has shown that typically of all students who enroll on their first course of study, 45% leave college without earning a degree, 75% dropout within their first two years of study, and 56% of all students who enroll in the institution will not graduate with the rest of their class (Tinto, 1975; 1982; 1993); additional to this Reisberg (1999) notes that c. 26% of first year students do not return after the first term break.

Yorke (1999), a UK study, noted that many (c. 17%) students leave higher education prematurely, and about 50% do so during, or at the end of their first year in college; within DIT (Dublin Institute of Technology) 85% of those who have dropped out of college do so during their first year (Costello, 2003; Conway, 2004). Many other Irish studies have surveyed the retention issue all educational institutes face each and every year (see Flanagan *et al*, 2000; Morgan *et al* 2001; Finnegan and Barrett, 2000; Morgan and Kellaghan, 2002; Lindsay and Bolger, 2002; Yorke, 1999; Costello, 2003; Conway, 2004; Long, Costello and Russell, 2005). However most of these studies fail to generalize beyond the traditional student with the exception of Long *et al* 2005.

However it is important for educational institutions to recognize that these students must have been motivated to enroll in the first place, so it is their motives together with a satisfaction or dissatisfaction level which needs to be researched. It is understandable that we cannot satisfy every student all of the time, however, we must achieve a situation where the students receive the proper message with regard to what the course and college is providing before they decide to go to that college. This must be monitored through prospectus documentation and information provided at open days; information given to guidance councilors in schools and advertising in the media. Once on the course we as educators must exceed their expectations and have satisfied students who may be retained on the course to completion and further progression.

This paper reviews a micro-research study into mature, part-time, night-time students' motives and choice behavior as they enroll in, and progress in a third level institution. A critical reflection on this research process outlining the advantages of its design and implementation and also highlighting its

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<sup>3</sup> In Dublin Institute of Technology, Faculty of Tourism and Food, there is a partnership agreement with industry called "MagicTouch".

limitations and ethical concerns will be conducted. It will briefly review some of the literature<sup>4</sup> in the areas of students as consumers and their motives for learning and being part of an educational institution while guiding the focus from the research design, the methodology and methods employed to conduct the interviews. As transcripts or analysis of the interviews were not required a digital copy of the recordings is available. .

### **Rationale and context of the research**

Through faculty retention reports obtained it was discovered that retention is an issue and has been for many years as most first year undergraduate students make rushed and spontaneous decisions when completing their CAO forms based on a number of factors, most of which are related to lack of information from college courses or lack of time to make this very important decision. Not all students within DIT enter via the CAO procedure and may undergo application, aptitude test and/or interview.

Unfortunately, a lot of students make another hurried decision straight after induction and subsequently leave college. This is mainly because their transition from one [educational] environment to another can be for some students a daunting experience. This has been part of the problem with the retention of students in the past (Martinez and Mundy, 1993; Martinez, 2001; Costello, 2003; Conway, 2004; Long *et al*, 2005).

Some may not have taken part in education for many years and find the transition to college to be a bigger learning curve than they had expected. Others may find that they favoured the ‘cosier’ environment of second level education where learning was teacher focused and directed, and therefore the culture of third level, of student focused and self directed learning is hard to adapt to.

Also while reading retention reports it became obvious that part time night time students were omitted from reports up until recently (Long *et al*, 2005), but while they were included in more recent reports they were bundled into the same category of ‘traditional’ students.

As I have personal experience of both part time and full time students and can verify that there is a lower percentage dropout rate and therefore a higher retention rate among the night time and part time classes, I would like to investigate further the reasons behind this. None of the retention reports accessed gave a full picture as to why there was higher retention rates in part time versus full time classes and therefore this needed to be investigated further.

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<sup>4</sup> More literature is included as appendices for perusal as word count prevent its inclusion in the main text. See appendix 1a and 1b.

If we as educators and providers of courses within education try to understand these students and their motives for going to college, for staying in college or for leaving a course, we might be able to improve the provision of our courses and help not only to retain students on courses but aid their progression throughout the courses chosen and onto further and higher education within the educational institute.

It was decided to study the motives of night time part time students of a non-national and mature nature (23 years or over, i.e. the majority of students on the two night time part time courses delivered within the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism in the Dublin Institute of Technology) as they appear to have high motivation to be on the course (in relation to their attendance level and participation within classes) and usually stay on the course to completion and progress onto further courses within the education system. This differs greatly from other first year full time day time student cohorts on the same or similar programs.

So what makes these students different? What motivates them intrinsically and extrinsically to stay on their course of choice? What leads them to this choice of course in the first place? Does their motivation change over time? Are there any social influences on their behaviour and if so what are they?

### **Aims and Objectives of the Research**

The principle aim of this research is to investigate what are the motives and choice behaviour of mature, non-national students enrolling and progressing in a night time, part-time hospitality management course in the Dublin Institute of Technology?

The main objectives of the research are to discover:

1. What factors influence/ motivate mature, non-traditional students' choice of part-time night time courses?
2. What external influences/ motives are at play during their choice process of their course?
3. What internal influences/ motives are at play during this decision process?
4. Do students' motives change over their time in college and if so what motivates them to progress from one course to another (specific to advanced entry students)?

To enable the researcher to discover the answers to the research questions posed the following methodology was employed.

## Methodology

Research methodology is the research design that shapes our choice and use of particular methods and links them to the desired outcomes (Crotty, 1998: 7). Qualitative research exists in the interpretative research paradigm outlined by Crotty (1998: 5). Ethno-methodology, hermeneutics, social anthropology and phenomenology are influencers of this paradigm (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001).

### Social Constructivism (adapted from assessment 2)

In social research knowledge is concerned not with generalization, prediction and control but with interpretation, meaning and illumination. To explain the social world we need to understand it, to make sense of it, and hence we need to understand the meanings that *construct and are constructed* (epistemology) by interactive human behaviour.

Social constructivism claim that people construct their own meanings and learning by building on their previous knowledge and experience and the interactions of society. Crotty (1998: 9) continues that the goal of the research within social constructivism is to rely as much as possible on the participant's views of the situation being studied, using broad general questions and using narrative analysis formed through interaction. Human action is given meaning by interpretive schemes or frameworks (Scott and Usher, 2000) such as stories or narratives. This paradigm is commonly described as the qualitative approach to research as the phenomenological method adopts a subjective style, in that the researcher and the research or study are linked (Hussey and Hussey, 1997; 2003).

Further, according to Hussey and Hussey (2003) the phenomenological paradigm is concerned with understanding human behaviour from the participant's own frame of reference. For the researcher the question of multiple realities arises. In terms of ontology, social reality is not independent; instead, reality is socially constructed by the people who inhabit it and is in a constant state of revision. In this paradigm reality is a social construction of the mind (Pring, 2000) and research can only be understood within the context of, and through which it has been constructed. Predominantly qualitative research takes the view that it is very difficult for researchers to stand back and be objective since they are really part of the process being researched, (White, 2000; 24) as the practice of education and researching education are inextricably bound together (Scott and Usher, 2000). This paradigm has been described as the science of phenomena (Hussey and Hussey, 2003) and stresses the subjective aspects of human activity by focusing on the meaning rather than the measurement of social phenomena. For example, there is constant interpretation and reinterpretation through which social reality is defined and suggests a qualitative approach to research. This contradicts and



distinguishes itself from positivism in an attempt to understand and explain human and social reality (Crotty, 1998).

Various qualitative methods are available to the researcher to assess the learning process, experience and adult learner motives for learning (see for example Light and Cox, 2001; O’Flanagan, 2005; Yin, 1993; Greene and Caracelli, 1997; Chatterji, 2005; West *et al* 2007; West *et al* 2001). White (2000; 20) suggests that when conducting research the selection of an appropriate methodology and choice of suitable techniques are of paramount importance and in this instance student surveys, focus groups and interviews are effective in eliciting the complex reasons behind student’ motives for education choices (Robinson, 2004).

## **Methods**

Considering the methodology, focus group interviews with two different part time courses within the college will be employed to provide a “voice” for these students and should give a holistic view of the student and more personal opinions of the college system as perceived by the student. Robson (2002) outlines particular circumstances in which interviews are appropriate (adapted from assessment 2):

Where the study focuses on the meaning of particular phenomena to the participants e.g. how adult learners decide what and how to learn, and when and where they will learn;

Where individual perceptions of processes within a social unit are to be studied prospectively e.g. motives of adult learners;

Where individual historical accounts are required of how a particular phenomenon developed e.g. discussions under focus group interviews will highlight how adult learners came to choose the course they are in today.

## **Focus Group Interviews**

The focus group technique for interviewing has been known variously as the ‘group interview’ (Perisco and Heaney, 1986); the ‘group depth interview’ (Golman and McDonald, 1987); the ‘focus group’ (Ziff, 1990); and the ‘focus group interview’ (Lederman, 1990) (cited in Walden, 2006, p.222-223).

The focus group interview allows for a relaxed setting where discussion of a topic will be able to take place. Wall (2001, 24) highlights their inexpensiveness and efficiencies when interviewing a large number of interviewees within the same group. As a result of some focus group discussion it is common for further individual interviews to take place to further probe comments made within the

wider focus group. Focus groups can be used at the preliminary or exploratory stages of a study (Kreuger, 1988); during a study (Race *et al*, 1994); or after a study has been completed to assess any further issues arising from the research.

*Focus groups are contrived settings, bringing together a specifically chosen sector of the population to discuss a particular given theme or topic, where the interaction with the group leads to data and outcomes (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, 288)*

## **Population**

Students on the night time part time courses delivered within the Dublin Institute of Technology Cathal Brugha Street (the hospitality and tourism campus). Only two night time part time hospitality courses are delivered within the Faculty of Tourism and Food in the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management; one is a two year Hospitality Services Management course delivered Tuesdays and Thursdays to c. 50 students over two years; and the second is a Hospitality Management course delivered over three years from Monday to Wednesday inclusive to approximately 75 students. 70% of these students are of non Irish nationality. I teach on both programmes to all years and I am therefore familiar with the majority of students on these courses. This would have implications of the interaction within the focus group interviews as these 'students' would view me, the researcher, as their lecturer, but this could not be avoided as they are the only students within the parameters of this research.

## **Sample**

1. All voluntary participants had to be of a non-national background;
2. Students must be resident in Ireland in the last twelve months;
3. Students must be on their first year of their programme; in the case of advanced entry students this may be the second year of the programme but their first year;
4. All participants must have gone through the application for entry onto the programme within the last twelve months and have secured their place since September 2009 (this would exclude deferred entry students as this would skew the research somewhat, i.e. their motives for coming on the course in the first place could have got lost amongst newer and more immediate motives to avoid the recession!);
5. Finally, all participants must have read, understood and signed the information sheet (see appendix 3a) submitted to all students in the previous week to the research. It was also presented to students on each night of the interviews as many had mislaid the information sheet. This required getting a colleague to witness the oral presentation of the meaning of the research and voluntary acceptance by the students before the focus groups commenced (see appendix 3b).

## Critical Reflection and Discussion

The research was carried out on Wednesday, November 11<sup>th</sup> 2009 (FG1) and Tuesday, December 8<sup>th</sup> 2009, (FG2) between 5.30pm and 6.30pm, the only time available for both the researcher and the interviewees. For all the interviews the moderator was the researcher and the interviews took on a semi-structured format, open ended format, i.e. there were some questions used for direction and probing, but otherwise the participants were allowed to discuss openly and have a chance to “voice” their opinions. (See appendix 2 for the interview guide and questions).

A total of 15 students, 11 in the first interview and 4 (all female) in the second, participated in the two focus groups conducted through a semi-structured interview format (due to time constraints the interviews had to be directed and controlled tightly). The first interview lasted one hour and this was due to interruptions during the interview. The second lasted 32 minutes as the four students involved had a class to go to directly after the interview.

Transcriptions of the research and a narrative analysis under each research topic heading would typically be the method of analysis here but this was not required and therefore not conducted at this stage. To give a ‘voice’ to adult students a narrative style of story-telling, a story of an episode of one or more people, to try to make sense or meaning of experiences (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995: 115 & 116) can be used to analyse these focus group interviews on why adults learners were motivated to go into higher education or why they did not (adapted from assessment 2 on Research Design).

This micro research threw up many questions before, during and after the process, such as:

Why are we only doing a small research project and why not something more substantial which could go towards the proposal? It was soon learnt that this could in fact go towards the proposal if it worked well and could easily be discarded and started afresh if things did not go according to plan. This was positive and a very valuable learning experience.

Why did I just ask that question; does it fit in with the overall research question? After the first focus group some of the questions in the guide (see appendix 2) were surplus to requirements as the students discussed these areas without having to be prompted. They could be left within the guide for future purposes but were not used here, only the main headings provided were used as prompt questions.

Did I get what I wanted out of this micro research? Yes and no, and possibly maybe!! The following critical reflection will hopefully throw some more light onto this area.

## Strengths and limitations of the research

Even though I was somewhat familiar with focus group interviews having conducted them in the past with colleagues in the college, it was felt an onerous task just organising the interviews within the time frame and with the participants involved as both their free time and my free time often clashed. I teach on all night courses and therefore if the students were free to do an interview on one night I was in fact teaching another class. Interviews could not be conducted during the day as all of the students under the parameters of this research were working in the industry. It was agreed that their only free time before classes commenced and after they finished work was the appropriate time to conduct the interviews. My classes would have to be rearranged at this time, i.e. 5.30-6.30pm.<sup>5</sup>

The focus groups were rescheduled four times due to work commitments of the participants, and even when the focus group went ahead (FG1) many interruptions on the night led to a jagged interview flow. Two students walked in later than requested to the room and this disrupted the others concentration on the topic being discussed or it stopped the flow entirely and the question had to be repeated or left as it was. This meant that certain vital information may have been lost, we will never really know.

Another interruption which required the recording to be temporarily stopped was when the tutor, who had given permission for the interviews to take place, entered the room without invitation and proceeded to interrupt the interview to give the students some information on classes that were being postponed due to strike action taking place in the college later in the term. This seemed a little unusual as the same person would have these students in class later that evening and could provide them with this information then.

While the recording was turned off an invitation to stay and witness the focus group was given but immediately declined, and the tutor left the room. This badly disrupted the interview flow as the students were then more interested in talking about the strike than talking about their own motives after the tutor left! After some minutes the interview was able to resume but then this ate into the time they were giving for the interview before their next class.

One major error that I only realised afterwards, was the recording was not working properly at the start of the first interview and some initial discussion and round robin questioning was lost during the first interview. It had been tested only before the interview took place and had been working fine – however I have learnt to expect the unexpected and thankfully this error was rectified during the second interview.

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<sup>5</sup> Night classes begin between 5.30-6.30pm and continue until 9.30-10.30pm depending on year and subject.

Within FG1 there was a larger group of students and this proved to be difficult to involve everyone. Focus groups can have anything from 2 to 12 participants but would normally hold between 4 and 8 to get any good information discussion going (MacIntosh, 1993; Kitzinger, 1995; Walden, 2006, 226). Some of the participants were more willing to talk and give their opinions whereas some of the students did not participate at all. This was explained afterwards that they could not get a word in with some of the other more outspoken individuals in the group. In this instance individual interviews would be better or a smaller number of participants in a focus group with everyone being drawn into the discussion by the moderator. A combination of both focus groups and individual interviews should be part of a future research design (Dreachslin, 1999, 226).

FG2 took place a few weeks after the first focus group and soon after the strike referred to earlier. The interview had been scheduled since October but was rescheduled because of the strike as Tuesdays was the only available day for the participants. This did influence some of what the students spoke of in their responses to the questions and their motives as they referred often to the recession and the economic climate.

FG2 was much easier to conduct as fewer participants were involved. These students were also taking part in their first year of the programme but it was the second course and were somewhat more mature so even though one student walked in later to the interview room there was very little disruption, and when one student was answering a question there was very little interruption from the other students in the room. They had also established a very good rapport with themselves as a group and with me and were more open to discussion.

Further, access to data and reports on students within the college were harder to obtain as some are not in the libraries any longer due to restructuring of the faculties and the college as a whole. Numerous phone calls were placed before one very helpful librarian informed me that the more recent reports were held in each faculty office since the restructuring; however the same librarian obtained the reports for me as a new lengthy process of requisition was in place for all lecturers, but not for librarians.

Another report on part time students and retention (Long *et al* 2005) was obtained from the author directly, but requests for more recent reports were not fulfilled due to the 'new system' in place.

### **Role of the research approach appropriate to the research**

Once the concept and rationale were explored, and some literature was reviewed, (see appendix 1a and 1b) questions arose for input onto the interview design. The interview design was kept as simple as possible because this felt like a pilot of the research design and by no means was some of the questions going to be perfect.

Questions in the following topic areas (guided by Kotler's 1997 sequence of consumer decision making process) of background, motives, choice behaviour and evaluation (underlying motives and choice behaviours) were developed to guide the research process within the focus groups and a 'round robin' type of question-answer set up was employed initially to get the discussion going following Dreachslin's (1999) guide to focus group questioning (see question guide in appendix 2).

The prompt questions for the focus groups were checked over with colleagues and the green light was given just before the first focus group with some minor changes due to the intricacies of certain words or phrases. It has to be remembered that these participants were part time, non national students working in the hospitality industry and on their first year of their programme and even though their English is at an acceptable level for entry into college, certain phrases may still be misinterpreted. At times during the interview process I repeated questions in different manners so all students would be able to understand fully the concept.

Help from colleagues in the college was very welcome. Access to conduct the interviews was obtained straight away from the tutors of the course and they were extremely helpful with their comments and suggestions before the research took place.

Also getting willing participants for the research was straightforward as once the students heard of the research and that they could be part of it they thought this was very interesting and were very motivated to be part of something like this. This supports Mayo's (1924-1932) Hawthorn effect that the [worker] student will become motivated if they feel they are part of something important (cited in Tiernan, *et al*, 2006). However getting a time and a venue that suited everyone was more problematic.

Students also became involved in the actual recording of the first interview as they were given flip chart paper to jot down other students opinions on each question posed. These topics and themes on flip chart paper were then illustrated on the walls of the interview room<sup>6</sup> for the group to refer to as the discussion was under way. The students said after the interviews that this in fact empowered them to remain in control over what was being recorded concurring with Wall's (2001, 27) study. It was used only in the first focus group as there were a lot of students present in this interview. Each focus group was digitally recorded and a computer disc copy is available on request or it can be accessed via MOLE (see appendix 4 for more details).

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<sup>6</sup> Class rooms were only available at night time for interview purposes as all other offices and meeting rooms were locked from 5pm at close of business each day. This again had to do with internal cutbacks etc.

## **Comparison of research to literature**

As retention studies can be quite negative in their connotation, I wanted to look at a more positive side of research, specifically the phenomenon of part time student motives of learning, and to research whether understanding of these motives would enable improvement of others education and experiences on courses. Much has been written in the field of retention and motives of students but what can be done with this research afterwards, how can it improve the educational experience for other students?

Although not required, it was interesting to note that, some early analysis of this research concurs with research completed in the area of Chinese students and their motives to study abroad (Chung, Fam and Holdsworth, 2009, 60) where they outline that a principle motive for Chinese students and educational attainment is to show respect to their parents (this also reflects their inherent culture and social values). One student of the programme under research outlined that she was on the course after being sent abroad by her parents to get a good education, and even though she held previous qualifications, was a mature student, was married and living in Ireland for some time, she still referred back to her parents (living in mainland China) saying she wanted to show them 'respect' and get a 'good' education, 'do well for them' and 'make them proud'. During FG2, two students referred to having some prior college experience as one of their motives for influencing them in their determination to continue studying and for taking up the course they are on now which agrees with Tinto's studies (1975; Draper, 2003; Tinto, 2005;).

Most of the students also agreed with previous research when they stated that they were on the course to gain a qualification so that it might help them in future to get employment, better employment and promotions, and better prospects for their futures (Kinman and Kinman, 2001; Svensson and Wood, 2007) and to also retain their current jobs during the economic recession.

## **Ethical Considerations (adapted from assessment 2)**

During educational research topics being researched together with those being researched may be of a highly sensitive nature so consideration of ethics within the research is of the utmost importance. Ethics is all about how we live in relation to one another and our moral obligations not to misuse or misinterpret to our best ability any information or assistance that would be given to us when conducting research. Qualitative research conducted in natural settings is common in the field of education, however, negotiation of access and the terms under which a researcher will be able to work with participants can be difficult to arrange (Jarsabkowski, 2001).

I was always aware of personal information being provided as answers to my questions, such as in FG2 where one of the students referred to a marriage breakdown as a reason to leave her country and

move here to Ireland and to subsequently get a job in catering and go to college at night. Educational research and ethics refers to the search for rules of conduct that enable us to operate defensibly in the political contexts in which we have to conduct educational research (Simons, 1995; 436; Pring 2000; 140; Punch, 2002) which should be conducted within an ethic of respect for persons, respect for knowledge, respect for democratic values, and respect for the quality of educational research (McNamee and Bridges, 2002; 251).

I was aware of this student's situation before the interviews were recorded as I spoke with students individually and casually before interviews began and she mentioned if this was appropriate. I assured her of anonymity if she wanted and that it was important if the breakdown of her marriage was a significant factor for her coming here and going to college. She indicated that she would say so when the question arose.

We must always remember that there is no one rule on earth without exceptions (Small, 2002; 96) in the end it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that educational research is ethical research and the better prepared we are to address this task the better our research will be (Small, 2002; 109). In this regard I always spoke with my students who were participating in the research before and afterwards to reassure them of their importance to the research and their right to ask me any questions they wanted as the interview went on. All students received the information sheet about the research and the ethics covered by their acceptance to take part or their decision to abstain.

It is also important to understand the relationship that exists between the researchers and researched and the roles, status and power within the relationship (Edwards, 1993, 162). Being a lecturer conducting a study of students and being the moderator of the study, one has to be aware of the potential power that this may bring with the position and the subsequent influence over the students, their initial choice to be part of the process and their responses. I also wanted to ensure the fact of a casual atmosphere within the interviews; however this was difficult as many of the students referred to the fact that I was their lecturer it was sometimes difficult to talk about other 'negative' facts of college. Again I tried to assure them that I was in that moment, a student like them so they were not to look at me as their lecturer but as another student. This did relax them somewhat and I think in FG2 this is evident where they mention aspects of their college life and college administration they do not like which has also influenced whether they attend classes some days or not. FG1 was more subdued and controlled in what the students' responses were and if they were in fact telling me what they thought I wanted to hear.



### **Summary, lessons learned and implications for further research**

Students as consumers and their motivation to enrol and be on a course, as a mature part time student really interests me, not only due to the fact that these classes were my first introduction to teaching in the college but also because given the choice to change to day time teaching I would not give up these highly motivated students for love nor money.

The research conducted here provided an insight into the intricacies of setting up and conducting interviews with part time students within the college in their pre Christmas term as it is one of the busiest for the industry, the students and the faculty, and me. I have previously conducted similar interviews with fulltime students and this did not pose the same problem. Time available to them would need to be taken into consideration in future and although the service industry is in a state of flux, these students are always busy in the pre Christmas term with parties and functions at work. Sometime in January or February when the industry is generally that much quieter would be a better time suited for all of those involved to conduct interviews in future.

The fact that this research was predominantly qualitative in nature and contained no quantitative focus, would imply it would take time to analyse and interpret but also initial transcriptions would be time consuming. A combination or “mixed methods” approach could be applied to a study of this kind and may provide a clearer analysis of interviews. But to obtain the “voice” behind the statistics a qualitative approach to the study must be maintained such as the focus group interviews employed here. It might also be helpful when an individual student highlights important issues that may not have been fully explored in the focus group and would be better as part of an individual interview at a later stage.

Their motivation for learning and studying is similar to other studies published in that they want to improve their skills (Svensson and Wood, 2007) they want to do it for themselves (Deci and Ryan, 1985) for their own satisfaction and enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998), but also to gain employment, better employment and retain their current jobs in this economic climate (Kinman and Kinman, 2001, 135). But why these students are more motivated than full time students remains to be seen. This has yet to be researched and could be the focus of some further research of a comparison of full time versus part time students’ motives to be learners (just like us as part time EdD students versus full time EdD students).

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## **Appendix 1a**

### **Students as Consumers**

As the traditional student is not the focus of this research the decision-making process surrounding the annual application process through the CAO forms is not under investigation. However, non-traditional students who apply to college go through similar processes of decision-making and choice behaviours based on the marketing concept of purchase and consumption.

The marketing concept is an idea that has been adopted in non-marketing contexts, such as the relationships between educational institutes and their students (Svensson and Wood, 2007, 17). However students as consumers is not a concept many agree with, but as more and more students are paying higher registration fees, examination fees and in some cases full fees, some say they should be treated just like other purchasers of services (Bejou, 2005; Bennett, 2003; Halbesleben, Becker and Buckley, 2003).

Bejou, (2005) in fact argues that it is cheaper to retain an existing customer than to attract a new customer, and that satisfaction and retention in academia is similar. Bennett (2003) furthers this 'marketing' argument by explaining that students who withdraw from courses may do so because of negative experiences within the college or institute and will afterwards spread negative word-of-mouth comments about the institute, impacting on its future reputation.

However, others suggest that a student entering third level education does not understand the significance of subjects on courses until they enter the workforce and can't really be understood as 'typical purchaser' as they do not understand the full context of their purchase until later (Clayson and Hayley, 2005; Adkins and Radkte, 2004; Driscoll and Wicks, 1998). Education cannot be passively consumed as with some other services provided. Students must direct their learning and in doing so become part of their own education. Clayson and Hayley, (2005) also argue that if students see themselves as consumers might they also resort to 'blaming' the educational institution for their lack of achievements?

On the other hand, not all students are full fee paying students and the question which must be asked is then who fits the bill? In Irish higher education the majority of third level institutions are government funded or part government-private partnership funded. There are also an increasing number of private institutions who charge full fees but who may also offer scholarships based on industry sponsorship.

So who is the ultimate consumer in this situation: the students; the government; the future employers?



The concept of students as consumers is largely based on a services marketing concept and this requires understanding the roles played by all parties involved in the process, students, government departments and future employers (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). Services are intangible (cannot be touched), heterogeneous (vary among lecture to lecture and student to student and from year to year), are perishable (cannot be stored for a later class, date or another student or lecture) and require simultaneous production and consumption (experiences of one student of a class and lecture will differ from another student within the same class) (Horner and Swarbrooke, 1997, 17; Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino 2006, 103;).

Therefore an understanding of students needs wants and desires for their education and the purpose of the course chosen should be the focus of research especially the explicit and implicit motives of students and other stakeholders.

### *Appendix 1b*

#### **Student Motivation**

Parker's (2002) study suggests that many students have applied to college with a very vague idea of what the course was for, and in their first and second year they were still waiting for someone to show them why they were there. When asked, they said they were waiting on their lecturers to model the discipline for them. Meanwhile in the same study a parallel set of interviews with teachers revealed complaints of students who lacked motivation and didn't seem to know the basics (Parker, 2002).

Students considering college undertake varying degrees of information gathering, depending on their own level of need for information. There are influencers on their decision process of choosing what to study and where to attend, and potential higher education students may be inexperienced in this process and may turn to others for advice. Moogan and Baron's research (2003, 273) discovered that friends can sway the decision (Riggs and Lewis, 1980; Fuller *et al*, 1982; Franklin, 1995) as can parents (Hanson and Litten; Ball, 1986; Hossler *et al*, 1989; Smith and Bers, 1989; Bouse and Hossler, 1991; Martin and Dixon, 1991; Stanley and Reynolds, 1994; Kalmijn, 1994; Inoue, 1999) (cited in Conway, 2004).

The choice process students undergo when selecting an educational institution and considering all the alternatives and competition available to them will frequently refer to their motives for commencing a certificate, diploma or degree in the first place. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, which are the internal "motives" or external environmental, "hygiene" incentives respectively, are increasingly referred to in literature when researching student motivation (Kinman and Kinman, 2001; Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1967; DeShields *et al* 2005, 132).

Intrinsic (internal) motives are outlined as follows:

- Self – determination and the drive for competencies, knowledge and skills (Amabile, Hill, Hennesey and Tighe, 1994; Svensson and Wood, 2007);
- Personal goals/ rewards (Deci and Ryan, 1985);
- Interest, curiosity, excitement and enjoyment (Csiksentmihalyi, 1998)

Extrinsic (external environmental) motives are concerned with material, social or symbolic rewards, such as:

- Competition;
- Evaluation;
- Status;
- Money or other tangibles' (employment and/ or promotion in the future);
- The avoidance of something negative (i.e. the recession);
- The advice or influence of others in a social network (family, friends, employers).

(Amabile *et al* 1994; adapted from Kinman and Kinman, 2001, 135).

These extrinsic factors will become more important to individuals affected by an external environment rife with redundancies and recession, which is where we find ourselves at the moment in 2009/2010, and for the foreseeable future. Further, Binsardi and Ekwulungo (2003), Bourke, (2000) Qureshi (1995) and Lin (1997) all refer to the core benefits students expect to get on gaining qualifications such as employment, status, lifestyle, better pay and better prospects for their futures.

Advice from friends and family or acquaintances or colleagues who have already experience the service are also important motivators for students when going through their choice process according to Gronross (2000), Bourke (2000) and Tinto (1975; 2005). Educational institutions' reputation and perceived quality together with the students' perception of academia and a collegial culture within the institute is also important. This together with facilities provided both academic and social are also important (Cubillo *et al* 2006). The course or programme is also evaluated for its suitability, recognition by future (or existing) employers, the perceived quality and sometimes, and most importantly of all, the total cost and finance for the course, especially for part time and non EU students paying full fees.

The image of the institute is also important and is formed through word-of-mouth, past experiences and marketing of the institute, (Kotler, 2000; Svensson and Wood, 2007). Sometimes this may backfire as the image and quality portrayed exceeds reality and results in dissatisfied students and

dropouts. DIT includes alumni in open days and marketing events as it believes word-of-mouth advertising is best<sup>7</sup>.

However what may be more important is not what motivates students' choice but what motivates them to stay on courses and to try to understand why they are satisfied with their course. As an educational institute we may be able to replicate onto other courses within the college the positive core motives discovered.

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<sup>7</sup> DIT's Mature Students Open evening was January 12<sup>th</sup> 2010 and some of the current students on courses both full and part time spoke of their involvement in the day.

**Appendix 2**

**Focus group outline and guiding questions**

Date and time of Focus groups: \_\_\_\_\_ 2009

Course Year and Code: DT\_\_\_\_\_

Number of students in attendance \_\_\_\_\_

Male: Female ratio \_\_\_\_\_ (approx)

General Age Profile: all students are between the ages of 23-40 years.

**General questions to help guide the focus group:**

**Background**

**Level of education prior to DIT**

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**Do you think this helped you in making your decision to come to DIT?**

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**How?**

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**Motives**

**How did the idea to take this course first enter your thoughts?**

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**Why did you decide to go back to college/ education?**

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**Why did you feel the need to take this course?**

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**Why was this important to you?**

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**What influenced your decision to come to college?**

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**What factors do you think influenced you to come to DIT?**

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**Who, if anyone, influenced your decision?**

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**What helps you in your learning here in DIT?**

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**Information Search**

**Did you look for any information to help your search?**

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**Where?**

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**Did you find the information easy to access?**

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**Did you know about the Up skills Project?**

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**Alternative Evaluation**

**Did you consider any other colleges?**

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**And if so which ones were these?**

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**Choice Behaviour**

**What made you choose DIT?**

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**When did you decide to come to DIT?**

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**Evaluation of their choice**

**What did you think college would be like?**

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**What did you think DIT would be like?**

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**What did you think your course would be like?**

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**What did you think the other students would be like?**

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**What did you think the lecturers/ teachers/ tutors would be like?**

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**This is your first/ second (delete as appropriate) year in the course; how satisfied are you with your choice of course?**

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**Nationalities - Students are from:**

<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Working in the industry</b>
Austria		
Belgium		
Bulgaria		
Cyprus		
Czech Republic		
Denmark		
Estonia		
Finland		
France		
Germany		
Greece		
Hungary		
Ireland		
Italy		
Latvia		
Lithuania		
Luxemburg		
Malta		
Netherlands		
Poland		
Portugal		
Romania		
Slovakia		
Slovenia		
Spain		
Sweden		
United Kingdom		
Other country not listed above		

## **Appendix 3a**

### **Information Sheet**

(Ethics declaration form handed to all students taking part in the focus group)

### **Research Project Title**

An investigation into the motives of mature, non-national students progressing in a part-time, night time hospitality management program.

### **Invitation**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. However, before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve, so please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with other if you wish.

Ask me if there is anything you need clarified or you require any further information. Please take the time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

### **What is the projects purpose?**

This research is part of an assessment for an Educational Doctorate in Higher Education and Lifelong learning. It is a micro-study of the motives of mature, non-national students progressing in a part-time, night time hospitality management program.

### **Aims and objectives of the research:**

The principle aim of this research is to explore the motivation and decision-making processes involved in enrolling on a night time part time course in the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and progressing into further studies.

Thus, this study of students will include a review of how individuals make decisions to spend their available resources (free time, money, effort) on consumption-related items (college courses).

This includes *what* course they enrol in and *how* much it cost (part time night time students pay enrolment fees), *when* they decided to enrol, *where* they found their information, and *why* they chose DIT etc.



Motives are both intrinsic (internal) and extrinsic (external) in nature, and this influences the type of factors which may sway students choice and typically what types of students enrol on night time, part time courses.

### **Why you have been chosen to be part of the study?**

You have been chosen to represent a typical sample of part time and night time students in DIT.

### **It is your choice:**

It is your choice to decide to take part in this research or not. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

The focus group interview is where all students involved will be interviewed on the topic of motivation on their choice of study at the same time within a discussion setting in one of the classrooms in the Marlborough Street building between 5.30pm and 6.30pm Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> November. It is envisaged to only last one hour and will never interfere with your classes. Should it do so you may withdraw immediately. While the focus group interview is being conducted I would appreciate full co-operation and of course respect of your fellow interviewees while they are talking.

### **What do you have to do?**

As part of the focus group I will pose questions related to my study of student motives and course choice and progression and you may get involved in the discussion as it relates to you. As this will be recorded I appreciate your full co-operation and ask that you respect others who are also involved in the focus group.

### **What are the advantages of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate or obvious benefits to taking part in the study the information obtained will hopefully give me a clearer insight into student behaviour, course choice and possible motives for progressing into and within higher education.

There are no disadvantages that I foresee. If you do have any queries about this research please do not hesitate to contact me after the focus group has been completed. Further if you have any complaints please do not hesitate to contact me.

**Will your inclusion in this research be kept confidential?**

All information gathered through the focus group this evening will remain strictly confidential and any information you provide will be seen, and produced as anonymous. It will solely go towards fulfilling the assessment as part of the micro-research project required for the EdD.

**This project is ethically managed through the University of Sheffield, UK.**

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

If you decide to take part in my research please sign your name and date here:

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_

All forms to be handed back before the focus group interviews take place.

Thank you, Ann Conway (Researcher: 01-4027554).

Alternatively I will outline this again before the interviews take place and you can sign your name along with the other students taking part on the night.

### **Appendix 3b**

#### **Signature Sheet for Interviews**

Signature of students willing to participate in focus groups:

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Witnessed By: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix 4**

#### **Audio Files**

Files of the audio recordings of the interviews are uploaded as separate files onto MOLE.

Transcriptions were not required at this stage of the research.