

**UNIVERSITY OF GLAMORGAN**  
**FACULTY OF HEALTH, SPORT AND SCIENCE**  
**FACULTY ETHICS SUB GROUP**

**Application for Ethics Group Approval.**  
**N.B. All questions should be addressed.**

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1. NAME OF MAIN APPLICANT        Sam Lloyd-Parry  
QUALIFICATIONS    RN, RM, RHV, Cert. Health Education, BA (Hons), PGCE, MA  
POSITION    Lecturer  
ADDRESS    Aberloghin Cottage, Wernffrwd, Llanrhidian, Gower, Swansea, SA43TY

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2. OTHER APPLICANTS IN THE RESEARCH TEAM (Please give details as above):  
Please state if same supervisor.  
Supervisors: Dr Andrew Rogers, Dr Ray Higginson

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3. A) DOES THIS PROPOSAL REPRESENT PART OF AN EDUCATION/TRAINING PROGRAMME?  
(If you answer YES to this question, please complete part B below.)

YES

B) IF YES, WHAT QUALIFICATION WILL THIS THE PROJECT LEAD TOWARDS?

MPhil/PhD

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4. TITLE OF PROJECT

An exploration of the experiences of a group of non-traditional students in Wales as they negotiate the transition between Foundation Degree and degree level study

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5. RATIONALE - give a brief account, with references where relevant, or attach relevant information, or research proposal (maximum 500 words)

This proposal presents an outline of an exploratory study into the experiences of a group of non-traditional students in Wales as they negotiate the transition from undertaking a Foundation degree (Fd) in a further education institution (FEI) to degree level study in a university.

The study will aim to contribute to the body of literature that has investigated the experiences of non-traditional students and the ways in which they engage with and progress through the education system. The intention is to formulate an understanding of the transition process that will give education providers the information necessary to plan strategies to support non-traditional students. This knowledge should contribute to policies that not only increase provision and widen participation, but also ensure that these students are supported to make the best use of the educational opportunities available to them.

The higher education (HE) sector is currently facing many challenges as it continues to move rapidly from elite to universal provision. WAG and UK government policies to widen participation mean that there is pressure on the sector to develop evidence-based strategies to manage the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Previous studies (Rowley 2005) have suggested that retention rates in non-traditional student groups are lower, and that the pastoral support they require is higher. The experiences

## Appendix 1

of students progressing from Foundation to full degree study have remained an under-researched area, particularly in Wales (Morgan, Jones & Fitzgibbon 2004). In order to respond effectively and appropriately, it is imperative that the views of these students are sought.

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) reported a significant increase in the numbers of students progressing from Fds in a FEI to full degree study in a university (HEFCW 2007). It is anticipated that this trend will be further encouraged following the announcement of a multi-million pound pan-Wales Foundation degree scheme (University of Glamorgan 29.07.09). This will be led by the University of Glamorgan with particular emphasis on wider partnership with the further education sector. There is the potential for the findings of this project to encourage collaborative practices across the sector.

In the present volatile economic climate, the necessity of developing a highly skilled workforce to react to the demands of a competitive, dynamic, global economy remains a government priority. The vital role of universities in engendering social mobility and lifelong learning was highlighted by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS 27.9.09). There was an acknowledgement that initiatives to respond to the needs of people from under-represented groups might place different demands on the university system. A qualitative study such as that proposed could address the complexities of heterogeneity and diversity in ways that might be problematic within standard statistical analysis models (Feinstein and Vignoles 2008).

Sociological circumstances have been considered to be of particular significance for non-traditional students, with writers drawing attention to the complex social relationships that need to be accommodated when a person enters higher education (Haggis 2004, Reay et al 2002). This study proposes a sociological approach to life course theory as a way of explaining and contextualising individual experience. There have been precedents for using life course theory as a theoretical framework to explore the reasons for 'dropping out' of university (Heinz and Kruger 2001). This would appear to be pertinent to the proposed study as the Review of Higher Education in Wales (WAG 2009) drew attention to the correlation between 'dropout rates' and non-traditional student groups, both of which were higher in Wales relative to other parts of the UK.

### References

BIS (2009) Higher Education and modern life. Peter Mandelson, Birbeck University 27.07.09 available at <http://www.dius.gov.uk/news> (accessed 03.08.09)

Feinstein, L and Vignoles, A. (2008) Individual Differences in the Pathways into and Beyond Higher education in the UK: A Life-Course Approach *Journal of Social Issues* 64 (1) pp.115-133

HEFCW (2007) *Study of the role of Foundation Degrees in Wales: A report to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales* HEFCW

Haggis, T. (2004) Meaning, identity and 'motivation': expanding what matters in understanding learning in higher education? *Studies in Higher Education* 29 (3) pp.335-352

Heinz, W. and Kruger, H. (2001) Life Course: Innovations and Challenges for Social Research *Current Sociology* 49 (6) pp.29-45

Morgan, A., Jones, N. and Fitzgibbon, K. (2004) Critical Reflections on the Development of a Foundation Degree, *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 9 (3) pp.353-369

Reay, D., Ball, S. and David, M. (2002) 'It's Taking Me a Long Time but I'll Get There in the End': mature students on access courses and higher education choice *British Educational Research Journal* 28 (1) pp. 5-19

Rowley, J. (2005) Foundation Degrees: a risky business? *Quality Assurance in Education* 13 (1) pp.6-16

University of Glamorgan (29.09.09) University leads on new Foundation Degree programme, available at <http://www.fundingmatters.weblog.glam.ac.uk/2009/7/29> (accessed 30.07.09)

## Appendix 1

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### 6. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE (e.g. hypothesis which it is intended to test – maximum 100 words)

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The study will aim to generate a theory that will answer the following questions:

- what are the experiences of students who enter university via a Foundation degree completed in a further education college?
  - what are the differences, if any, between studying higher education in a further education institute (FEI) and subsequently studying a full degree in a higher education institute (HEI) from the student perspective?
  - what are the most effective/most widespread coping strategies used by students during the transition process and how do these strategies affect their engagement with their studies?
  - what implications might student perceptions of the transition process have for institutional planning and student support services?
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### 7. DESIGN OF THE STUDY (describe briefly – maximum 250 words)

Please attach protocol, questionnaires, and data collection tools as appropriate.

This qualitative study will aim to generate a theory to understand the transition process, primarily from the student perspective. It will utilise a grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis.

Students will be informed of the study's objectives and the nature of the research at the end of a lecture by a person independent of the study. An information sheet about the study will be provided for all students (attached).

A consent form and biographical data sheet (attached) will be distributed two weeks later by the same person with a pre-paid envelope for return to the researcher. Students will therefore be given adequate time to discuss any queries or concerns they may have. Return of the data sheet will be requested within two weeks of receipt.

The data sheet will seek to obtain demographic information regarding family background and previous educational experience to ascertain whether a proportion of the student groups might indeed be defined as non-traditional.

In order to gain a broader understanding of the transition process, it is also proposed that a series of focus groups be undertaken. The advantage of focus groups is the 'more comprehensive elicitation' of views than is often possible in individual interviews (Wilkinson 2008). Cohen et al (2007) observed that focus discussions could play a useful role in triangulating other forms of interview, with resultant benefits for reliability.

It is anticipated that focus discussions will take place with students in the University and in the three partner colleges listed. Students will also be asked to indicate at the end of the data sheet whether they are willing to take part in a group discussion at a later date.

Students who agree to participate in the discussion group will have their consent checked verbally at the start of the session as part of the explanation of the ground rules (attached Group Discussion Schedule). Broad topic areas for the focus discussions will be informed by the research questions and analysis of any previous discussion groups.

The main focus of the study will be individual interviews with students who have enrolled on the BSc (Hons) in Childhood Studies at the XXXXXXX. It is proposed that two interviews, group and individual, will be undertaken with each participant. This will allow for the clarification and expansion of issues that become apparent during the constant comparative process of analysis following the first interviews.

## Appendix 1

Analysis of the group discussions will identify a schedule of broad topic areas as a starting point for the individual interviews.

The crux of the proposed research is to ascertain the student perspective. Therefore, analysis of students' views will determine the broad emphasis of subsequent interviews and discussion groups.

Focus discussions with lecturers are expected to take place following the individual interviews. This should enable emergent themes from staff input to be addressed in the second round of individual interviews. However, that input should not govern the direction of the project. In keeping with theoretical sampling in grounded theory the exact composition of the focus groups would be derived from the iterative process of data collection, coding and analysis (Johnson and Christensen 2008). The information obtained from these sessions together with data from the first round of interviews should then inform subsequent interviews and augment the comparative process until saturation occurs.

Members of staff who are invited to participate in focus discussions will also be given information sheets regarding the nature of the research project and their written consent will be sought. They will be given similar assurances that ethical approval had been granted, and that they will not be identifiable.

## References

Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007) *Research Methods in Education* 6<sup>th</sup> Edition Oxford: Routledge

Gorard, S. and Smith, E. (2006) Beyond the 'learning society': what have we learnt from widening participation research? *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 25 (6) pp.575-59

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Johnson, B. and Christensen, L. (2008) *Educational Research* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Wilkinson, S. (2008) Focus Groups in Smith, J (ed) (2008) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

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8. WHERE WILL DATA BE GATHERED? / STUDY SETTING (please give an address and postcode for each location)

University of Glamorgan  
Pontypridd  
Wales  
UK  
CF37 1DL

Coleg Sir Gâr  
Ammanford Campus  
Ammanford  
Carms  
SA18 3TA

Pembrokeshire College  
Haverfordwest  
Pembrokeshire  
SA61 1SZ

## Appendix 1

Coleg Morgannwg  
Rhondda Campus  
Pontrhondda Road,  
Llwynypia  
CF40 2TQ

### 9. TIMETABLE OF RESEARCH (over what period of time do you wish approval to be granted? Start / end dates)

Proposed project duration January 2010 - January 2014

January 2010 - Research proposal submitted for consideration by the Ethics Group, University of Glamorgan. Research Consent Forms, Information Sheet, Biographical Data Sheet,

example of schedule for group discussions included for consideration

February 2010 distribution of biographical data sheet (following circulation of information letter)

April / May / June 2010 Student Group Discussion sessions

Transcription of discussion groups, data analysis

October 2010 Initial Individual Interviews

December 2010 – January 2011 Group Discussion sessions with members of staff

Transcription and analysis

March 2011 – Follow up Individual Interviews

Transcription

May 2011 – December 2013 Data analysis, interpretation and preparation of paper

January 2014 – submission of completed paper

The applicant wishes to apply for Ethical Approval for a period of four years from February 2010. In keeping with a grounded theory approach, permission to start data collection early in the research project is sought.

The majority of students who have previously enrolled on the BSc in Childhood Studies following successful completion of a Foundation degree in a further education college have usually opted to 'top up' to a full degree over the course of one academic year. The relatively short timetable for data collection reflects the desire to ensure that the views of these students are sought while they are actively engaged in their studies.

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### 10. SUBJECTS

What groups will the subjects include, by age and gender, etc?

Biographical data sheet – approximately 65 Foundation degree students from Care/Childhood Studies courses across the three colleges and 25 BSc Childhood Studies students in the University of Glamorgan.

Group discussions – optimal number of 8-12 people at each session. If greater numbers of students or members of staff volunteer to participate in the discussions, then following analysis of the questionnaire responses, theoretical sampling will be used to determine the group most likely to elucidate the issue.

Interviews – approximately 20 students will be interviewed, which at this stage is deemed appropriate to reach saturation. (Should saturation not be reached, application to extend the data collection process would be sought).

The relatively small number of people which it is anticipated will take part in this proposed study means that it will be difficult to claim generalisability to the larger population. To increase the prospect of wider relevance, care will be taken to ensure that the sample will be as representative as possible. Silverman (2004) contended that in a qualitative project, very few situations could be exactly replicated in another sample but asserted that the insights derived from one study could prove invaluable in illuminating other contexts.

## Appendix 1

The numbers accepted onto the BSc. programme have not yet been finalised but evidence from recent years suggests that the cohort will comprise approximately 35 students. A high proportion of these students is expected to enter the programme from a FEI. The views of students who have not taken this route will also be sought.

As indicated in the application and associated documentation, it will be made clear that the research is in no way linked to the course and that participation in the project will have no bearing on student attainment – positive or negative.

How many subjects are needed? Please give information about statistical analyses, e.g. Power measurements, if appropriate.

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### 11. INVESTIGATIVE/INVASIVE PROCEDURES OR INTERVENTIONS

What investigative procedures or interventions do you intend to carry out, if any (e.g. blood pressure recording, ECG monitoring, written test)?

N/A

SAMPLE MANAGEMENT – Please provide details of the management/handling of samples? (E.g. Blood, tissue, saliva, hair, etc.)

N/A

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### 12. A) DATA MANAGEMENT – Please provide details of storage, analysis, and archiving.

Coleg Sir Gâr Data Protection Policy

All data to be stored in a locked filing cabinet at Coleg Sir Gâr

All data will be treated as confidential and anonymity will be preserved in any publication or discussion regarding the research project.

Data analysis will be supported with NVivo software, installed on password protected computers.

The data will be used solely for the purposes of the research project.

Anonymised transcripts will be archived for 5 years following completion of the project.

### B) COMPUTERS

Are computers to be used to store data?

YES

If so, is the data registered under the Data Protection Act?

YES

Electronic data stored on password protected computers

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### 13. HAVE NATIONALLY APPROVED GUIDELINES BEEN FOLLOWED IN PREPARING THIS PROTOCOL? (e.g. Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry Guidelines (1983), Royal College of Physicians Guidelines, The Declaration of Helsinki, etc). If so, please specify.

No

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### 14. INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER PROFESSIONALS/ AGENCIES/ OTHERS

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## Appendix 1

Will others from outside the School be involved? If so, please give details and evidence of collaboration (e.g. letter of support, previous publications, etc.).

N/A

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15. HAVE CONSUMERS BEEN INVOLVED IN THE DESIGN OF THIS STUDY? Please state.

Lay people have read the information sheet and consent form to test for readability.

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16. DISCOMFORT

Will discomfort, possible anxiety or interference with their activities be suffered by all or any of the subjects? Will the study involve expense and/or inconvenience to the subjects? Please give details.

Students will not be pressurised into taking part in the research project. The possibility of latent bias in terms of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee has highlighted by Greenbank (2007) and Kvale (2007). There is a probability that the researcher may be involved in teaching a small proportion of the participants in the focus discussions. The applicant would wish to seek approval to conduct these sessions as part of her own research training and personal development. Where relevant, the students will be informed that the discussions will be managed by one of their lecturers. Students will be given the option to request a person other than a lecturer, without sanction.

During a previous research project, the applicant requested and was granted permission to interview her own students. To preclude bias, the applicant attended training sessions in ethical approaches to interviewing held at the University of Glamorgan. Pilot interviews were then conducted and the tapes submitted to the University for scrutiny and feedback. The interviews were deemed to meet the necessary standard.

Written assurance will be given to participants that there will not be any coercion to take part in the study. Non-participation at any stage will not be penalised in any way and will not influence the outcome of a student's studies. Information about the aims and boundaries of the study will be given verbally and in written form by an independent person, together with details about data management and confidentiality.

Students may request an interview with an independent person without sanction. Written consent will be obtained before participation in any phase of the study. Students will be reassured that they can withdraw at any time without penalty. The data sheet, focus discussions and interviews will be conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines. Students will be given the name of a person independent of the research project to contact for any reason related to the research project. It is unlikely that students will experience any discomfort or anxiety. Care will be taken to ask questions in a sensitive manner. All contributions will be treated with respect. The aims and boundaries of the research project will be explained. The researchers or an independent named person will be available for follow up discussions if required.

Full explanation of the research project will be given to members of staff who participate in discussion groups and their written consent will be obtained. They can expect the same consideration as student participants in terms of respect, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to leave the research project at any stage without penalty. It will be explained in writing that the information obtained during the discussions will be used for research purposes only, will be recorded and stored in line with Data Protection policies, and will not have any bearing on their professional roles. Staff members will also have their views respected and ground rules for the discussion groups will be established at the beginning of the sessions.

### References

Greenbank, P. (2007) Utilising collaborative forms of educational action research: some reflections

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## Appendix 1

*Journal of Further and Higher Education 31 (2) pp.97-108*

Kvale, S. (2007) *Doing Interviews* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

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### 17. A) WHAT ARE THE MAIN ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE RESEARCH?

The proposed research will be conducted in line with the principles of ethically sound research and will be subject to the approval of the Ethics Committee at the University of Glamorgan and the Principals of the partner colleges. The importance of confidentiality will be emphasised, and in respect of the individual interviews and focus discussions, ground rules will be established and reiterated at the start of a session. Data obtained will be stored in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 2003.

The main concerns are that students or members of staff do not feel pressurised to participate in the research and that they are fully assured that declining to become involved will not result in any form of penalty.

### B) HOW ARE THESE TO BE ADDRESSED?

Students will receive full explanation of the aims, scope and demands of the research project in a form that they understand.

Students' informed consent will be sought prior to any involvement in the project.

Pilot studies of the biographical data sheet and the interviews will be undertaken and monitored by an experienced researcher prior to student involvement.

Members of staff will be subject to the same considerations.

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## 18. INFORMED CONSENT

***If you have any doubt about whether or how informed consent can be obtained, you will need to discuss this with a member of the Committee in the first instance.***

A. The submission should be specific about the following:

- i. Will consent be given in written or verbal form? (a copy of any consent form should be attached).
- ii. How will subjects be given information about the study? (a copy of the information sheet, whether it is to be read out or given to the subject, should be attached).
- iii. How will the subject or volunteer be asked to participate?
- iv. How much time will be allowed for subjects to consider and consult others before giving consent?
- v. If the study includes people who may be unable to give informed consent, what alternative process will be used?

B. What will the subject be told about:

- i. the project and what it is intended to show
  - ii. the frequency of procedures and what they entail
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## Appendix 1

- iii. possible risks and side effects
- iv. exclusion criteria with reference to medical history, etc
- v. entitlement to leave study.

Please give below page references to the main protocol in order to cover these points. Also, please provide any additional details not adequately covered in the protocol.

An example of an information sheet and a consent form is available from the Committee secretary on request.

Explanation of the study will be given two weeks before the data sheets are distributed. Students will have the opportunity to contact an independent person to discuss any issues before deciding whether to take part in the study.

Willingness to participate in a group discussion will be indicated in writing at the end of the data sheet.

Further explanation and consent will be sought before individual interviews are undertaken. Interview dates and times will be arranged at the convenience of the student.

At the data sheet, group discussion and interview stages, students will be reminded that they may withdraw from the entire research project, or any part of the project, without penalty.

Assurances will be given to all students that any involvement in the project will not influence their studies.

Members of staff will receive similar assurances. Full explanation of the research will be given and their written consent will be sought.

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### 19. SPONSORSHIP/ FUNDING

Is the project being sponsored? NO

If so, please give the name and address of the organisation providing the sponsorship.

Please give full details of:

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| (i) payments to subject / health volunteer               | £ N/A |
| (ii) payments to a trust or research fund                | £ N/A |
| (iii) personal payment or personal benefit to researcher | £ N/A |
| Is there any cost to the Faculty?                        | NO    |
| If yes, what is the expected total cost?                 | £     |

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### 20. WHAT SUPPORT AND FACILITIES WILL BE AVAILABLE TO THE RESEARCHER e.g. library, expert advice (please give details)

Library facilities, PhD student training sessions, supervision by Dr Andrew Rogers and Dr. Ray Higginson

### 21. COMPENSATION

Appendix 1

What compensation / insurance arrangements cover this research?

University of Glamorgan Indemnity Insurance

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22. IS THIS RESEARCH PROJECT BEING SUBMITTED FOR LREC OR NRES (COREC) APPROVAL?  
If YES, please state.

NO

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23. The information supplied above is to the best of my knowledge and belief accurate.

I understand that I may be invited to explain my proposal to the Faculty Ethics Sub Group.

I understand that the Faculty Ethics Sub Group gives ethics approval only.

**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR** .....

**SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR** .....  
(MSc Students)

**DATE OF SUBMISSION** .....

**SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL** .....  
(Chair/Secretary – FESG)

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**FESG use:**

*Date considered:*.....

*Ethical Opinion:*

*Favourable*     *Unfavourable*     *Ref'd to FESG*

*Signature of FESG* .....

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