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LOST IN (SOCIAL) SPACE?

Testing the transition to learning online

Lost in (Social) Space?

Testing the transition to learning online

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The Open University

- Blended distance learning
  - Mix of online (VLE) and face-to-face provision
  - Open access
  - Part time student profile
  - Modular rather than programme route

External context

- Higher fees…Increased consumerism
- Historical separation
  - (full time work/part time students)
- Current blurring on a continuum
  - (full time work and full time study equivalency)
- Student self-service enrolment…rather than course choice advice
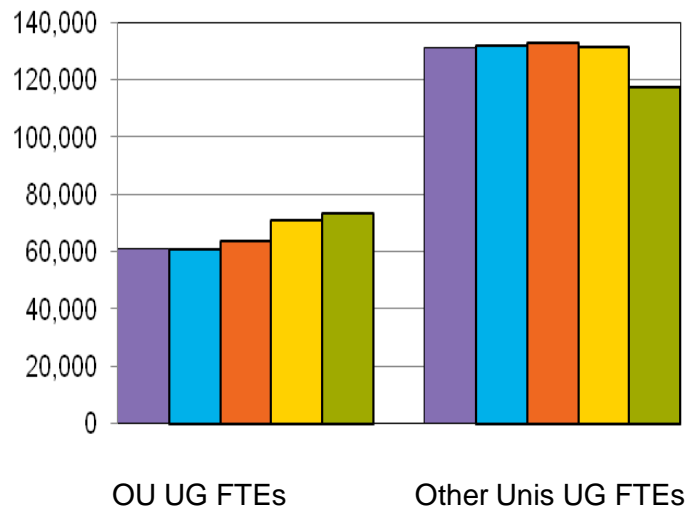- Growth of MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) as another potential game changer
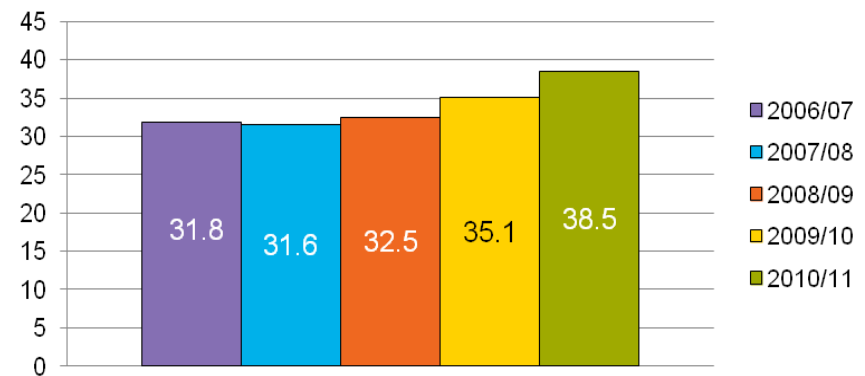
UK Part Time vs. Full Time

Total UG FTEs and OU Market Share

The overall Part Time market fell by 5.7% 09/10 vs. 10/11, with UG PT -5.7% and PG PT -5.9%. OU UG FTEs increase by 3.5% and increase market share to 38.5%.

UG PT FTEs

OU UG FTEs   Other Unis UG FTEs

OU UG Market Share %

- 2006/07
- 2007/08
- 2008/09
- 2009/10
- 2010/11

Values shown: 31.8, 31.6, 32.5, 35.1, 38.5

*Source: HESA 2010/11 UK Summary, J.Rogers, OU Marketing*

Possible implications for Part time study?

- Attempt to obtain degree in UK traditional timeline of 3 years or less (evidence of multiple module registrations identified increasing especially from October 2012)

- Unrealistic expectations of 24/7 support which fits into individual lifestyle

FBL Student Age Profile
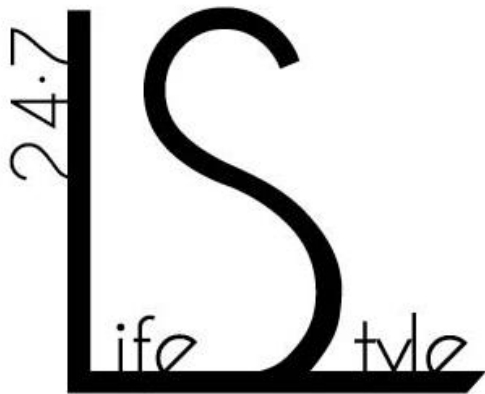
OU FBL student age profiles
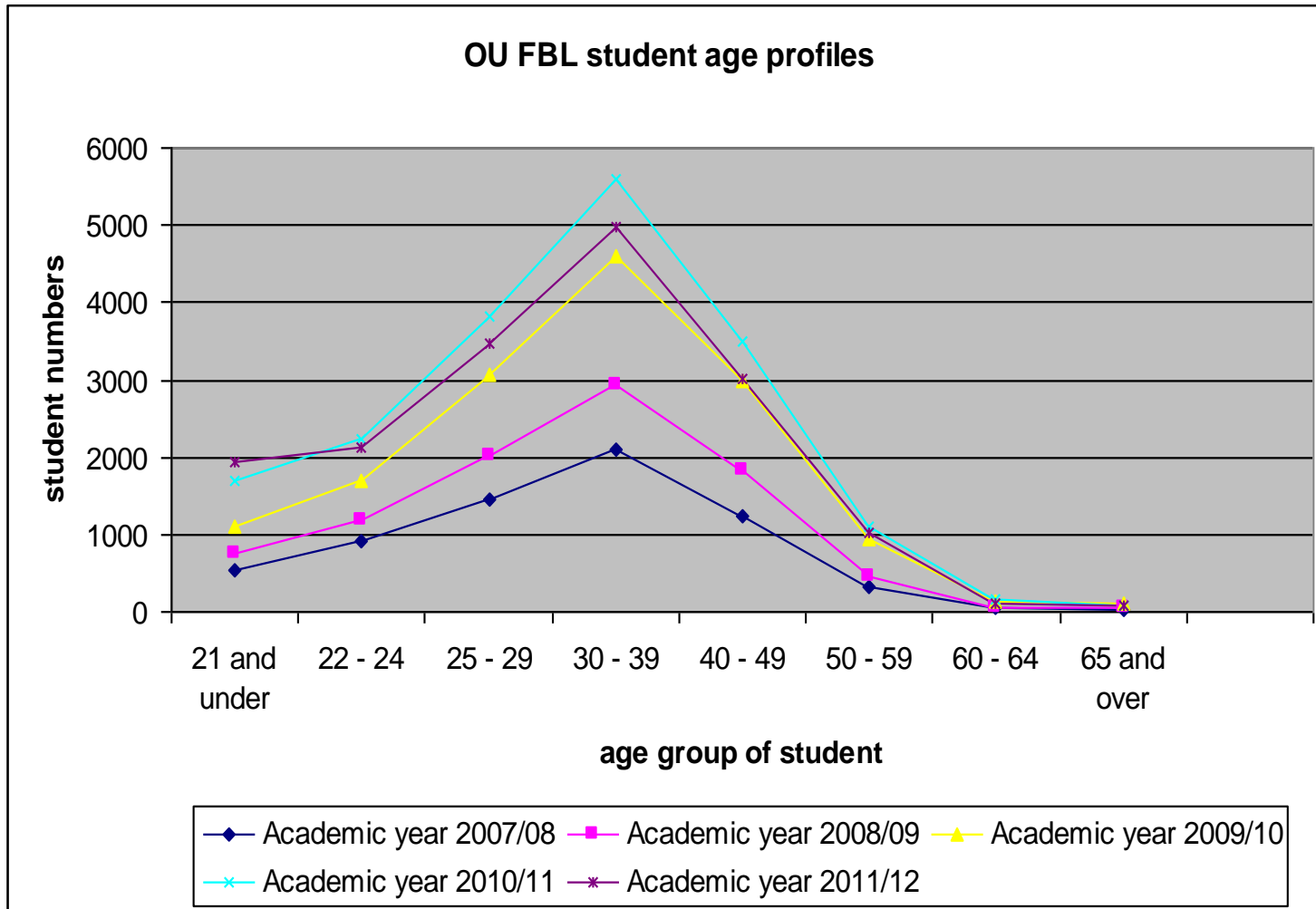
Research Questions

- Finding out what's really driving our online student behaviour

    Q - Have we made institutional assumptions about how students behave online?

    Q - *How* are students interacting within our online environment?

    Q- What can it tell us to help retention?

E-Learning Strategies in F2F Learning

Distinct E-Learning Strategies

F2F Strategies in E-Learning

Source: Etale – Life in the Digital World http://etale.org/main/tag/blended-learning/
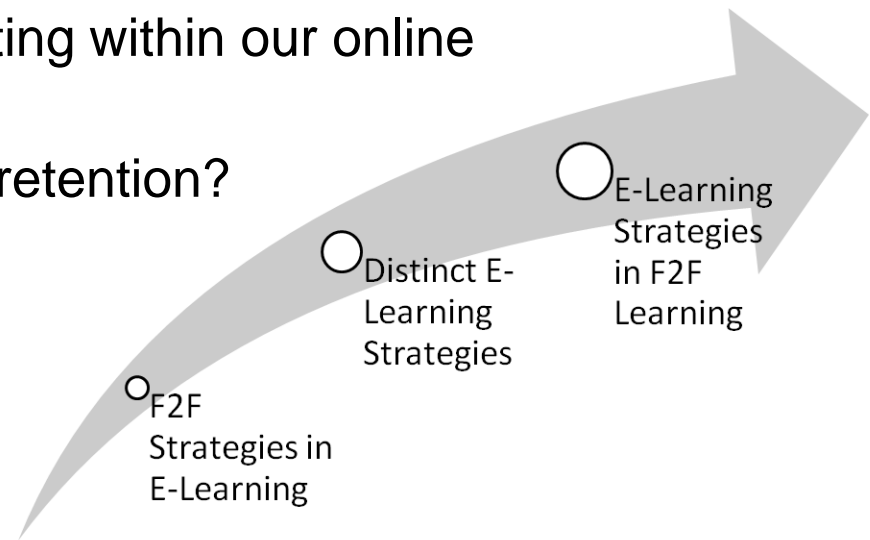
Research Outline

2009 cohort – two key strands

•Look at how different student groups work with the VLE

  - how do students go from social

    space to learning on line?

  - Which group engaged most?

•Benefits of using this data as a retention tool

Literature Review

- Crosses THREE areas

  - Student retention

    - Open/distance learning courses…traditionally poor retention rates but retention on online and e-learning is often worse' (Simpson).

    - Studies on retention in other HEIs (Keegan, Bennett…).

Literature Review cont'd…..

- Crosses THREE areas
  - Part time students (Yorke and Longden)
  - Learning Design/Cost of moving online (Salmon/Laurillard)
    - costing technological enhancements to learning
    - "…context of the environment ….learners inhabit…"

Methodology

- 3000+ UG Year 1 Business & management students
  - Retrospective study (2009-10 cohort)
- Quantitative & qualitative approach:
  - study included detailed analysis of 54,000 online forum postings.
  - cross-mapping with OU student record system - entries made by tutors and learner support staff.

Methodology cont'd…

Initial data set contained key information:-

- – assignment and module results,

- – personal profile data (inc. age, gender and declared disability)

- – recorded tutor referrals or interventions for additional student.

Social space vs. online learning

- mainstreaming the use of technology for teaching & learning

- Research into Learning Design
  – Laurillard
    - *Learning context*
  – Knight
    - *erosion of study boundaries*

- Portfolio of online media tools provided
  – evolved mirroring other digital environments
    - Private tutor forum (20 students)
    - Module wide and pan-faculty cafés
    - Personal (private?) online space

Source: The Millennial Moment http://www.nightclub.com/bar-management/consumer-trends/the-millennial-moment

Challenging our Institutional assumptions

- Millennials majority of traditional HEI populations at present
  - Research on their learning needs

- Growth in this market for OU
  - Many OU assumptions that younger students would be the greatest participants online and largest beneficiaries of blended experience

Source: In Touch with Student Services http://www.csulb.edu/divisions/students2/intouch/archives/2007-08/vol16_no1/01.htm

Challenging Institutional assumptions II – user type and type of use….

Age of student	Number of posts			Total posts	Percentage of cohort	Difference compared to expected
	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3			
18 to 25	7,732	5,432	695	13,859	25.5%	-6%
26 to 35	10,057	7,695	1,144	18,896	34.7%	-2%
36 to 45	7,791	6,327	1,121	15,239	28.0%	4%
46 to 55	2,870	2,489	494	5,853	10.8%	3%
56 to 65	267	201	44	512	0.9%	0%
65+	29	7	4	40	0.1%	0%

Secondary benefit of VLE tools

- Tracking tool for student behaviour
- Changes in behaviour indicated change in engagement
  - Student "drift"
  - Role of support
- Re-development of proactive retention strategies
  - Higher fees
  - Graduation rates
  - Retention and progression

Summary Findings

- Several sorts of findings:
  - OU assumptions about young students (U25) were wrong; most active online groups were 35-55
  - Studying multiple modules wasn't the assumed show stopper, although it did affect grading
  - Students were reluctant to cross over from social space to learning space - unless steered by tutor / requirement of assessment …interaction remained social

Findings cont'd…

- Changes to behaviour online were always associated with changes to engagement
  - Positive from tutor intervention
  - Negative in passive / active withdrawal
    - Role of tutors in active decision-making
    - Student drift with less engaged tutor
      - Case studies where students clearly thought they were still studying when we know they have failed

# Conclusions from first study

- Obvious patterns emerged

- Existing retention policies underfunded / potentially intrusive

- Existing profiling does work but has limitations

- Potential for tracking as a non-intrusive, cost effective monitoring of student engagement

- New technology for T&L but secondary benefits in retention

Summary…

- Fee changes – change behaviour?
- Higher expectations and demands
- Increased multiple modules
- full time study/part time

basis

Recommended…
- ❖ Intervention at module choice
- ❖ Intervention at first assignment
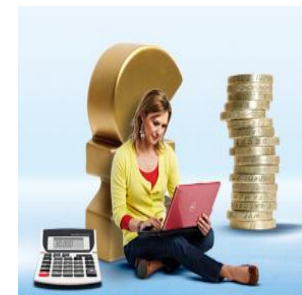
2012/3 study

- **New VLE enables automated tracking**
- **University funding to look at what can be substantiated to support profiling as result of ours and others studies**
- **Current work ….**

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