

An analysis of the impact of financial uncertainty for mature students to enter Higher education:



A case study of undergraduate accountancy programmes

Research Proposal

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Introduction

This dissertation will look at the possible financial uncertainty of studying Accountancy as a mature student in university. The results will be analysed to see how much financial uncertainty makes an impact on mature students deciding to take that leap in to higher education in Accountancy. It will consider backgrounds of mature students that have dependents, rent or have a mortgage, are a carer or have a partner and their decision to study Accountancy at higher education from prospective, past and present students.

Rationale

The researcher has chosen this area of research because the researcher is also a mature student in the final year of higher education studying accountancy. The researcher delayed studying for several years because of financial uncertainty whilst raising a child. When the researcher finally took the leap to study an undergraduate Accountancy degree, motivation and family support helped the decision but financially the researcher has had a negative experience to the point of nearly dropping out of continuing to study. Referring to bullet point three of the objectives, the idea to explore what financial help is available to recommending to governing bodies could potentially help perspective accountancy students' that worry about the financial uncertainty.

Background Literature

Accounting is a specific subject and skill set that is used in every business. Businesses use accountants to monitor daily cash flows, submit readings to HMRC annually, create annual reports to present to shareholders and potential investors and much more. Studying a degree in accountancy can open more doors into a career in Accountancy (UCAS, 2021).

Motivation or self-concept is psychological relating to self-beliefs. Motivation to study in higher education comes from the need to achieve a result to expand knowledge, succeed more in life with a career and expand personality and emotional development (Marsh et al. 2019).

According to Rolfe (2003), the number of mature applicants that apply to university in general to study higher education has decreased due to fees and the concept of a huge student loan can feel over whelming to those that are from the working class or reliant on benefits. These potential applicants could be working on hourly pay, renting or even have a mortgage, have dependents or care for vulnerable relatives. All these factors come in to play when deciding to enter higher education in general.

Student Finance Wales (2021) offers a figure in the shape of a loan for the higher education course and then help with living costs which can be depending on the total household income how much is a grant and how much is a loan, which needs to be paid back. For those with children there is additional grants available depending also on household income. Rent and mortgage should be covered by the grants and loans.

Mature students with dependents would potentially find it harder to get a part time job along side raising their children and studying full time. Multi-tasking and organisational skills are required but as soon as a dependent is sick or is off school, pressure and stress is added on top.

Key questions to address from literature:

- What funding is available to mature students studying an accountancy degree? – Oliver (2020)
- Comparison of mature students applying for higher education compared to those coming straight from college. – Office for Students (2021). HESA (2021).
- Is there enough motivation to study higher education for mature students? Jabal (2021).
- What benefits are there to mature students studying an Accountancy degree? – Kaplan (2020).
- How much information on finances is out there for mature students wanting to enter higher education? – Nidirect (NA).

Aims and Objectives

Aims

The aim of the dissertation project is to research mature students' that struggle financially when undertaking higher education in accountancy and analyse whether financial uncertainty has an impact on the students' intentions to study. For the aim to be obtained, objectives are stated as a checklist of tasks to be completed to achieve results. The objectives are very important as they help guide the researcher to the results (Farrugia et al. 2010).

Objectives

- Carry out a comprehensive literature review in reference to the higher education and accountancy sector to determine students' motivation to study, impact on affordability of studying accountancy and financial uncertainty.
- Carry out quantitative research in the form of a questionnaire to current, past and prospective accountancy students.
- Make recommendations premised on the findings to higher education governing bodies and government agencies on how accountants can be sustainably attracted to degree courses.

Research Method

Research design is:

“The specification of how the research question will be approached including the refinement of the question(s) and key constructs; the nature of the data that will be required and the identification of its sources, as well as methods for its collection and organization; the specification of the population of interest and an appropriate sampling strategy; the selection of an appropriate range of statistical tests in the case of a quantitative study.”

(Duignan, 2016, p. 27)

Semi-structured interviews are often referred to as qualitative research interviews. The interview has basic questions to ask the interviewee, but the questions may vary from participant to participant depending on circumstances. Some questions can be omitted out as they may not apply to all participants (Saunders and Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

Quantitative research is numerical where specific questions could be asked on mass to participants. Putting options in place for answers can generate data that can say for example: Sixty percent of participants have children. Qualitative research is more in-depth answers with produces a narrative. The questions can be broader, but the answers can benefit the researcher by being more detailed (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009).

The method applied to this research will be quantitative. The questionnaire will gather numerical data which can be analysed from a pie chart. The use of a quantitative method allows the researcher to analyse a high number of participants and form factual percentages to compare data.

The qualitative method would not gather clear data and in the mist of COVID-19, interviews may not be accessible.

Data Collection

The research will be collected by use of a quantitative method. To gain the quantitative an online questionnaire will be released by social media and LinkedIn to look for participants that fit the categories of past, present and prospective mature students.

The present category can be obtained from current mature students enrolled on the BA Accountancy degree from year one to three from the University of Wales St David Trinity and expanding to other nearby universities such as Swansea University and the University of South Wales. The target response will be fifty.

The past category can be obtained from targeting local accountancy firms in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot areas. The firms will be contacted by email for permission and a rough response rate to judge whether accounting firms further away would need to be contacted. The target response will be fifty.

The prospective category can be obtained from social media and LinkedIn. The target response will be fifty.

Ethical considerations and Limitations

According to Western Australian centre for health promotion research (2010), Ethical considerations to consider are:

- Consent
- Voluntary participation
- Confidentiality
- Do not harm
- Anonymity
- Only access relevant components

Consent will be obtained through the university before the questionnaire is posted online or to present students. When posting on social media and LinkedIn with the link to the questionnaire a message will be seen to prospective participants, The message with a rough guide to the wording can be found in appendices A1.

Potential imitations could include:

- Limited time
- No funding for resources
- Lack of prospective mature students wishing to study Accounting in higher education

Resources and Planning

A computer and internet access are needed for the dissertation project. The computer will need to be only accessed by the researcher to comply with ethical reasons when storing data collected before it is added to the dissertation. Access to books and journals can be found using the university library and google scholar.

The following dates have been given for draft chapter submission dates:

- Dissertation proposal – Thursday 25th November
- Ethics form – Thursday 25th November
- Literature Review – Monday 17th January
- Methodology – Monday 7th February
- Data Analysis – Monday 7th March
- Conclusions and Recommendations – Monday 28th March
- Full dissertation – Monday 25th April

A timetable is created below to show the time length spent on each task:

Dissertation Submission		
Task	Start Date	Duration to draft submissions
Dissertation proposal	30/09/2021	25/11/2021
Ethical Form	30/09/2021	25/11/2021
Literature Review	26/11/2021	17/01/2022
Methodology	18/01/2022	07/02/2022
Data Analysis	08/02/2022	07/03/2022
Conclusions and Recommendations	08/03/2022	28/03/2022
Full dissertation	29/03/2022	25/04/2022

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Appendices

A1 – Text for questionnaires

“Below is a link to a questionnaire aiming to collect data for a research project titled ‘An analysis of the impact of financial uncertainty for mature students to enter Higher education: A case study of undergraduate accountancy programmes. The researcher is looking for participants from the following categories:

- *Mature students that studied Accountancy in university that have completed their studies*
- *Mature students that are currently studying Accountancy in university*
- *Those that would be mature studies and are interested in studying Accountancy at university*

By participating in the questionnaire, the participant gives consent to the data being used in the research project. The participant will be kept anonymous, and participation is entirely voluntary. All questions are relevant to the research project and the researcher is happy to answer any further questions on the project itself, Thank you”.