

SCOTTISH SPECIAL ENTRY SUMMER SCHOOLS: A SECRET SUCCESS STORY?

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SYNOPSIS

This article highlights the lack of independent research into the Scottish Special Entry Summer Schools scheme, designed to facilitate access to higher education for those who would benefit from study at this level but who, for a variety of reasons, have not achieved the entrance qualifications usually required. Evidence available from participants suggests that the scheme is successfully meeting its aims, but systematic research into the long-term effects of this initiative, and its implications for supplementing access provision generally would be valuable, particularly in the light of a long-standing concern for educational underachievement in areas of social and economic deprivation, areas specifically targeted by the summer schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Special entry summer schools are organised by Scottish Universities to provide short courses (normally ten weeks long) for students—usually school leavers—with the potential for university study but without the necessary qualifications. The courses are designed as an introduction to university level study, with an emphasis on study skills and the development of students' confidence in their own abilities. In terms of academic content, students select subject areas relating to the choices they would be likely to make as first year undergraduates: in other words, the subject they expect to be their main degree subject and two or three subsidiary subjects. Students who successfully complete the courses—which include course work assessment and exams—are guaranteed university places. Special entry summer schools fall into two types: 'general' schools, which cater for students interested in pursuing degree courses in arts or social sciences; and 'science' schools, set up to address the particular problem of expanding participation in science and engineering in higher education, and therefore placing special emphasis on developing the knowledge and skills seen as essential for degree level study in these fields. There are currently five 'general' schools in Scotland, in Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Dundee. The Glasgow school is organised by a consortium of universities: Glasgow, Strathclyde, Glasgow Caledonian, Paisley and Glasgow School of Art. Aberdeen and Edinburgh Universities are responsible for the schools in their areas, and the two schools in Dundee are run by Dundee University and the University of Abertay. There are six science summer schools, run by the Universities of Strathclyde, Paisley, Glasgow Caledonian, Napier, Abertay and Robert Gordon. Successful students usually progress to degree level studies in the university to which the school is attached; but in some cases, those who complete the courses opt for other universities, for further education or to defer entry for a variety of reasons. For most of the schools, 1997 is their seventh or eighth year of existence. To date, some 6000 students have entered Scottish universities as a result of the scheme. However, there has not, as yet, been any systematic research into its achievements. Most of the available data comes from evaluations carried out by participating institutions in the form, for example, of end-of-course reviews. From this evidence, reviewed in this paper, it appears that the schemes have been markedly successful, and the aim of this article is therefore to argue for further, independently funded research, and to suggest key areas for investigation. Furthermore, if the schemes are proved to be as successful as the preliminary evidence suggests, it is argued here that this initiative has broader implications for our understanding of success in higher education.

2. WIDENING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Policy context

Government policy over recent years has been both to increase the numbers of students in higher education and to widen access to include people ‘with ability to benefit’ from academic studies, regardless of whether they met the ‘traditional’ minimum entry requirements of three Highers. Participation in higher education in Scotland has expanded by 30% in the last decade. However, as Gallacher *et al.* point out in their review of access policy and provision in higher education (1996), government policy which focuses on expansion does not necessarily lead to greater participation in higher education from groups which, traditionally, have been under-represented in this sector. More needs to be done to link the drive for expansion (whose origins may be in notions of economic competitiveness or in demographic changes affecting the number of ‘traditional’ applicants to Higher Education) to principles of social justice. It continues to prove difficult to attract students from families with a history of manual or unskilled work, or long-term unemployment, and little experience of post-16 education. Children from areas of social and economic disadvantage may have grown up in a context in which educational underachievement is the norm and there are few role models to support educational aspirations. In addition, pupils whose education is disrupted through ill-health or disability, or for other reasons, can find it difficult to achieve qualifications matching their academic potential.

Alternative routes to higher education

There are now a number of routes by which school leavers without the ‘traditional’ three Highers may seek to enter higher education. They may progress to further education and sit Highers there after one or two additional years of study. Successful completion of Higher National Diploma courses enables students to transfer from further to higher education, sometimes waiving one or two years of a degree level studies. For adults wishing to return to education after a period of time, the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP), aimed primarily at adults who would like the opportunity to study at degree level, is one of the best-established routes. Access students normally study for a year on modular, continually assessed courses and, if they successfully complete these courses, are guaranteed a university place. In all of these cases, entry into higher education for those without Highers will usually require a minimum of an additional year of study.

Summer schools initiative

The summer school scheme differs in a number of ways from other initiatives which aim to encourage ‘non-traditional’ students to consider higher education. Firstly, it is designed principally to meet the needs of school leavers, and specifically pupils who have themselves recognised their potential for higher education or who have been successfully persuaded by teachers at their school or other guidance workers to consider the possibility. Summer schools are not, therefore, dealing with ‘returners’ to education, in the main, but with people with recent experience of studying, often with some degree of success or at least with reasons for believing that success is possible. One reason for the likely effectiveness of the relatively short courses which the summer schools provide is therefore this combination of recent experience and a degree of self-belief. In contrast, SWAP and other forms of access provision take a gentler and longer-term approach as part of their task is to revive the study habit, and to boost students’ confidence in their own abilities. Secondly, the summer schools have invested considerable effort in the effective identification of potential candidates. Course co-ordinators work closely with local secondary schools and with the regional authorities. Schools in disadvantaged areas and those with a poor

record of sending students to university are targeted. For example, the list of criteria for selection to Dundee University's summer school includes the following:

- little or no parental experience of higher education
- limited family income
- parent(s) in unskilled/semi-skilled employment or unemployment
- living in a neighbourhood or in other circumstances not conducive to study
- educational progress blighted by specific family events at critical times (e.g. bereavement, illness, separation or divorce)
- other exceptionally adverse circumstances or factors specified by nominating institutions (Blicharski, 1996)

School-based projects have been developed to establish direct contact between school and university, using mentors and tutors who have themselves entered higher education through the special summer school route. The mentors take part in school activities and discussions with pupils, raising interest and awareness and encouraging participation in the summer schools. On some courses, very specific needs are targeted. For example, at Glasgow Caledonian University's Summer School, students who have sat Highers but failed to meet some or all of the grades required to meet the University's offer of a place can take intensive courses designed to bridge the gap. If they successfully complete the assessments they are deemed to fulfil the original conditions of entry. Similarly, Glasgow Caledonian runs courses for students transferring from Higher National courses in FE Colleges, where they may not have exactly the skills required to transfer easily from one mode of study to another. At Dundee University, in addition to the ten week summer school courses, four-week intensive courses are now running for those who discover, when the Higher results come out, that they do not have the grades they need to enter higher education. Interestingly, although these students do not have to meet the same access criteria as those on the ten-week course, it has emerged that a surprisingly high proportion do meet one or more of them, suggesting reasons why they may not have achieved the grades they hoped for.

Participation in the summer schools initiative

From the data currently available, it would appear that the summer schools have been particularly successful in persuading students from disadvantaged backgrounds to take part in the scheme. Statistics relating to Dundee University's 1996 summer school show that the majority of their students (54%) fulfilled two or more of the conditions of entry, as listed above (and all fulfilled at least one); and the numbers of students who came from families with little or no experience of higher education and/or where educational experience had been adversely affected by unhappy family events were substantial (Blicharski, 1996). As Blicharski points out in his report, while national statistics reveal that only 27% of applicants accepted for degree level study come from social classes III, IV and V (i.e. skilled/non-skilled manual; partly skilled; and unskilled), the majority of the students on the summer school courses are likely to come from this group. In seeking ways of ensuring that access provision attracts people from groups which are under-represented in higher education, the summer school approach suggests that careful targeting specifically of educational disadvantage is particularly effective.

3. PREPARING TO STUDY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Summer schools courses

The summer school courses are by definition, intensive. Summer school students have both to cover the content of the course and take exams in the space, on average, of 10 weeks. In this, they contrast with SWAP courses, which, as we have seen, tend to be less intensive and to be continuously assessed, precisely because they are designed to replicate the kind of approach to study which students will have to adopt when they begin degree level study. Research has shown that students can experience considerable differences in approaches to teaching and learning, when the modular curriculum, range of teaching styles and continuous assessment give way to a more integrated, hierarchical view of knowledge, formal lectures and exams; and that this can be a source of confusion for them and lead to a lack of confidence (Munn, MacDonald and Lowden, 1992). The content of summer school courses reflects the view that what academically disadvantaged students lack are principally skills for effective learning rather than academic ability *per se*. The summer school courses set the twin goals of extending the students' knowledge base and their study and communication skills, and also seek to integrate these two goals wherever possible by drawing students' attention explicitly to the range of strategies they require, to cope with the demands being made of them in the course of their learning. Approaches include modelling learning strategies, making the criteria for academic outcomes explicit and providing in-depth feedback on performance. Aberdeen University has conducted research into factors which existing and potential students in higher education regard as significant in supporting academic success (Cudworth, 1996). These include:

- confidence/self-belief
- knowing what is expected
- feedback about work
- competence in academic writing
- competence in note-taking
- support and encouragement

Academic staff in the university were also asked to identify the characteristics of 'effective' students, and it was significant that these were similarly 'alterable' variables, such as writing skills, time management, etc. rather than fixed measures of ability. Other aspects of the summer school courses also replicate characteristics of university life. A key element of the experience is to introduce potential students to a university environment: in many cases, the students stay on campus, and they make use of university facilities such as the library or the computer centre. Early familiarisation with the environment in which they are likely to study as undergraduates (most summer school students go on to study in the university whose summer school they attended) is thought to be of considerable psychological, as well as practical importance, and former summer school students recognise this as particularly valuable:

I was already one step ahead of people arriving in University for the first time. I knew how the system worked— so it made me more prepared.
(Students from the Aberdeen Summer School)

It will take some of the shock out of the first year. If I need help I will feel more comfortable about getting it.
(Student from the Strathclyde Summer School)

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COURSES

Course completion rates and take up of higher education places

In order to judge the success of the courses both in familiarising students with the nature of university life and in preparing them for the academic demands and the study skills needed, a range of evidence is required, although currently, only some of this data is available. For example, course completion rates will indicate whether the selection process is effective, in terms of identifying students who will last the course and benefit from it. The available evidence suggests that the summer schools are highly successful in this context: approximately 90% of the students who attend summer schools complete their courses and go on to further study. (The figure varies from year to year and across the various institutions concerned.) Table 1, below, shows the available statistics for 1996, for a selection of summer schools, and indicates the range of rates of course completion and take-up of university places.

Table 1: Course completion and take up of university places (1996 figures)

| Number of students | Dundee University | Strathclyde University | Robert Gordon University | Paisley University | TOTAL |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| starting course | 75 | 53 | 78 | 20 | 226 |
| completing course | 72 | 37 | 66 | 20 | 195 (86%) |
| taking up university place | 62 | 20* | 66 | 20 | 168 (74%) |

**This figure relates only to summer school students who took up places at Strathclyde University. No figures are available for students who may have gone to other universities.*

A purely numerical account of the outcomes of the special summer schools is misleading, however, in attempting to gauge their success. It has to be borne in mind that some of the factors which initially hampered students' progress at school do not vanish overnight. In particular, students whose education was disrupted before for reasons of ill health, disability or for other personal reasons may continue to be affected and thus fail to complete the course or to be able to take up the university place they achieve. It is important to recognise that even in cases where the proportion going on to higher education appears relatively low, this represents an improvement on the likely situation if the summer schools did not exist: i.e. that very few of the students would have progressed to higher education, and fewer still would have done so by the autumn following the summer they left school. Data from Dundee has compared outcomes for those who attended summer school courses in 1993, 1994 and 1995 with outcomes for those who applied but did not attend. (This latter group can be seen as a 'control' group, in that they had similar social backgrounds to those who did attend the course, according to access criteria, and similar levels of academic achievement, as measured by 'points' scores at Higher grade.) Comparative data shows that those who attended were far more likely than those who did not to go on to Higher Education; and far less likely to be unemployed (Watt and Blicharski, 1997). Furthermore, even where students do leave courses, they are doing so on the basis of informed judgement: they may have decided that higher education is not

for them, or that it is not for them at this stage in their lives. This also represents an improvement on the previous situation and may well mean that these students waste less time if they decided to return to education in the future.

Student perceptions

Another way of judging the success of the courses is to ask the students themselves whether they feel that the courses were worthwhile. The available evidence suggests that student satisfaction with the courses is high. In the report of the 1996 Dundee summer school, a student survey revealed that

- 99% of the students said that the course had helped them to analyse themselves as potential undergraduates
- 96% said that the course had given them a clearer understanding of life as a university student
- 93% said that the course had helped them decide whether to continue in education
- 90% said that the course had helped them to organise their studies
- 87% said that the course had helped them decide which courses and subjects they might take at university (Blicharski, 1996)

There is anecdotal evidence too from other schools, where comments such as the following have been collected from students:

I now have a fair idea of what a university essay involves, how to balance a timetable and how to meet deadlines.

You become familiar with the environment and the demands of the first year.
(Students from the Strathclyde Summer School)

Progress at university

Investigation of what happens to the students once they have taken up their university places will show whether the summer school courses have prepared them adequately. How many students graduate? How does the drop-out rate compare with that of students who have entered higher education via the 'traditional' route? Do summer school students feel themselves to be on an equal footing with other students? How does their academic progress compare? Again, we have only partial data in relation to these questions, though what is available suggests that summer school students compare well with the student population as a whole. Statistics from Dundee (Watt, n.d.) show that the 'drop-out' rate for summer school students after one year at the University are comparable with the overall rate for the University: 9% of summer school students 'drop out' in the course of the first year, compared with 10% of all first year undergraduates at Dundee. As Watt points, out 'drop-out' is most likely to occur in the first year of a degree course, and therefore, this is a particularly significant statistic. Other statistics from the Dundee summer school, based on 116 summer school students starting degree level studies in the three years from 1993 to 1995, shows a staying-on rate for the three cohorts (and therefore for differing periods of time in each case) of 75.9% (i.e. 88 students). Again, this is comparable with the overall rate of retention for students at the university. As with course completion rates, however, statistics alone can be misleading evidence by which to judge the effectiveness of this type of initiative. Academic studies which have looked at the relationship between entrance routes and achievements have identified a number of problems in assessing the impact of 'non-traditional' schemes. For

example, it has been suggested that ‘non-traditional’ students who are accepted under rigorous admissions policies are more likely to complete their courses than those accepted under more liberal policies. However, it is also important to bear in mind that ‘prestigious universities’ are more likely to have very high standards of admission for all students, and, in particular, to regard standard entry qualifications as by far the most desirable. In these institutions, it may be the case that only the most determined and highly qualified non-traditional students are accepted, and consequently, it is not surprising that they do well. More ‘liberal’ institutions may take more students with lower qualifications and therefore they may have a higher drop-out rate and more non-traditional students who do not achieve ‘good degrees’. But the non-traditional students in these institutions who do complete their course and achieve ‘good’ degrees may represent greater ‘value added’ than is the case with non-traditional students in ‘prestigious’ institutions. Assessing the impact of the special entry schemes in this context is likely to be difficult, for these reasons, and as yet, it is, in any case, probably too early to attempt an evaluation of the scheme as a whole, although formative evaluation along the lines suggested here, exploring the take-up rate for the summer schools, course completion rates, transfer to university and appropriateness of university courses, would be desirable. Clearly, it will be important in the near future to assess the value of the special entry schemes in relation both to the ‘traditional’ and to other ‘non-traditional’ routes. Fundamental variables which must be taken into account in assessing the success of any particular entrance scheme include qualifications on entry, external pressures on students, gender¹, subject choice, and the quality of support for students while studying in Higher Education. It is likely that considerable variation across universities, and perhaps also across departments will emerge.

Other measures of effectiveness

Those involved with the summer schools have suggested various criteria by which the success of the scheme may be judged. In their commentary on the available data from Dundee University on the progress of students who attended summer schools, Watt and Blicharski (1996) state that an acceptable measure of success for these schools should be that the ‘right’ level of education is identified for the student within a year of completing the course. On this basis, the Dundee school must be judged to have been very successful: in addition to the 88 students still attending the university (i.e. the 1993–95 cohort mentioned above), 12 students continued in education elsewhere (11 in higher education and 1 in further education), and the remaining 16 indicated an intention to return either to degree or HND level study in the future. Aberdeen University has developed ‘performance profiles’ which measure gains in the quality of academic writing (Cudworth, 1996). Strathclyde University has set as its aim that summer school students should ‘survive’ the first semester: ‘Research has shown that this is the critical period for students with non-standard qualifications.’ (Murray, 1996). There appears to have been little systematic research as yet into the views of former summer school students once they are established as undergraduates, though there is anecdotal evidence of continuing recognition of the value of the summer school course:

Summer School gave me a great advantage in my first year. It taught me to study properly and think logically. It was a great psychological advantage, because you don’t feel like the ‘new kid on the block’.

If it wasn’t for the Summer School, I probably still wouldn’t know where I am or what I’m doing—some of the third years still don’t!
(Former students from the Aberdeen Summer School)

4. THE VALUE OF THE SUMMER SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Cost effectiveness has become a pressing issue for some of the summer schools in view of local government reorganisation in April 1996. Some of the schools are funded entirely from existing university funds, but others have been funded in conjunction with local authorities who also sponsored students, providing a small grant, a travel subsidy and free or subsidised meals. Without the contribution of the authorities, some of the schools would have considerable difficulty in running the courses and without local authority sponsorship, some of the students would be unable to attend. Following local government reorganisation, some authorities found that they could not afford to continue to support the summer schools at the level which had previously been possible, and some summer schools were therefore forced to rely on a 'cocktail' of private donations and contributions from charities² in order to run the 1996 course, as well as absorbing tasks which had previously been the responsibility of the authorities. (For example, the course director of the Dundee summer school had personally to take on the work of recruiting students for the course, an additional responsibility which both the external examiner and the external quality assessor, in their reports, pointed up as being entirely inappropriate.) This section therefore considers the value of the scheme to various 'stake-holders'.

Benefits for stakeholders

Cutting the funding to these schemes may be a short-sighted move on the part of the authorities. In order to argue the case, it is clearly important to establish the value which these courses represent to each of the groups with a stake in their success: the universities, the students, the local authorities, the schools and, more generally, the communities served. While there is little specific financial data currently available,³ there are a number of issues which the various groups should take into consideration, in documenting the advantages of the scheme, and which are raised here briefly, taking each group in turn.

Universities

One of the direct benefits for universities is in the increased participation of students with high academic potential. As we have seen, the students targeted are perceived to have slipped through the 'traditional' net for a variety of reasons but nevertheless to have the potential to do well in higher education. Any scheme which successfully identifies these students, attracts them to university and prepares them well for the experience is clearly of great value and deserves protection. Furthermore, we have seen that those working with this group of students, both in the summer schools and subsequently, when the students become undergraduates, are beginning to raise questions about the ways in which the potential to benefit from higher education is recognised and judged. The work at Aberdeen University exploring key factors supporting academic success suggests that these are learnable skills rather than some kind of fixed predisposition. If these findings are sustained, they may lead to a review of the ways in which university entrance is currently determined, and, in the long-term, of the ways in which schools identify and prepare students with the potential to benefit from higher education.

Students

The principal gain for students is likely to be time. As they are recognised as having the ability to succeed in higher education, but do not, at the point at which they are about to leave school, have the necessary qualifications, it may well be the case that they will eventually reach higher education via one of the other routes described earlier (section 2). However in every case, this route would take longer than the summer school route,

and would, for this reason, be more expensive in the long run. There may be indirect benefits for summer school students too, particularly in terms of empowerment. For many of these students, their experiences of the last years of school may have been those of frustration and a sense of failure, as they realised that they were not likely to 'make it' to university, for a variety of reasons not always within their control. (For some adult returners, the sense of disillusionment which this provokes is one of their most abiding memories of school: see Blair, McPake and Munn, 1995.) Teachers in their schools, aware that only a certain percentage of their pupils will achieve the relevant qualifications, or perhaps unused to any pupils going on to higher education (as one of the factors in deciding which schools to target has been very low numbers of pupils entering higher education), may have felt it inappropriate to encourage pupils who were unlikely to acquire the necessary qualifications. In this context, meeting course co-ordinators and role models in the shape of student mentors on their visits to target schools and discovering that their teachers do believe that they have the potential may have a powerful effect on students' perceptions of their own abilities. Comments from some of the summer school students make this clear:

Without the Summer School I would never have had the courage to go to University or the confidence to attempt the things I am now attempting.

Some things in life aren't always your fault. Summer School gives you fighting chance to do what you've always wanted.
(Students from the Aberdeen Summer School)

Authorities

The principal advantage for local education authorities is likely to be financial, though further research is needed to establish the relative costs and benefits of the various routes by which those who fail to enter university via the traditional route subsequently achieve this. How do the following costs compare:

- the cost of supporting students on an intensive ten-week summer school course?
- the cost of supporting students resitting Highers over an additional year at school or in FE?
- the cost of supporting students over a two year Higher National course who subsequently transfer to HE?
- the cost of supporting adult returners over a year's access course?

We do not currently have the answer to these questions but it is not unreasonable to suppose that the shortest route (i.e. the ten-week summer school course) may well prove to be the least expensive. We should not simply look at what the ten weeks cost however. We need also to take into account the hidden costs incurred by these students not proceeding swiftly to higher education: unemployment or lower earning power leading to take-up of benefits, loss of earnings and child-care costs incurred by returning to education at a later stage, and possibly additional health costs brought on by frustration or simply from low income. These costs are borne partly by the students themselves, partly by local authorities and partly by the state.

Schools

Schools are likely to benefit indirectly from the schemes in a number of ways. Firstly, as we have seen, the scheme targets schools where few pupils have progressed to higher education and makes use of student mentors and role models in order to encourage pupils to consider higher education. This clearly has a positive effect

on pupils who come into direct contact with the mentors, but is also likely to have longer-term benefits for the schools concerned: as more pupils go to university and become, in their turn, role models for those who follow them, the phenomenon should generate its own momentum, independently of the summer school scheme. In the previous section on benefits for students, we noted that awareness of imminent failure to achieve the necessary qualifications to enter university was likely to lead to frustration and disillusionment. This may be the experience not only of the pupils but also of their teachers who, indeed, may be more aware of the ways in which circumstances beyond their control prevent pupils with the ability to do well from progressing along the conventional route to higher education. Providing an alternative opens up new possibilities for teachers too, and instead of the vicious circle of failure breeding frustration and cynicism, leading to further failure, a 'virtuous' circle of success leading to renewed enthusiasm and then further success may be instigated. We also noted in the section on benefits for universities that the scheme may, in the long term, provoke changes in the way that students' potential to benefit from higher education is identified and supported. This would affect the way in which schools prepare university candidates, and it seems a particularly pertinent issue to raise currently, in the light of Higher Still. Clearly entrance procedures which focus on students' potential to benefit rather than on achievements to date might benefit schools which currently have to 'fight against the odds' (and possibly lead to a review of priorities in those which currently benefit from the existing system).

Communities

Finally, it is important to consider the benefits which the scheme offers to the wider community. It is clear that areas where educational disadvantage is widespread stand to gain substantially. But beyond this, it is important to recognise that, if it is the case that students who have entered university via the summer school route perform comparably with those who have entered via the conventional route (as is suggested by existing results and would be implied by the fact that the scheme targets those of comparable ability without the necessary qualifications) then, ultimately, the result will be an increase in the number of able graduates with the potential to make significant intellectual, professional and economic contributions. If the summer school scheme meets these aims, it would appear to fill a well-recognised gap in current provision and to enhance the educational status of the population as a whole. It therefore deserves wider recognition and support.

5. THE NEED FOR EVALUATION

The evidence available from summer school providers suggests that the initiative is meeting the needs of the students who attend the courses, and also that it offers a response to current concerns to ensure that higher education is accessible to social groups traditionally under-represented among undergraduates. However, it is important to be able to substantiate these indications. Those involved in the summer schools need to be clear, for their own purposes, that the courses they run are meeting their aims as effectively as possible. Indeed, individual courses already carry out their own evaluations and, in many cases, are subject to the same quality control procedures as other university courses, but independent evaluation of the whole scheme would bring a number of wider benefits. The achievements—and limits—of the scheme need to be clearly established, and possibilities for refinement identified. Such an assessment would help in raising awareness of the scheme among the relevant professional and policy-making bodies, and in protecting the sometimes precarious funding models on which the courses currently rely. In the course of this article, a number of issues requiring further research have been identified. The research questions raised are summarised here:

1. In comparison with other schemes targeting ‘non-traditional’ students, how successful have the special entry summer schools been in ensuring access for students from areas of social and economic disadvantage and a history of educational underachievement?
2. How effective is the summer schools’ approach to teaching and learning in supporting transition to higher education?
3. How many summer school students
 - successfully complete the course?
 - take up places in higher education?
 - ‘survive’ the first term (or the first year) of higher education?
 - graduate?
4. How do summer school students’ degree results compare with those of other students generally, and, more specifically, with those who have entered university via other non-traditional routes?
5. What variables (type of university, subject choice, gender, nature of external pressures on students, etc.) influence the success of former summer school students in higher education?
6. How do students themselves (including those who do not go on to take up higher education places) assess the value of summer school courses?
7. What are the costs and benefits of the scheme for universities, students, local authorities and the communities from which the students are drawn?

If the summer school schemes are proved successful, they add to our understanding of what it takes to be successful in higher education. Both the approach to teaching and learning which most schools adopt, and the work of Cudworth (1996) in exploring the qualities of a successful student, suggest that the development of particular ‘studious’ attitudes and skills has a prominent part to play in preparing the target group for degree-level study. This may be contrasted with the knowledge-based approach espoused by the ‘traditional’ Highers route and with the confidence-building focus of other access routes (while acknowledging that each route contains all three elements, with differing emphases). Both for their potential to identify and support the entry into higher education of students likely to benefit from this, and for their contribution to our understanding of academic success, they therefore deserve to be explored in detail.

NOTES

1. Johnes (1990) noted marked gender differences in relation to the factors which are used to predict non-completion rates generally, while Yates and Davies’s study (1987) of access students in higher education found that men were almost twice as likely as women to drop out of courses. Gallacher (1994), reviewing the success of the Scottish Wider Access Scheme, reports higher numbers of women than men overall, but also that women are more likely to be found on courses which traditionally have been female dominated, such as education and nursing. Gallacher’s study also notes that there has been little systematic research into the impact of access schemes on people from minority ethnic groups or those with disabilities.
2. In addition to a number of small grants from locally-based charities, BP and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, which both have interests in sponsoring access to higher education, have provided substantial support over a number of years: BP has supported both the student tutoring scheme and the summer schools initiative, while Paul Hamlyn has provided funding to develop and extend the scheme.

3. One useful piece of information is that the University of Glasgow Caledonian, which meets all the costs of its science summer school itself, reports that the total cost for some 350 students on an eight week course in 1995 was £45 000, and that the average cost per student was £143.

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