Returning to Education   by Dr Catherine Armstrong

There are many factors that may affect the decision to return to university after a long period away from study. There are some challenges in particular faced by those who do not choose the traditional role of going straight to university after school. This article will offer some solutions to these challenges whether you hope to become an undergraduate or postgraduate student, and show you how to get the most out of returning to study as a mature student.

Challenge 1: I cannot afford it

The financial implications of going to university for mature students are tremendously serious, just as they are for eighteen year olds. All undergraduate students can apply for a maintenance loan from the LEA if you study full time. If you have extra expenses such as dependent children or if you are disabled you may be entitled to a Disabled Student's Allowance or Parents Learning Allowance. Have a look at this website and see what you can claim: www.studentsupportdirect.co.uk

Particular universities and departments also offer bursaries depending on the degree and subject area you are interested in. Contact someone in the admissions office or the department you are applying to. You might also find information on the university website.

For many mature students the only option is to study part time. Part-time students usually pay per module and (if they are UK students) can ask their Local Authority for help in the form of a 'fee grant'. The LA will advise you if you are eligible for this. It will depend on your income.

If you want to study for a different sort of qualification (such as NVQ or BTEC) then you may be eligible for an adult learning grant. Have a look at this website: https://www.gov.uk/grant-bursary-adult-learners

Challenge 2: I cannot write essays/reports/exams

One of the biggest fears faced by returning mature students is that their ability to do assessed work will be less than their younger counterparts will because they have

Text A: Returning to Education

been outside formal education for a long time. This is usually an issue of confidence. You have probably been using these skills in the world of work and simply not realising it. In addition, once you get back in the classroom you will be surprised how much you do remember from an earlier education. Many departments offer support to students of all ages who do not feel confident in their abilities. You can attend essay writing workshops, or exam skills workshops to boost your skills in the areas where they are weakest. And don't forget that many school leavers also come to university feeling unsure that they have the ability to do what is required, so as a mature student you are not in so very different a position.

Challenge 3: My computer skills are out of date

For many degrees, your research and writing will be done on a computer and you may feel unfamiliar with the latest technology. Although most people now have computers in their own homes, if you have not this does not mean you will not cope with university life. You will have access to computers at the university should you need them. Training will be offered to all students who need it in word processing, using spreadsheets and databases, researching online, using referencing, and citation packages so you just have to have the confidence to identify the areas where you need help and ask for it!

Challenge 4: I will not fit in

It's easy to think, especially if you are about to become an undergraduate that your classmates aged eighteen will be living in a different world unable to communicate with you and leaving you feeling isolated. In contrast, actually most mature students find that the shared learning experience brings mature and school-leaver students together. Teenagers do recognise and respect the different life experiences and knowledge that mature students bring to the discussions. Despite a lack of self-confidence among mature students most actually find that once they get into the seminar room they are able to discuss topics with confidence and actually help lecturers to facilitate learning in small group environments due to their maturity and experiences with colleagues in the workplace.

Text A: Returning to Education

Challenge 5: Friends and relatives think I am being self-indulgent/making a financial mistake

If you have been outside of the formal education system for a while or come from a non-traditional background, the decision to go to university as a mature student can cause some negative comment among friends and family. You may even encounter resistance to the decision you have taken. The two main attacks are that undertaking learning as an adult is merely self-indulgent or it is financially risky. However, you will know the reasons why you chose to do a university course and the decision to do so will have been a long and hard one, so don't listen to those who are trying to knock your ambition; instead be determined to show them how much benefit doing a university degree really can be.

Source A:

https://www.jobs.ac.uk/careers-advice/careers-advice/1163/returning-to-education

Text B: Case Study: Lisa Smith - credit transfer

Credit transfer - Lisa Smith

Whilst helping at her children's school, Lisa Smith came to the realisation that she wanted to teach maths. Other UK universities refused to accept Lisa's US degree, but thanks to the OU Lisa was able to transfer credits from her previous study and she embarked on an Open degree. Despite some personal challenges along the way, Lisa achieved her degree and is now looking forward to starting teaching at her local secondary school.

I first studied at the University of Indianapolis when I left high school in the US and achieved an associate degree in industrial chemistry. In 1997, I moved to the UK with my husband and over the next 13 years, I had three children and worked part-time to suit my family commitments. When helping at my children's school I found myself back in the classroom, learning how maths was being taught to children. Teaching had changed significantly since I was at school and this whetted my appetite for more; I decided to embark on a career teaching maths.

Universities in the UK would not accept my US degree, but fortunately I found the OU and they allowed me to transfer some credits from my previous study. After five years of part-time study, I graduated with an Open Honours degree and throughout the last four years, I have been working as a learning support assistant in a dyslexia centre at a local school.

"Achieving my degree has fulfilled a lifelong dream"

There were some considerable challenges whilst I was studying: a fire at home resulted in me severely burning both hands, which prevented me from writing and using the computer. I had to learn to write with my hands in bandages and I could not attend tutorials in person, as I was unable to drive. In addition, my niece was diagnosed with an inoperable malignant brain tumour; that news stopped our whole family in its tracks as we learned to cope. During these times, the OU and my tutors were wonderful and supportive.

Name _____ Date _____

Text B: Case Study: Lisa Smith - credit transfer

I applied for teacher training places and was accepted to begin teaching in the secondary school where I work. Achieving my degree has fulfilled a lifelong dream and I am excited about this new phase in my life and am looking forward to teaching. Without The Open University and my supportive family, friends and work colleagues, I never would have made it. My children were at my graduation as I felt it was so important for them to see that hard work is rewarded and my parents flew over from America just to see me graduate!

Source B:

The Open University http://pearl.open.ac.uk/case-studies/credit-transfer-2

Questions. (Please answer in the space provided)

Text A

1) List three layout features in text A

---   --

----

2) Which web site would you visit to find out if you were eligible for an adult learning grant?

----

3) What is cited as one of the biggest fears of returning to education?

----

4) How is technology likely to be used in a University setting?

----

5) What could a mature learner bring to the seminar room?

----

6) Explain a counter-argument to those who may consider the decision to go back to

university 'self-indulgent.'

Text B

7) How did Lisa come to the decision to embark on her new career?

----

8) Where had she previously studied?

----

9) Explain the phrase "whetted my appetite".

----

10) What considerable challenges did Lisa experience?

Writing tasks

Please use additional lined paper to write your answers to these. If you type your answer, please use word pad as you will not have the use of a spelling and grammar check for your assessments.

11) Your best friend has always wanted to work as a mental health nurse. She/he has been focusing on family commitments for a number of years. However, now the children have started school she/he is considering training to be a nurse.
Write an email to your friend advising her/him on her/his decision. **(Minimum 150 words)**

12) You have decided to apply for the course of your dreams – the stepping-stone to achieving your career ambition. You are required to write an article for admission on to the course. You should include why you want to do it, what skills and experience you will bring, and how important the role is to society. **(Minimum 150 words)**

REFORMED FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ENGLISH Content (takes effect from September 2019)

Purpose and learning aims of Functional Skills English

Functional Skills English specifications enable students to develop confidence and fluency in, and a positive attitude towards, English. They should be able to demonstrate their competence by using English in real-world situations as well as demonstrating a sound grasp of basic English knowledge and skills. They need to provide assessment of students' underpinning knowledge (i.e. spelling) as well as their ability to apply this in different contexts.

Entry Levels: a qualification to demonstrate the ability at an appropriate level to read, write, speak, listen and communicate in English and provide the basis for further study at Levels 1 and 2. Students should, with some direction and guidance, be able to apply these (Entry Level) English functional skills to informal and some formal contexts, in familiar situations.

Levels 1 and 2: a qualification for work, study and life. Achievement of the qualification demonstrates the ability at an appropriate level to read, write, speak, listen and communicate in English, and apply these skills effectively to a range of purposes in the workplace and other real-life situations. Students should be able to communicate with confidence, effectiveness and an increasing level of independence, in a range of formal and informal contexts.

Functional English – Speaking, Listening and Communicating (SL&C)

'Speaking, listening and communicating' within Functional Skills English qualifications is non-written communication, normally conducted face-to-face, and can also include 'virtual' communication methods such as telephone or spoken web-based technologies. The terms 'speaking, listening and communicating' are intended to be interpreted in a broad, inclusive way and are not intended to create any unnecessary barriers to students with speech or hearing impairment.

Learning aims for speaking, listening and communicating

E1, 2 & 3 Listen, understand and respond to verbal communication in a range of familiar contexts. Acquire an understanding of everyday words and their uses and effects, and apply this understanding in different contexts.

L1-2 Listen, understand and make relevant contributions to discussions with others in a range of contexts. Apply their understanding of language to adapt delivery and content to suit audience and purpose.

Functional English - Reading

'Reading' within Functional Skills English qualifications is defined as the independent understanding of written language in specific contexts. Can be demonstrated through the use of texts on screen or on paper.

Learning aims for reading

E1, 2 & 3. Acquire an understanding of everyday words and their uses and effects, and apply this understanding in different contexts. Read with accuracy straightforward texts encountered in everyday life and work, and develop confidence to read more widely.

L1-2 Read a range of different text types confidently and fluently, applying their knowledge and understanding of texts to their own writing.

Functional English - Writing

Writing' within Functional English qualifications is defined as the independent construction of written language to communicate in specific contexts. Text can be written on paper or electronically.

Learning aims for writing

E1,2 & 3. Write straightforward texts and documents with clarity and effectiveness, and demonstrate a sound grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

L1-2 (i) Write texts of varying complexity, with accuracy, effectiveness, and correct spelling, punctuation and grammar (ii) Understand the situations when, and audiences for which, planning, drafting and using formal language are important, and when they are less important.

Part-time English preparation tasks
Curriculum mapping

Subject content - FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ENGLISH 2018		
→ or ← = not covered in detail in this resource but included to show progression across levels. ✓= **content** covered in this resource, although this will vary with the student group and how the resource is used by the teacher (✓✓ = key learning objective). **Only relevant content descriptors** are included – consult the DfE Subject Content document for more information and a full list of descriptors. C*ontent (and *text types) at each level subsumes and builds upon that at lower levels.*		
Reading content descriptors		
Entry Level 3	**Level 1**	**Level 2**
E3.8 Read correctly words designated for Entry Level 3 → E3.9 Identify, understand and extract the main points and ideas in and from texts → E3.10 Identify different purposes of straightforward texts E3.11 Use effective strategies to find the meaning of words (e.g. a dictionary, working out meaning from context; using knowledge of different word types) → E3.12 Understand organisational features and use them to locate relevant information (e.g. contents, index, menus, tabs and links) →	L1.9 Identify and understand the main points, ideas and details in texts ✓✓ **Q2 Q3 Q4 Q5 Q7 Q8 Q10** L1.10 Compare information, ideas and opinions in different texts L1.11 Identify meanings in texts and distinguish between fact and opinion✓**Q6 Q9** L1.12 Recognise that language and other textual features can be varied to suit different audiences and purposes L1.13 Use reference materials and appropriate strategies (e.g. using knowledge of different word types) for a range of purposes, including to find the meaning of words ✓**Q9** L1.14 Understand organisational and structural features and use them to locate relevant information (e.g. index, menus, subheadings, paragraphs) in a range of straightforward texts ✓ **Q1 Q2** L1.15 Infer from images meanings not explicit in the accompanying text L1.16 Recognise vocabulary typically associated with specific types and purposes of texts (e.g. formal, informal, instructional, descriptive, explanatory and persuasive) L1.17 Read and understand a range of specialist words in context L1.18 Use knowledge of punctuation to aid understanding of straightforward texts	L2.11 Identify the different situations when the main points are sufficient and when it is important to have specific details L2.12 Compare information, ideas and opinions in different texts, including how they are conveyed L2.13 Identify implicit and inferred meaning in texts L2.14 Understand the relationship between textual features and devices, and how they can be used to shape meaning for different audiences and purposes L2.15 Use a range of reference materials and appropriate resources (e.g. glossaries, legends/keys) for different purposes, including to find the meanings of words in straightforward and complex sources L2.16 Understand organisational features and use them to locate relevant information in a range of straightforward and complex sources L2.17 Analyse texts, of different levels of complexity, recognising their use of vocabulary and identifying levels of formality and bias L2.18 Follow an argument, identifying different points of view and distinguishing fact from opinion L2.19 Identify different styles of writing and writer's voice
Scope of study – learners should read *texts that include:		
straightforward texts that instruct, describe, narrate and explain.	straightforward texts on a range of topics and of varying lengths that instruct, describe, explain and persuade. ✓	straightforward and complex texts on a range of topics and varying lengths that instruct, describe, explain & persuade.

Part-time English preparation tasks
Curriculum mapping

skills workshop

Writing content descriptors		
Note that **only writing composition descriptors** are included here as SPaG (spelling, punctuation and grammar) is not the main focus of the writing task.		
Entry Level 3	**Level 1**	**Level 2**
Spelling, punctuation and grammar	**Spelling, punctuation and grammar**	**Spelling, punctuation and grammar**
E3.13 Use a range of punctuation correctly (e.g. full stops, question marks, exclamation marks, commas)	L1.19 Use a range of punctuation correctly (e.g. full stops, question marks, exclamation marks, commas, possessive apostrophes)	L2.20 Punctuate writing correctly using a wide range of punctuation markers (e.g. colons, commas, inverted commas, apostrophes and quotation marks)
E3.14 Form irregular plurals	L1.20 Use correct grammar (e.g. subject-verb agreement, consistent use of different tenses, definite and indefinite articles)	L2.21 Use correct grammar (e.g. subject-verb agreement, consistent use of a range of tenses, definite and indefinite articles) and modality devices (e.g. to express probability or desirability)
E3.15 Use mostly correct grammar (e.g. subject-verb agreement, consistent use of tense, definite and indefinite articles)	L1.21 Spell words used most often in work, study and daily life, including specialist wordsL1.22 Communicate information, ideas and opinions clearly, coherently and accurately	L2.22 Spell words used in work, study and daily life, including a range of specialist words
E3.16 Use the first, second and third place letters to sequence words in alphabetical order		**Writing composition**
E3.17 Spell correctly words designated for Entry Level 3 (see Appendix)	**Writing composition**	L2.23 Communicate information, ideas and opinions clearly, coherently and effectively
Writing composition	L1.22 Communicate information, ideas and opinions clearly, coherently and accurately ✓✓ **Q11, Q12**	L2.24 Write text of an appropriate level of detail and of appropriate length (including where this is specified) to meet the needs of purpose and audience
E3.18 Communicate information, ideas and opinions clearly and in a logical sequence (e.g. chronologically, by task) →	L1.23 Write text of an appropriate level of detail and of appropriate length (including where this is specified) to meet the needs of purpose and audience ✓✓ **Q11, Q 12**	L2.25 Organise writing for different purposes using appropriate format and structure (e.g. standard templates, paragraphs, bullet points, tables)
E3.19 Write text of an appropriate level of detail and of appropriate length (including where this is specified) →	L1.24 Use format, structure and language appropriate for audience and purpose ✓✓ **Q11, Q12**	L2.26 Convey clear meaning and establish cohesion using organisational markers effectively
E3.20 Use appropriate format and structure when writing straightforward texts, including the appropriate use of headings and bullet points →	L1.25 Write consistently and accurately in complex sentences, using paragraphs where appropriate	L2.27 Use different language and register (e.g. persuasive techniques, supporting evidence, specialist words), suited to audience and purpose
E3.21 Write in compound sentences and paragraphs where appropriate		L2.28 Construct complex sentences consistently and accurately, using paragraphs where appropriate
E3.22 Use language appropriate for purpose and audience→		
Scope of study – learners should write *texts that include:		
straightforward narratives, instructions, explanations and reports	straightforward narratives, instructions, explanations and reports of varying lengths ✓	straightforward and complex articles, explanations, narratives, and reports of varying lengths