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Mature Students:  
Life Choice or Life's Necessity?

A Thesis Presented In Partial Fulfilment  
Of The Requirements For The Degree Of  
Master Of Arts In Social Policy  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis has two key strands: mature students, and the funding of tertiary education. Primarily, it concerns the reasons mature students decide to study, the financial and non-financial barriers they face, and the strategies they implement to overcome those barriers. It does this in the context of current tertiary education sector policy regarding the funding of tertiary education, for the purposes of assessing the fit between the needs of mature students and the policy environment.

Mature students: life choice or life's necessity? became the focus. To operationalise the phrase, five objectives were formulated. Using survey research, with a sample population drawn from the Student Learning Centre database, 38 participants indicated a willingness to participate in this research.

Overwhelmingly, the primary reason the respondents of this research were at the university was for their future careers. While many respondents thought it was important that personal considerations, e.g. some interest in the subject, were taken into account, these personal considerations were very much secondary.

The barriers faced by mature students are academic, primarily a lack of study skills; domestic, primarily as a result off family demands; and financial. While both the Student Loan and Student Allowance Schemes assist mature students in their academic pursuits, they are also hindrances. Many mature students would be unable to complete their studies if they did not have the support of their families.

Suggestions have been made for future policy directions at two levels: institution-specific and sector-wide.

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