

HELPING TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF INCREASING ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The Brief

Before identifying the problem and our focus for this project, we first broke down the brief and defined the key elements of the problem. Through this process, we made an important distinction between access to education in the form of accessing the institution, and access to knowledge - the ability to engage, learn and gain knowledge not just to be taught. This distinction came from recognising access is not entirely getting access to the building and is also about being able to 'take' something away from the service that is education. Education is also defined in this way, it is not just 'the process of teaching' but the 'knowledge' obtained (Cambridge, 2022).

The brief also specified improving access not reducing barriers so we defined our philosophy in our approach as being about: what can we implement to improve access, not just the barriers we can reduce

access

verb [T]

UK  /'æk.ses/ US  /'æk.ses/

access verb [T] (ENTER PLACE)



to be able to get to or get inside a place:

- *It is too difficult for anyone using a wheelchair to access the building.*
- *Students need a card to access restricted areas such as residences and labs.*
- *The basement room is accessed from outside.*

access verb [T] (USE OR GET)



to be able to use or obtain something such as a service:

- *Older people may have difficulty accessing medical **services**.*
- *It needs to be easier for small businesses to access government **resources** and advice.*

education

noun [S or U]

UK  /,edʒ.ʊ'keɪ.ʃn/ US  /,edʒ.ə'keɪ.ʃn/



B1

the process of teaching or learning, especially in a school or college, or the knowledge that you get from this:

- *As a child he **received** most of his education at home.*
- *It's a country that places great importance on education.*
- *She lectures in education (= the study of education) at the teacher training college.*
- *It's important for children to get a good education.*

Empathy.

- Our target demographic is mature students who did not have the opportunity to complete their education.
- For mature students, the decision to go into higher education is often a more challenging one for them to make, and the consequences of it are greater than for young students.
- It was important to recognise some of the key problems that our demographic faced during their time in education:
 - lack of support
 - financial situation
 - unaware of opportunities
 - family responsibilities
- A lot of mature students feel they are not offering their full potential in their current jobs and seek more progression. Their existing experience coupled with an accredited degree would open doors to more opportunities. These students need the opportunity to utilise their skills, ultimately offering more value and contribution to society as a whole. Our institution will give them the platform to untap their potential.

"In the UK, a significant proportion of adults do not participate in any form of learning, with a third or more of the respondents to the Learning and Work Institute's annual survey reporting that they have done none since full-time education." OfS

User-centred design

We wanted to truly understand our users and tailor our solution to best fit their needs.

Recognising the difference between barriers and access. Student engagement with resources and the ability to obtain value from them was a key factor to consider. Teaching skills such as tech literacy and also addressing any stigma around learning difficulties and mental health. These are factors that might have been overlooked in the past but we know the significance they hold for our students. We address this with our assessments which identify the level of study our students are at and how we can cater the university experience towards them

We would offer a range of support systems such as counselling, community networks and societies

It was important to take into consideration the whole user experience from start to finish, through affordances, how they would interact with our different facilities and platforms and how can we facilitate and cater our opportunities to them

Define

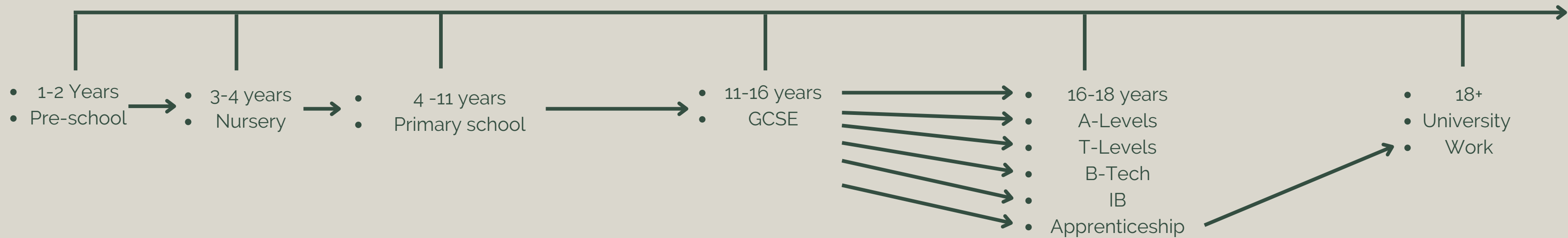
When trying to increase access to education, it is important to identify barriers to accessing education in the first place

- Access Technology and tech literacy
- Previous education
- Grades
- Skills
- Mental and Physical Health
- Cost / Employment
- Location
- Learning disabilities
- Conflict & child labour



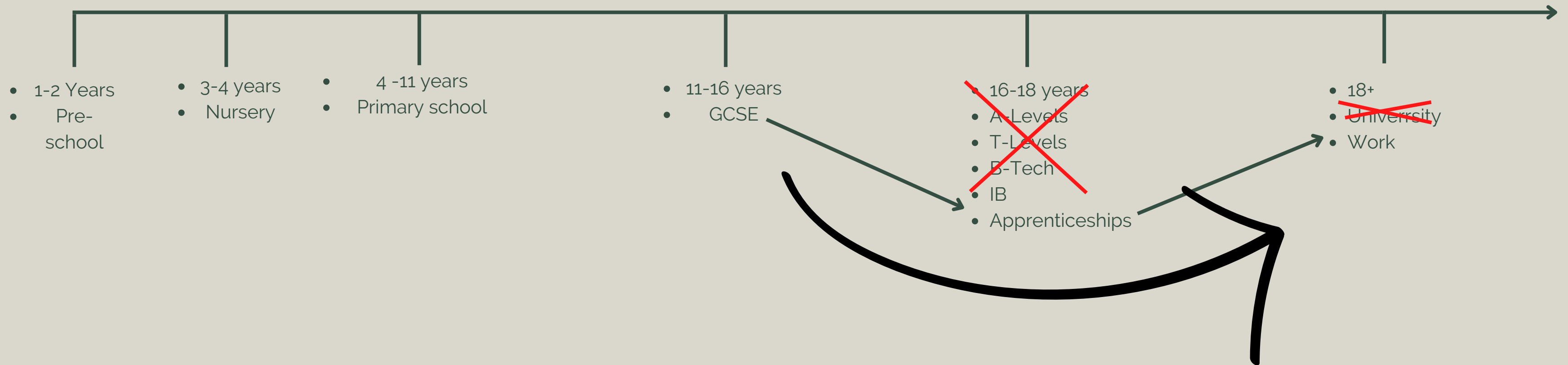
The Expected Journey.

In the current education system in the uk, the assumption is that students will follow this linear path of education before entering the world of work



The journey that a significant amount of people actually go through

A sad truth is that almost about 1 in 5 students don't achieve the equivalent of 5 GCSE at grade 4 or above by 19. Without those GCSE's, this is what their life path starts to look like. They either go straight into the world of work as unskilled workers or do an apprenticeship



Re-Define

There is clearly an issue with the current education system, especially with GCSEs being the 'all-powerful' qualification that either opens or closes many doors for a student's future.

It is unfortunately not designed to meet different types of demographics, interests and learning styles

Around a fifth of the adult population does not have upper secondary education; less than half have tertiary education

When studying the system we realised that further on in life, those students who had those doors close have little to no way of re-opening them so we chose to approach the theme from the lens of helping those whom the system has already failed and attempt to re-open doors for them.

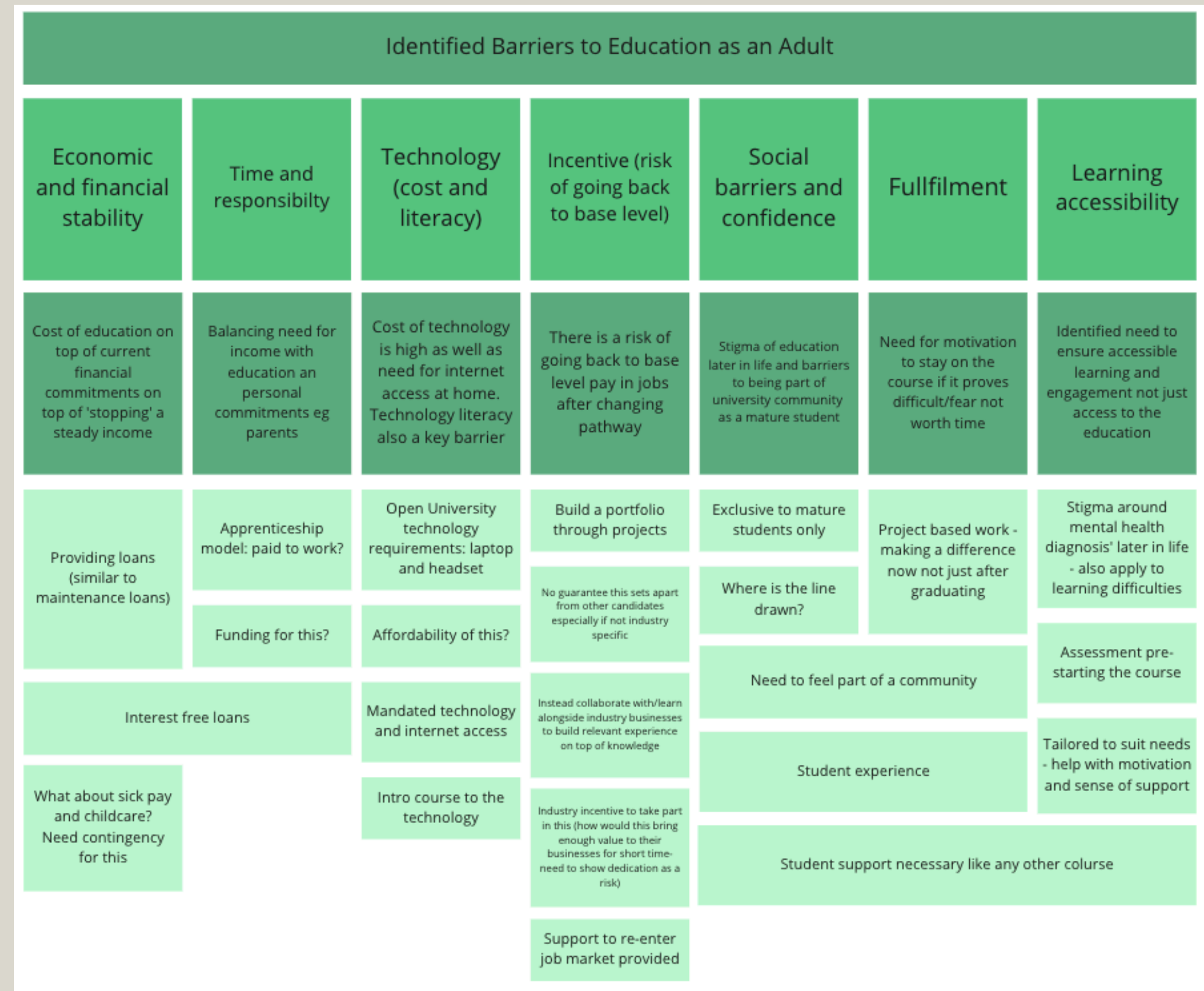
Whilst we are aware there are options for this such as post-graduate education, e.g. The Open University, this has its own barriers of requiring previous degree level qualifications, relevant work experience and the necessary technology. We recognise that not everyone has these but should still be able to have these opportunities.

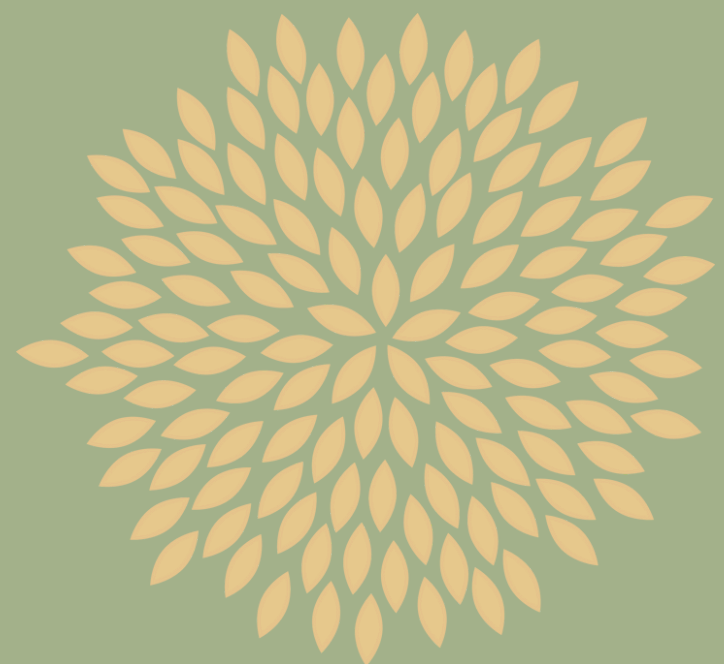
Ideate

Through our defining phase and research, as well as from our own perspectives, we noted several barriers for adults when re-entering education later in life. We categorised these and worked through the problem and potential responses.

As we looked at the layout of our approaches we realised areas that are relevant from our university experience that could help.

We also wanted to get input from students who had re-entered the education system after time in work, the response was that economic stability was the largest concern to re-entering education, in response to this interest free loans would support financial commitments to be able to focus on studies instead of working to support personal responsibilities





Bloom University

Higher Education
for Mature
Students



Prototype - Structure

Our response to the problem statement is an Adult centric Higher Education course

This consists of a 1-year part-time foundation course prior to starting the course, followed by the three-year course.

Foundation year: split into three modules, on top of student support and experience

Basic skills refresh:

- recapping basic knowledge and skills learnt from previous education (GCSEs) or missed due to personal circumstances/path taken
- learning this from an updated perspective (depth, style and method of teaching constantly change)

Technology literacy

Learning accessibility:

- mental and physical health tailored course
- assessments to identify needs to ensure able to learn not just be taught

Main course: over a period of three years consisting of two terms per year, each year has two modules

Education:

- Education and subject learning
- Transferable and applicable knowledge relevant to different fields following career changes as necessary

Industry placement (one/year):

- two projects within a placement across two terms to gain work experience in their current field of interest

Student life: ingrained across all four years

Student support: following learning accessibility assessments psychological barriers eg quitting current employment, dealing with change and instability, job and employment risks post-graduation, poor previous experiences, navigating the balance

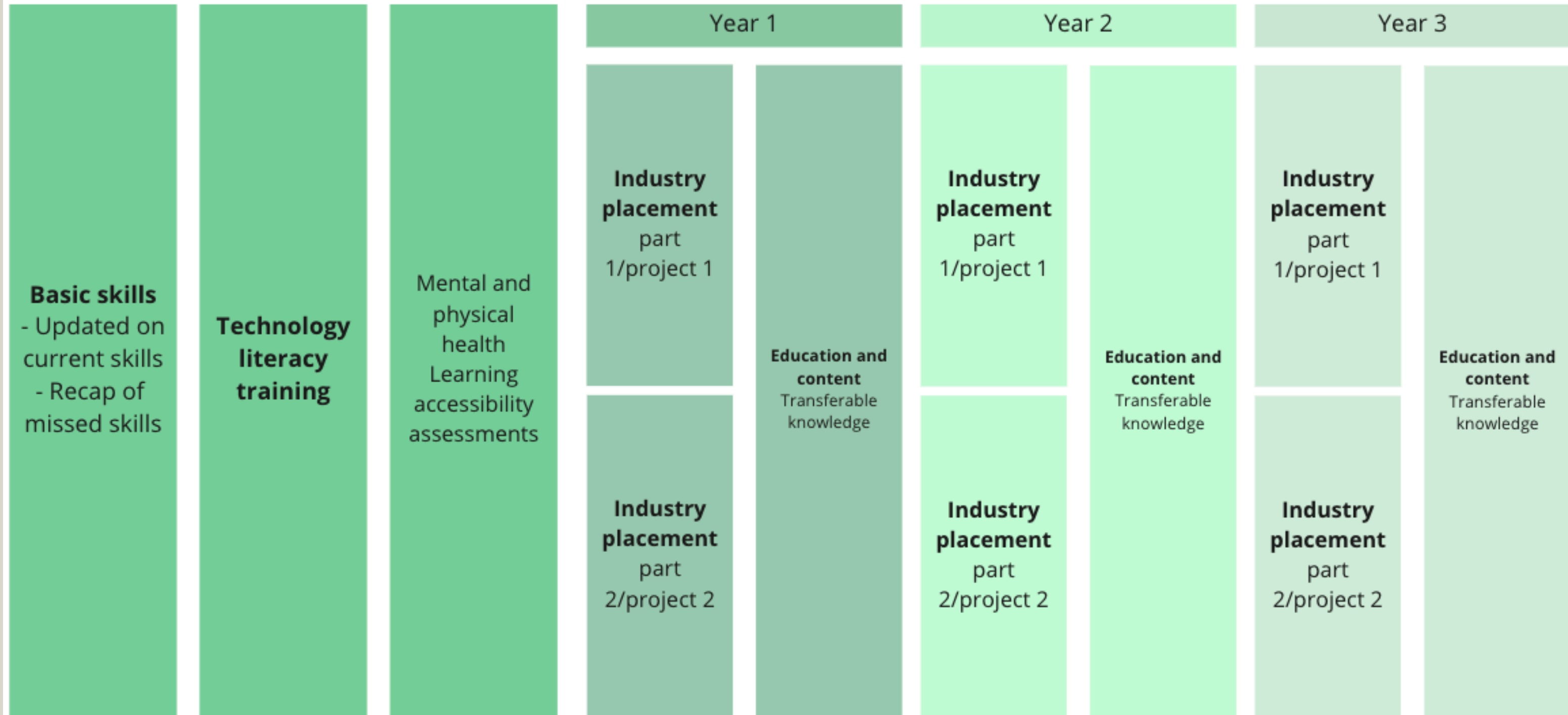
Student experience: network to ensure a community feel, and additional educational experiences

Designed Structure for Adult centric Higher Education

Foundation course

Three year course (two terms each)

Student support and Student experience



Prototype - Reasoning

The qualifications needed to enter this course are circumstantial. Given disparities in previous education, a grade based entry system was not suitable. Instead the individual is assessed on why they left education in the first place, reasons for wanted to rejoin the education system, their personal barriers currently preventing them from doing so. The foundation year is unpaid (part-time to allow for other commitments given finance situation), by completing this introduction and the necessary foundational skills, the individual can show this commitment and that they are willing to be dedicated in completing the course (this was necessary to gain compliance from industries). This is important as the course is intended for those who missed out on the necessary education previously, have new requirements for the career progression/change, not just individuals who have worked in one industry and would like to change career path.

Foundation year:

1 year prior to the course as we recognised people will enter from different levels, this would help recap on basic skills and knowledge missed to reduce the **disparity in knowledge**. The length of time this will take to complete is circumstantial.

It is part time so that it can be taken alongside current circumstance eg work, at home priorities, etc

Technological literacy is a key barrier so a module would consist of learning necessary online tools to be able to participate efficiently in the education later, these skills will also help in the work placements and in the career post-graduation.

Recognised the need to adapt to specific **learning requirements**, an assessment will take place identify what is needed to ensure learning not just being taught.

Main course:

Three year course receiving a degree level qualification and valuable, relevant work experience.

Education consists of necessary subject knowledge but knowledge and skills that are transferable to a variety of jobs and industries, this will show skills in areas for career development and change later on. Whilst an individual may know the industry they are aiming towards, this may change therefore versatile knowledge skills are fundamental.

Industry placement only one per year, as incentive for the companies to gain enough value from the connections, and for the individuals to build on their skill set and develop and explore different roles within an industry. The two terms allow for two different project developments, therefore they can work in these different roles, and apply different skills. The industry placements would be in a variety of sectors, starting with a few, the availability growing with the projects development.

Student life:

The social and support aspect builds sense of **community**, helps people realise they aren't the only ones making this change.

Student support: realised we needed a system in place to aid with overcoming and managing barriers we identified in the research and ideation phase. Student support system that is tailored to mature students by recognising barriers such as stigma, additional responsibilities and finding motivation.

Limitations And Mitigations

- For mature students who may have other commitments such as taking care of families, relocating may be an issue
 - Finding companies willing to take this risk may be difficult
 - Having contingencies in place for unexpected personal commitments
 - Selecting students
 - Providing a good level of academic rigour to make the course degree worthy but also remaining accessible to students who don't have the best academic track record
- Potentially providing family friendly accomodation to help with relocation if necessary
 - Emphasis on the fact that the students will not only have industry experience but also a set of different transferable skills
 - Interviewing stuends on a case a by base basis
 - Foundation year to create a phased return to education so that applicants can re-learn basic skills needed to progress through-out the course, tech literacy courses to be able to make the most o their learning experience

Test - User Persona 1

Dilan

43

Teacher

Story: Rebellious student and didn't take education seriously. Entered the world of work at 18 with bad GCSE results as academic history, working low skilled jobs.

Goals:

Looking to change careers to Graphic Design, having never been able to complete the degree qualifications needed

Barriers:

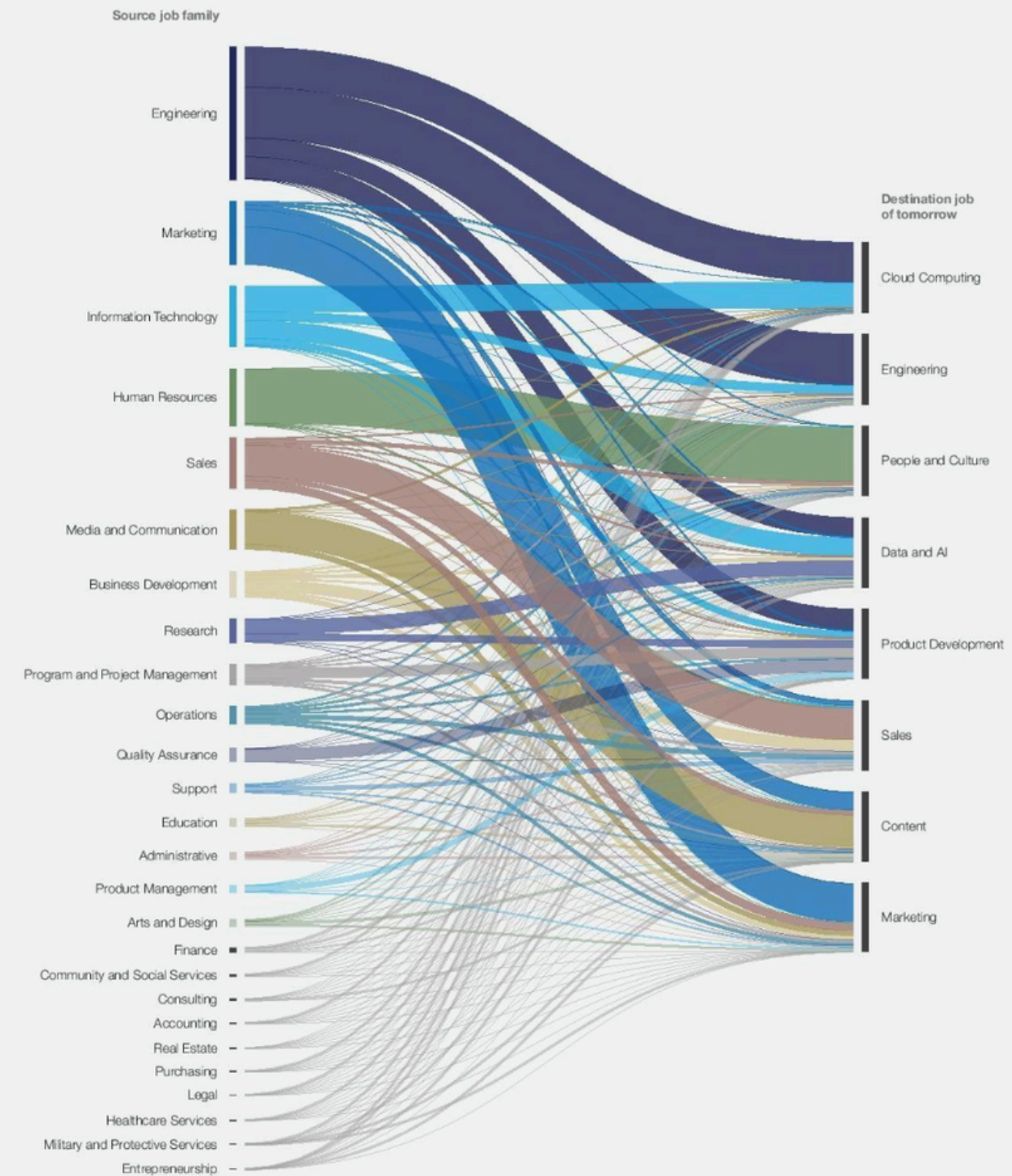
Didn't do well in GCSEs

Past experience was poor - fear go back too

Limitation of financial support to leave work to rejoin some form of education

Not very technology literate

FIGURE 25 Transitions into the jobs of the future



Test - User Persona 2

Charlie

33

Stay at home parent with a 13 year old child

Story:

Dropped out of uni for unplanned pregnancy.

Goals:

Wanting to get back into the world of work, with the goal of a career in banking.

Barriers:

Responsibility of a young child in education and worried about uprooting their life.

Anxious about rejoining education

Our course:

Skills:

Literacy, mathematical, communication

Industry placement:

Banking company in Canary Wharf, working in different areas of the company, one project could be about family finance management.

Student support:

Help navigate instability and anxieties

Student experience:

Find comfort in being around other parents

Reflection

We approached this brief from a multitude of perspectives, using our time at two new institutions, we merged conceptual thinking with applicational knowledge. Using these perspectives we followed a design thinking approach to best understand the perspective of our target audience,

Some limitations to our approach was that we didn't have the personal experience given that we all came directly from pervious education into university. To gain perspectives on this we created and sent a form to some mature students who had re-entered the education system after time out, asking what factors they found influenced their decisions.

How would you rate the significance of following factors when making the decision to re-enter education?

Economic and financial stability

1 2 3 4 5

Not a barrier Massive barrier

Could you please elaborate on this? (You can answer with as much or as little detail as you would like)

Your answer _____

Time and Responsibility

1 2 3 4 5

Not a barrier Massive barrier

Could you please elaborate on this? (You can answer with as much or as little detail as you would like)

Your answer _____

Technology - Cost and Literacy

1 2 3 4 5

Not a barrier Massive barrier

Could you please elaborate on this? (You can answer with as much or as little detail as you would like)

Which would you rate as the most influential factor?

Economic and financial stability

Time and Responsibility

Technology - Cost and Literacy

Social barriers and confidence

Previous personal experience and fulfilment

Learning accessibility

Other...

Were there any other factors you found influenced your decision?

Short answer text _____

Was there anything else you found aided or hindered the ease of your decision? (You can answer with as much or as little detail as you would like)

Long answer text _____

- Jasmine Bowley (LIS)
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- Logan Veerapatrapillay (LIS)
- Priya Mistry (LIS)
- Viktoria Tsvetanova (TEDI)

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