



## Cardiff University

### Exploring the past

The Exploring the Past Foundation Pathway (EtP) is an innovative progression route onto degree schemes in History/Archaeology/Religious Studies at Cardiff University. A partnership between the Centre for Lifelong Learning (LEARN) and the School of History, Archaeology and Religion (SHARE), EtP combines the former's experience of supporting adult learners with the latter's teaching/research expertise. It aims to increase the numbers of part-time students progressing to undergraduate degrees, in particular those from Communities First Areas and Low Participation Neighbourhoods.

All students successfully completing EtP automatically qualify for an interview onto part-time degree schemes within SHARE. Students who perform successfully in interview are eligible for advanced standing – EtP credits contributing directly towards the first year of their degrees.

#### **Innovation and creativity**

EtP is an open-access progression route of six 10 credit courses which enables adult learners to study within a timescale, framework and environment designed to cater for their needs. Inclusive, flexible and multi-disciplinary, EtP allows students to experience a wide variety of subject areas/ approaches and attain significant employability skills – providing a focussed, well-structured alternative route to Access/A Level.

Teaching is through blended delivery, with bite-sized lectures dovetailing with seminar discussions, workshops, group work, debates, quizzes and a very successful level of engagement via online discussion forums. All modules have significant research-led elements and a team of tutors with strong associations/affiliations with SHARE has been recruited. All modules have been developed to reflect the subjects taught and researched within SHARE thereby preparing students for study within the School.

Some EtP courses are delivered through mixed classes of part-time/full-time students generating a vibrant atmosphere, breaking down barriers/creating support networks. EtP provides significant pastoral support for students including a peer support network which meets on a monthly basis outside the classroom setting, to socialise and work together. EtP modules are taught in manageable 10 credit bites over eighteen contact hours, with significant VLE support.

Student numbers are capped at 15 per module to ensure the quality of contact. Most courses are taught on weekday evenings; a number are delivered through linked Saturday Schools/weekend summer schools. Most modules are taught within SHARE to familiarise students with the physical/cultural environment in which they will undertake their degree.

### Sustainability and Impact

As with all part-time/lifelong learning higher education provisions, the recruitment of a critical mass of students is crucial for survival. In its first year, EtP offered eight modules with an average of 9.5 students enrolling per course, two degree places were secured.

This year, ten modules are available and the average number of students per course is ten – with the three core modules averaging thirteen students, all courses commencing in January 2012 were oversubscribed. Currently, six students have applied for progression onto part-time degrees in SHARE in 2012-13.

EtP's success has influenced University policy and proposals for a further six pathways based on the EtP model have been incorporated into Cardiff University's recently published Widening Access Strategy. Furthermore, additional funding has recently been allocated and an EtP project officer recruited to sustain and develop the pathway.

The imperative to create a positive impact on our students' lives is one of the driving motivations behind EtP. Many EtP students face barriers ranging from physical disability and mental health issues to redundancy. Fee waivers are available for those on DWP benefits or claiming tax credits and a limited number of bursaries are available.

### Hayley Basset progressed from EtP onto a degree in 2011, she has commented:

"I am a full-time mum. My youngest child is four, she has severe learning difficulties, mobility difficulties and autism. As well as a mum, I am her full time carer ... I had known when initially enrolling on the course that there was the possibility of progressing onto a part-time degree at Cardiff University if I passed all six modules and, if I am honest, I wanted to progress. For the first time in a very long time I had something just for me, something I really enjoyed and something which, to my utter surprise, I was actually quite good at."

### Transferability

The uniqueness of EtP within Wales and the UK more broadly has inspired Cardiff University's Widening Access strategy, currently the School of Social Sciences is working in partnership with LEARN to develop a comparable pathway.

EtP therefore provides an inspiring modifiable template for the establishment of similar foundation pathways which will allow Cardiff University to raise aspirations and recruit and retain able students from diverse backgrounds/groups who are traditionally under-represented in Higher Education in Wales. <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/learn/exploringthepast/>