

RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON EMPLOYABILITY PROVISION IN THE ARTS & HUMANITIES

SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on our employability provision which took place between 9 and 22 February 2021. It involved discussion in the Arts and Humanities Board of Studies Student Consultative Forum, and a short questionnaire.

The forum can be found at: <https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=24213>

and the questionnaire can be found at: <https://learn2.open.ac.uk/mod/questionnaire/view.php?id=1751099>

This consultation was open to all undergraduate and postgraduate students currently studying Arts and Humanities modules and qualifications. In total 271 people registered for the forum consultation, with 186 posts made by students. 92 students responded to the questionnaire.

The purpose of the consultation was to explore ways to improve the information, resources and teaching that we provide around employability and personal development. The forum sought students' views on: motivations for studying an Arts and Humanities qualification; our teaching of employability skills; the value of gaining work experience to support students' career goals. The questionnaire aimed to assess students' awareness, use and opinions of the employability resources in the UG Arts and Humanities study website.

Below is a list of some of the major issues raised by students contributing to the consultation, and the steps being taken by the school to address them:

- OU resources must serve the needs of two distinct student cohorts; those who want a qualification to help with employment, and those who seek to study for reasons not linked to employment.
 - o The Board of Studies will review the appropriate balance between employability skills embedded in modules and the optional employability resources provided in the Arts and Humanities Study website.
- Students would prefer our teaching around employability to focus on transferable skills rather than vocational ones: they want to know what employers are looking for in Arts and Humanities graduates.
 - o Employability resources and initiatives specific to Arts and Humanities subjects already place a strong emphasis on transferable rather than vocational skills. We will look into providing quotes or recorded testimony from employers on the Arts and Humanities subject site.
- Many students are unaware of the employability resources available in the 'Succeed' section of the Arts and Humanities Study website.
 - o We will provide links to the A&H Study website (which houses the employability resources) in the first and last week or under the resources tab of all relevant module study planners, and will use module news items and forum posts to alert students to new employability resources.
- Initiatives like FutureYOU and PDP (Personal Development Planning) are valued by students who have engaged with them, but not always recognised as relevant.
 - o More of our modules will be mapped to FutureYOU, and it will be linked from either the first and last weeks or the resources tab of module study planners, along with brief explanations of its intended role.
- Additional help would be welcomed with creating tailored searches and alerts in the Opportunity Hub.
 - o We will ask our employer engagement team to explore how the use of search criteria in the Opportunity Hub can be made more effective and focussed for Arts and Humanities students

The forum was moderated by Bev Smit (Arts and Humanities BoS student representative), Richard Marsden (Director of Teaching, Arts & Humanities), Claire Blanchard (Careers and Employability Consultant), and Clare Spencer (Deputy Director of Teaching, Arts & Humanities). The moderators will provide a summary of discussions to the Arts & Humanities Board of Studies, and recommendations for future actions will be discussed and agreed at the Board of Studies meeting on 13 October 2021.

FULL RESPONSE

AWARENESS AND VALUE OF OUR CURRENT EMPLOYABILITY-RELATED RESOURCES

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
You were not aware of the full range of employability resources available via the 'Succeed' tab in the Arts and Humanities Study website	We will do more to make these resources visible to you in the normal course of your study, particularly on module websites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We will add links to the Arts and Humanities Study website, where our employability resources live, in the first and last weeks of module study planners and under the 'resources' tab on module websites.• The existence and character of Arts and Humanities employability resources will be flagged up more clearly in the various 'enhancing your career' forum threads on run on discipline forums and on module welcome forums.• When new Arts and Humanities employability resources are made available, news items and forum postings on module websites will be used to alert students
You would like to see more employability resources catering explicitly for career changers and mature students.	We will explore how best to provide self-help material designed specifically for students planning to change their careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work on this to begin in autumn 2021, with the release of some initial resources in 2022
You would like access to more resources for Arts and Humanities students who aim to go into teaching	There are a range of resources on becoming a teacher available from the following page in the OU student Help Centre, many of which are relevant to Arts and Humanities students: https://help.open.ac.uk/becoming-a-teacher	
You value insights into how Arts and Humanities alumni progressed their careers, and would like to see the range of student stories in the Study website extended	Three sets of student stories are already available on this page of the Arts and Humanities subject site: 1. Student stories and OU alumni Q&As: https://learn2.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=207009&cmid=1611061 2. PhD student lecturer Q&As: https://learn2.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=207009&cmid=1843291	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We will continue to add to the student stories already available, so that they cover a greater range of disciplines and a wider variety of employment experiences following graduation.

TEACHING OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
<p>You mostly value employability initiatives that focus on transferable skills, rather than vocational skills</p>	<p>It is good to hear this, because the employability resources and initiatives that are specific to Arts and Humanities subjects already place a strong emphasis on transferable rather than vocational skills.</p>	
<p>Clearer prompts are needed to engage with PDP elements and FutureYOU, where modules and qualifications include these</p>	<p>PDP (personal development planning) is embedded in many of our newer modules and we will continue with that approach. However, we accept that FutureYOU, whilst receiving excellent feedback from those who use it, is not visible enough and most students do not therefore get the benefit of it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will 'map' more of our modules to FutureYOU, meaning that it will offer more specific examples of which parts of modules relate to particular transferable skills • We will add links to FutureYOU in the first and last weeks of study planners on module websites, along with a brief explanation of what is and what it is for. • The existence and value of FutureYOU will be flagged up more clearly in careers and employability-related threads on the Arts and Humanities discipline forums.
<p>You want to know what employers are looking for in Arts and Humanities graduates</p>	<p>There is already a substantial amount of material on this topic available on the OU's Careers and Employability Service website: Careers and employability Help Centre The Open University</p> <p>However, we agree that it would be valuable to hear directly from a range of employers about what they value in Arts and Humanities graduates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will look into providing quotes or recorded testimony from employers on the Arts and Humanities subject site.
<p>You would welcome opportunities to network with people already employed in the career areas that interest you</p>	<p>Virtual careers events with employers and students are already run on the IVent platform: Events (open.ac.uk)</p> <p>IVent has live networking area, where students can interact directly with other students as well as employers.</p>	

THE VALUE OF WORK EXPERIENCE TO SUPPORT STUDENTS' CAREER GOALS

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
You would welcome additional help with creating tailored searches and alerts in the Opportunity Hub	This is useful feedback and we agree that these refinements would be very helpful to students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We will ask our employer engagement team to explore how the use of search criteria in the Opportunity Hub can be made more effective and focussed for Arts and Humanities students
You are interested in voluntary opportunities, as well as paid work experience	The Opportunity Hub promotes both paid and voluntary opportunities, including virtual internships, traineeships, work experience opportunities. Here is the link: Jobs (open.ac.uk)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The existence and value of the Opportunity Hub will be flagged up more clearly in careers and employability-related threads on the Arts and Humanities discipline forums.
You are particularly interested in opportunities for home-based work experience	That said, we accept that the existence of the Opportunity Hub could be highlighted more clearly so that more students benefit from it. Advice on approaches to finding home-based opportunities for paid and volunteer work is already available on the website of the OU's Careers and Employability Service: Home working Help Centre The Open University	

Date: May 2021