

RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TUITION

SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on Health and Social Care (HSC) tuition which took place between 8th March 2021 and 22nd March 2021 on the [Health, Wellbeing and Social Care Board of Studies Student Consultative Forum](#).

This consultation was designed to elicit student views about the Health and Social Care tuition provision. The questions posed were informed by Board of Studies Qualification Reviews for Health and Social Care (R26). The review of student satisfaction over the past several years revealed that students have concerns about elements of tutor support. Students previously reported that they can contact tutors when they need to, but that contact from tutors at the start of the module is not satisfactory and ongoing support is not meeting expectations in terms of encouraging students in their studies and supporting developing professional skills. We wanted to understand more about what student expectations are around these areas. The student consultation therefore focused on timeliness of student contact, tutor support for wellbeing, tutor support for developing professional skills, how tutors encourage students, and questions related to tutor support when studying more than one module at a time.

The forum was moderated by Erica Borgstrom (Qualifications Lead), Lynne Watson (Qualifications Lead and Staff Tutor), Jon Rainford (Associate Lecturer (tutor) Board of Studies representative), Natasha Rear (Staff Tutor; now Faculty Deputy Associate Dean for Teaching Excellence), and Ruth Tudor (Student Board of Students representative).

In total, 46 students responded to the consultation providing over 150 posts in total, and at least 115 readers engaged with the forum. Total student responses equated to approximately 13,000 words of text and students were engaging well within the forum, both with each other and with moderators. Across all six questions, students provided a range of responses that reflected a variety of expectations of tutors and a range of tutor practice. Across all six questions, students noted how some OU policies (such as responding to contact within 10 working days) did not meet student expectations or needs for support, especially when related to wellbeing and/or assignments. Some students negatively compared their experience of HSC modules with experience of modules in other faculties, suggesting that practices in HSC may differ from tutor support offered within Faculty of Arts Social Sciences, Faculty of Business and Law and Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Students also set up their own thread about what they'd like to see happen during tutorials and a short thread about module forums.

Students consistently said they prefer first contact with tutors to happen between one and two weeks before the module start date, or as soon as they are allocated a tutor. Many said that this initial contact can be via email, with ideally the offer of a 1:1 telephone call. Ideally students would want this first contact to be welcoming and encouraging, with clear indications about tutor availability. Much of what students said they expected mirrored existing OU tutor guidance and practices; several students provided examples of good or best practice that could be shared in tutor training sessions.

Students suggested that if module materials are made available early, that a central email about the availability could be sent which is then followed up by tutor communication once allocated. There was a minority who did suggest though that tutor support and tutor group forums should be available earlier in line with when module materials are available for view (i.e. if modules have an 'early start' that is earlier than the official module start date). Some students noted that they did not know that module sites could be accessed before the official module start date.

Many students noted that tutors could have a vital role in support student wellbeing, either directly or indirectly (e.g. through how encouraging and responsive communication was). This was noted by students to be particularly relevant during the ongoing pandemic situation, although some students did suggest that individual wellbeing support is beyond the academic remit of tutors (i.e. they see a separation between academic and pastoral support). It was noted that providing extensions is one way to support wellbeing, as well as proactive tutor contact, offering 1:1 telephone calls, timely email communication, and personalised clear feedback. Signposting to other resources in and of itself, however, was often felt to be insufficient and may risk students being caught between services.

Students were less clear about if and how tutors do or even should support the development of professional skills. Time management was the main skill identified. Several students suggested how tutors may support the development of such skills through the use of tutor group forums and tutorials.

When students have been studying more than one module simultaneously, they noted the usefulness of extensions and tutors being aware of full-time intensity study. They also suggested prompter return of their feedback to enable them to manage multiple assignments. They also suggested where possible being allocated the same tutor for both modules, consideration of assignment timings across module combinations, and more varied times for tutorials.

Erica Borgstrom and Lynne Watson will follow up these actions within the next six months. The feedback has been shared with all moderators of the forum. It will also be considered in the upcoming Health, Wellbeing and Social Care Board of Studies meetings in 2021.

FULL RESPONSE

You said

OU response

Next steps, if appropriate

Tutors should contact students one to two weeks before the module starts (or as soon as allocated).

This is in line with what tutors are currently advised to do. Tutors can only contact students after they have been allocated; sometimes this may be after the module start date (e.g. late registrations). It is reassuring to hear that current advised practice fits with student expectations.

We will remind tutors on HSC modules about this good practice for 21J (modules starting in October 2021).

Introductory emails are a good first contact. These can be followed up with additional forms of contact (phone call, email exchange, forum posts). Informing students of tutor availability is appreciated.

We advise tutors to send introductory emails; it is reassuring to hear that current advised practice fits with student expectations. Amount and type of follow-up (e.g. phone conversation) can vary by module depending on how much time tutors have been given to work on the module.

We will remind tutors on HSC modules about this good practice for 21J (October 2021). We will share examples of good practice.
We will review tutor workloads across the qualification to review scope for follow up telephone calls. This will inform future module production.
We will include information about 'what you can expect from your tutor' on the Health and Social Care website.

You want to be informed when module materials are ready to view.

We are exploring when and how module materials become available before the official module start date. For example, sample module material may be on the Health and Social Care website.

As we develop our plans for releasing module materials (from 22J (October 2022) onwards), we will consider how this is communicated with students who are already registered and the tutor support that may be available at that time.

Tutors can support student wellbeing. You provided several examples of how this can be done. You were less clear on if and how tutors can and do support your development of professional skills, except for time management and use of feedback.

We really appreciated the examples you shared across both of these areas.
Some student satisfaction surveys ask students about tutor support and professional skill development. Tutors are likely supporting a range of skill development, but this may not be explicitly discussed or recognised.

We will use this information in further developing our Health and Social Care wellbeing resources, skill resources, and information we provide to tutors.

There are several things that can make studying two modules simultaneously better when it comes to tutor support: understanding the pressures of studying multiple modules with competing deadlines, use of extensions, timely return of feedback, and where possible having the same tutor for multiple modules.

Within Health and Social Care, each year more students are studying several modules simultaneously. We already consider how to avoid assessment clashes were possible when producing modules. Your feedback and ideas will help us devise practices that can better support these students.

We will use this information in further developing our Health and Social Care tutor training. We will also put joint study calendars on the Health and Social Care website.

Date: 21 June 2021