

# RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON THE PERSONAL LEARNING ADVICE SERVICE

## SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on the PLA Service which took place in July 2022. You can find the consultation here: [STUDENT-CONSULTATION: The Personal Learning Advice Service \(open.ac.uk\)](https://open.ac.uk/student-consultation-the-personal-learning-advice-service).

The summary of student feedback is here: [STUDENT-CONSULTATION: The Personal Learning Advice Service \(open.ac.uk\)](https://open.ac.uk/student-consultation-the-personal-learning-advice-service)

In the Personal Learning Advice Service, we would like to thank all students who participated in the July 2022 Forum. We know that as OU students you work very hard and have busy lives outside of study; we truly appreciate the thought and time you invested in sharing your experiences and ideas with us and we enjoyed reading each of the 167 posts.

We identified 5 areas of continued improvement and development detailed below:

1. Our Online Workshops
2. Choosing the Personal Learning Advisor you work with
3. Scheduling your Appointments
4. PLA Service News and Resources
5. Ongoing support and connection with others

Since our last update, we have been able to act on the feedback and student recommendations in relation to all of these themes and have detailed the specific areas of improvement below.

## FULL RESPONSE

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
The student forum feedback indicated to us that our online workshops in spring 2022 were a helpful aspect of the support we provide in the PLA Service.	Many students highlighted the need for a full programme of workshops which extended from the beginning to the end of the module.	We have launched an induction programme and a series of workshops for our students – advertised on our website <a href="#">here</a> and by email on a monthly basis.
Students described experiencing technical issues when using Microsoft Teams to attend workshops.	We acknowledge these issues and, after investigation, have established that it is due to a known fault with Microsoft Teams.	We now routinely upload copies of the workshop slides and materials to our website, as well as circulating them by email in advance of each session. For induction sessions we also upload a pre-recorded version of each workshop on to our website for students to access.
The student forum raised the question as to whether we could	Zoom is not a platform we are currently able to use at the OU.	Students who attend appointments / workshops on

<p>use Zoom for workshops and appointments because of their familiarity with it.</p>	<p>However, we have taken steps to familiarise students with the Teams platform we use.</p>	<p>Teams receive written guidelines by email on how to access the sessions. At the start of every workshop, PLAs spend time orientating students around the Teams functions. We have also introduced a supplementary tool – a Padlet discussion board – for those students accessing Teams on devices where the chat function is not visible. We’ve been pleased to see that this has allowed everyone to participate.</p>
<p>Many students stated that they would benefit from working with the same coach / mentor, rather than being allocated to a new PLA each time they take-up the support.</p>	<p>We acknowledge the rapport and connection that is established between PLAs and their students and, where possible, have made it possible for students to remain with their PLA.</p>	<p>We have introduced ‘bridging sessions’ so that a PLA can support a student in between modules (for example, over the summer). PLAs then make the offer to continue working with their students once they register on the next module.</p>
<p>Students told us that they would like to be able to choose their PLA and have a space to find out more about them before signing up.</p>	<p>We understand that some students may prefer to work with a PLA of a particular gender or ethnicity – for example – and we accommodate these requests wherever possible.</p>	<p>We have included brief profiles for all of the PLA’s on our student website here: <a href="#">Personal Learning Advisors (open.ac.uk)</a>. Students can also indicate preferences about their PLA on our sign-up form.</p>
<p>Many students felt that there was a need for informal support outside of the 6 scheduled appointments with their PLA.</p>	<p>We acknowledge that it is important for students to be able to reach their PLA outside of their coaching and mentoring appointments and we have built this into our new bookings system.</p>	<p>We have already included some flexibility in our new automated bookings system which allows students the option to book shorter ‘check-in’ calls with their PLA in between longer coaching and mentoring appointments. PLAs continue to be available by email during OU office hours.</p>
<p>Students let us know that they’d like more flexibility and control with the booking, rescheduling and cancellation of appointments with their PLA.</p>	<p>We understand how busy our students are and that it can be necessary to cancel or rearrange appointments at the last minute. We have addressed this in our new bookings system which we hope saves time and helps our students manage their appointments.</p>	<p>Our new bookings system sends automated reminders to students about appointments. It allows students to identify available appointments in their PLA’s schedule and book them via a link. It also allows students to cancel and/or reschedule appointments by clicking a link.</p>
<p>The student forum feedback told us that many students would like us in the PLA Service to create more</p>	<p>We are interested in ways we can facilitate peer support and spaces where students being supported</p>	<p>We have been using the padlet tool to create discussion boards for students to connect with peers (if they’d like to) in our</p>

opportunities to connect with others. by a PLA can connect with each other. workshops and Learn-Grow-Connect sessions. We are continuing to explore the possibility of a student forum on our website – depending on staffing and resource available.

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Many students advised us that they'd like to be able to access more appointments with a PLA during their studies. In the PLA Service, we understand that it can be helpful to be able to access appointments before, during and after a module begins and we have been able to create this opportunity via a more flexible offer. Students can now have 7 appointments with a PLA during their module (an increase from 6). Students can also access support from their PLA in between modules via our programme of bridging sessions. This allows students to use their allocation of sessions more flexibly.

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**Date:** 20/01/23