# RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON MATHEMATICS AND STATISTICS BOARD OF STUDIES STUDENT CONSULTATION FORUM

## SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation which took place between 13 - 27 March 2023 on the Mathematics and Statistics Board of Studies Student Consultation Forum. The summary of student feedback is at STUDENT-CONSULTATION: Mathematics and Statistics Board of Studies Student Consultative Forum - March 2023 (open.ac.uk).

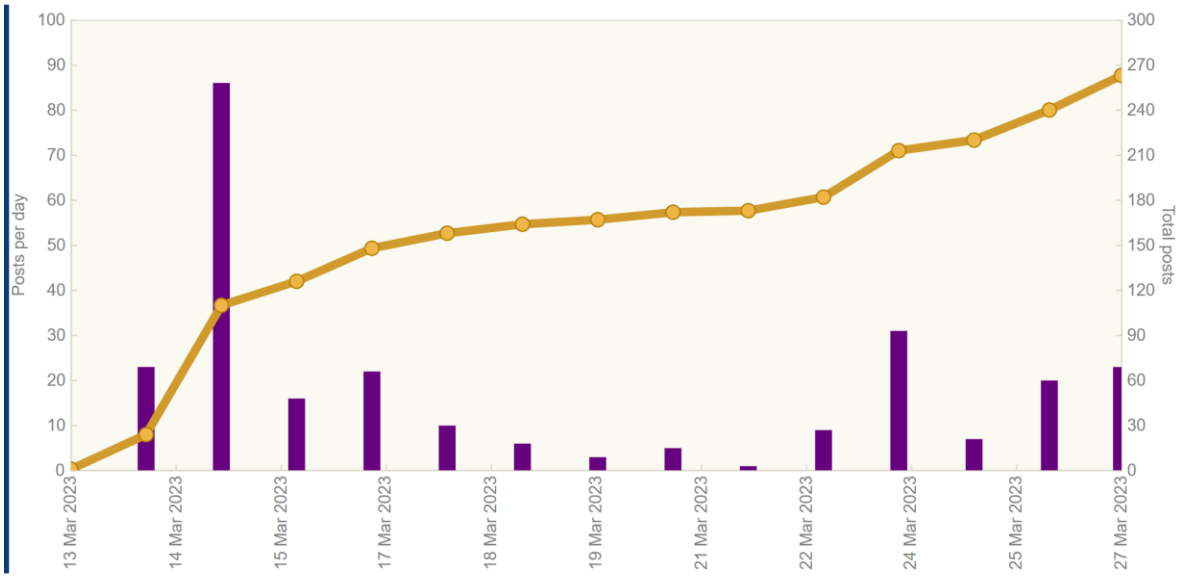
### Usage

[Corresponding numbers for the 2022, 2020, 2019 consultation which took place in a similar two week period are shown in brackets.]

All 9446 students currently registered on a module in mathematics and statistics were invited to participate.

A total of 38 [151 (2022), 228 (2020), no figure for 2019] students registered to take part in the consultation in the forum.

A total of 206 [226, 308, 202] posts spread over, in the end, 32 [6, 10, 12] threads, with postings from 83 [39, 83, 41] students were made (there are more students who contributed (83) than registered (38) since all eligible students are invited to post regardless of whether they have registered or not).




The forum was moderated by Tim Lowe (Director of Teaching), Jotham Gaudoin (Deputy Director of Teaching) and Andrew Potter (EDI lead).

The consultation unfortunately coincided with a period of UCU industrial action, hence there was probably less interactive engagement with student comments than in previous years.

## Topics

The following questions were posed each in a separate thread:

- **Making Maths & Stats inclusive of everyone**
  We are really interested to know how we can make our modules in Maths & Stats more inclusive. What changes would you like to see made to our module content or assessment (or what events would you like to be put on) to better reflect the **diversity** of mathematics and statistics, and support wider **inclusivity**?

- **30 or 60 credit modules?**
  Currently, most modules within Mathematics and Statistics are worth 30 credits, but there are a few 60 credit modules (M208, MST210, M303). What are your experiences of studying a 60 credit module as compared to a 30 credit module, and do you have any preferences as to the size of modules?

- **What do you wish you had known!**
  To try and better support new students starting their journey with the Open University, I would be interested to know what (in retrospect) you now really wish you had known before starting your studies? What would you have liked to have been told on Day 1 that would have significantly improved your later experience?

In addition, students started 29 additional threads. Those with 5 or more posts were:

- Python and R versus Proprietary, Windows-only Software (Minitab and SPSS) (7 posts)
- Please return to proctored exams (35 posts)
- More options for MSc topics (5 posts)
- Recording tutorials (7 posts)
- MST 224 :More extensive Practice exercises (12 posts)
- Lectures as well as tutorials (22 posts)
- Why are the MSc set texts so abysmal? (9 posts)

The most popular discussions, in order, were as follows.

| Most read | Most posts |
|---|---|
| 30 or 60 credit modules? | Making Maths & Stats inclusive of everyone |
| Please return to proctored exams | 30 or 60 credit modules? |
| What do you wish you had known! | Please return to proctored exams |
| Making Maths & Stats inclusive of everyone | Lectures as well as tutorials |
| Do the OU have plans on how they work with potential plagiarism from STEM remote exams? | What do you wish you had known! |

**FULL RESPONSE**

# Summaries of main discussions

## Making Maths & Stats inclusive of everyone

One of the actions in the School of Mathematics & Statistics Athena Swan Action Plan is to embed Student Voice in the development of greater equity and inclusivity of our teaching and learning. Students were asked to give their views on ways in which we could make our teaching more inclusive, which reflects the diversity of students who study M&S qualifications.

Responses to the consultation covered a wide range of inclusivity needs and concerns, with many posts focusing on a specific characteristic of underrepresentation, including age, gender and neurodiversity. Many other students commented on support for students with caring responsibilities. A popular topic for discussion was assessment, which suggests that high concern exists amongst students with inclusive and equitable treatment at the point of assessment.

Some students commented on ways in which the curriculum could be enhanced by more discussion of the history of mathematics and statistics, and the way in which equity (or inequity) intersects with the history of our disciplines. The comments received will feed into the development of the Contextualising the Curriculum resource, which seeks to supplement our curriculum offering with a discussion of inclusivity themes through historical examples.

### Response to students

Now that this discussion has closed, I just wanted to say thank you to everyone for sharing your views, experiences and suggestions for making Maths & Stats inclusive of everyone. It's been really interesting to read your posts, which have given me real food for thought. It's impossible to list everything that was discussed in a short summary post, but among other things, we've talked about:

- Inclusive assessment
- Support students with caring responsibilities
- Neurodiversity
- Age
- Gender
- The history of mathematics and Western cultural bias, including naming conventions
- Thank you once again for sharing your views, and best of luck with your ongoing studies!

### You said, we did

**You said:** Students want to learn more about the diverse history of mathematics and statistics.
**We did:** Feed student comments into the development of a new resource called *Contextualising the Curriculum*, which will explore inclusivity and equity issues in mathematics and statistics through the history of our disciplines.

## 30 or 60 credit modules

We currently have three 60 credit modules – M208, MST210 and M303. These were all referenced by the students. There were 45 replies in the thread about this topic and approximately two-thirds of the students preferred 30-credit modules over 60-credit modules. The reasons for this were primarily

related to workload and the issues involved with studying at such a study intensity. Some students noted that they tried to obtain copies of the materials early in order to begin their studies in advance of the official module start date. Several also mentioned that they felt a single 3-hour examination was not sufficient to cover the material in a 60-credit module appropriately and that two examinations would be preferable (and that this would be delivered by 30-credit modules).

Of the students who expressed a preference for 60-credit modules, this was primarily because they felt that the material was delivered more coherently than when presented as two separate modules.

### Response to students

Many thanks for your contributions to this topic, for the range of opinions you have provided and for the interesting rationales behind these. The school will consider whether it would be advantageous to move from 60-credit modules to 30-credit modules as it updates its curriculum on a rolling basis.

### You said, we did

**You said:** You generally preferred 30 credit modules
**We did:** Will consider moving from 60 credit modules when reviewing the curriculum.

## What do you wish you had known!

Students were asked for suggestions on what they wished they had known before starting their studies, to enable us to provide better support for new students.

Comments included:

- Wanting better advice on study pathways, particularly at Stage 1, and particularly regarding the possible module presentations, as some choices mean you cannot study all modules in a single year.
- More prior information on module structure, for example, 30 credits implies 1 unit over two weeks, 60 credits mean 1 unit every week.
- Difficulties in finding what you need from the huge amount of information available, for example the existence of the M500 society, how to get additional support, advice on how to study, take notes etc, how to book a tutorial, that you can look at module examples when doing TMAs.
- Seemingly lack of anyone “in charge” of joint degrees (e.g., Data Science).
- Noted that many staff are extremely helpful.
- Might not have begun studies if they had known remote exams would continue so long.
- More details on what support a tutor can give.
- The need for a Windows operating system for M140. Include details of such limitations on the Qualification information pages.
- Nothing more needed!
- Better highlight the *Are You Ready For…* quizzes.

### Response to students

Thank you very much for your wide-ranging replies to this question. It seems clear that many find locating the information they need within in the large volume of information provided to students difficult. Several of the suggestions are indeed already available somewhere, but exactly where is perhaps not obvious! I will be thinking about how best to address this, and also picking up one some of the particular comments made.

### You said, we did

**You said:** You wanted more qualification specific information.
**We did:** We will include more qualification information on the Study Site.

**You said:** You wanted *Are You Ready For…* Quizzes better highlighted.
**We did:** We will improve the promotion of these.

**You said:** You wanted more advance information on module structure and study rates.
**We did:** We will include such details on OpenMS and our Study Site.

**You said:** You wanted clearer sight of the information you need to get started
**We did:** Update and better highlight the "Start here!" page of the M&S study site

## MSc related topics

### Response to students

1. Thanks everyone for your comments which are always interesting and thought-provoking.

2. We do try to provide a range of teaching materials because we know that different people have different learning styles. We have been building up the resources for each module.

3. We do review modules but it is really quite hard to change a set text because all the rest of the module material is centred on the text, so in practice the module would need a major overhaul if not complete rewriting. We simply don't have the resources to do that.

4. I won't say much about future curriculum plans here, because I am giving a briefing to all interested students (whether currently registered on MSc modules or not) on Wednesday 10 May at 7.30 pm UK time in the Mathematics MSc Online Room All the events are on Wednesdays, 7.30 pm - 9 pm UK time in the Mathematics MSc Online Room https://learn2.open.ac.uk/mod/connecthosted/view.php?id=1605160 (and recordings will also be available there at https://learn2.open.ac.uk/mod/connecthosted/viewrecordings.php?id=1605160&group=0&filter=2). All are welcome to attend.

5. Regarding Data Science, there is an undergraduate programme in this area, to which the School of Mathematics and Statistics makes an important contribution. We have considered including statistics modules in the MSc but it is has not been possible up to now for staffing reasons. So far as I know there are no current university plans to introduce an MSc in Data Science.

6. Regarding additional tutorials on MSc modules, I appreciate that this would be very much appreciated, but we don't currently have the resources to do so. On the plus side, we are encouraging all our module teams to offer revision tutorials (in addition to the M500 revision weekend, which we support). We also have the intensive MSc January Study Event which is popular.

### You said, we did

**You said:** Please include SM880 in the Mathematics MSc
**We did:** We plan to include the module as requested.

## Other topics

Students raised various other topics themselves, which included the following points.

- A request to make TMA questions more challenging, and not simply copies of module material examples.
- Include more practical projects within statistics modules, following the different stages of solving a practical problem.
- Better provision of links to other support materials relating to topics being studied/further reading: YouTube site, library and non-library books.
- A wish to move from proprietary software (Minitab, SPSS) to open source, especially when the proprietary software is only available on certain platforms.
- A desire to return to in-hall examinations, which was countered by others.
- There is too much concentration on “learning books” rather than participation and collaboration.
- Desire for more context as to why students are learning particular topics, and hints at how they might be extended/are useful elsewhere (particularly in MST124).
- Desire for more exercise books, practice quizzes and topic introductory lecture videos. (Particularly MST210, MST224).
- It is hard to open large books flat (suggest a maximum of 260 pages), and move wide margins to the spine side of the page.
- Suggestions for more (different) coloured boxes, and to move history/asides to the end of the unit as they are a distraction. Make handbooks single column only.
- Request for better quality videos (and better handwriting in them!), pre-recorded lectures.
- Record all tutorials, so the student can select the “best” to watch.
- Provide access to more module materials before the module starts, to make an early start.
- Desire for recorded lectures on modules, key topics.
- Tutorials tend to concentrate on TMA questions rather than any *teaching*. There is a desire for more teaching beyond what the printed materials provide.
- M303 theorem numbering is hard as it resets for each book. (Each book has a “Proposition 2”.
- Request for more specific R tutorials for M348.
- The OU is often the only opportunity for disabled students to engage with HE, yet our curriculum offering is restricted compared to face-to-face universities.
- A request that TMA questions closely cross-reference which parts of the text they relate to.
- Revise and refresh material should be part of the actual module, not as preparation.

## Response to students

Not necessary for these numerous very short threads.

## You said, we did

**You said:** You would prefer a move away from proprietary statistical software to Open Source software.
**We did:** We will consider this when updating statistics modules.

**Date: 25th July 2023**