

Student Voice Festival 2024

Responses to student feedback from online sessions and online forums





Background:

Student Voice Festival was held from 24 February to 9 March 2024. There was over 40 sessions and over a 100 speakers.

There were different types of sessions held, including panel and Q&A sessions, coffee mornings, discussions, and workshops. Face-to-face Student Consultation Meetings were also held across the four UK nations.

Student Voice Festival held sessions on a myriad of topics from the future of tuition, assessment, to the new StudentHome.

This document contains the responses to the online sessions held as part of the Student Voice Festival.



Welcome Session: Moments of Truth

Over 100 students joined to share pivotal moments in the student journey, from peak to pitfalls and everything in between.

You told us:

- Studying can be challenging but a rewarding experience.
- Having opportunity to change study plans switching between degrees and modules is 'really good'.
- Collaboration in forums and tutorials is important.
- > Students are most likely to request support from Tutors.
- 'Finding Student Hub Live for study skills and having a community to not feel isolated is a great tip...'
- Taking time to read TMA Feedback is important.
- It has been really nice hearing from other students and how much support is available'



We have:

- Gathered information and insight shared during the session to truly understand pivotal moments during study so far.
- Begun to review in detail where pitfalls may have occurred to understand reasons and ways to better signpost to support and guidance.
- Established a working group to embed learning back into our services.

- Offer more opportunities to gather student voice and insight.
- Share with faculty colleagues, feedback specifically associated with tutor support, engagement and TMA feedback.
- Continue to offer Student Support Team collaboration and participation within forums and student events.
- Working with specialist teams such as Disability Support Team and Careers and Employability Services to ensure students are signposted and have access to appropriate services when needed.

We need your opinion! Invigilating exams that you take from your own home

You told us that:

- You understood the need for the OU to protect the integrity of exams to ensure that they're fair.
- Given the option to take exams online, with invigilation in a place of your choosing or at an exam centre, there is a small but significant preference for taking exams online.
- Technical and connectivity issues were the biggest concern about online invigilation for remote exams.

The Open University

We have:

- Looked at how we can reduce the likelihood of technical issues at exam time as much as possible, for example putting in place practice exams.
- Spoken to other Universities to get practical insights on what helped them ensure a good invigilation experience for students.

- As we currently do, we'll support students to have reasonable adjustments when needed.
- We're still working on our technology, process and policies, and will make sure that aspects that students are concerned about, such as internet and power outages, are covered in both the guidance we give to students and our procedures.

Sustainability and Eco-Anxiety at the OU

The 90-minute session and breakout room activities were a great opportunity for us to hear from students.

Student feedback in the chat included positive engagement; and suggestions for action.

You told us:

- '...I've learned so much!!'
- '...interesting and nice to hear about the steps that the university is taking to reduce its impact.'
- '.....I liked some of the podcasts....'
- 'I find the podcasts great to listen to'



Suggestions for action:

- '....a webinar....explaining all the terms would be good....'
- '.....remind people it's (anger and frustration) a rational...reaction' [to learning about climate change impacts]
- '....having daily things to do, ...the streak element...gamification...'.[something for different preferences]
- '.... post on OU Facebook page so more people can hear....'
- '.....a little overwhelming as there is so much...'
- '....content that applies to me....'
- '....the features based around habits overlap with other apps I use'

This response is continued on the next page.

Sustainability and Eco-Anxiety at the OU

Based on student suggestions we shall:

- Produce a recorded induction, explaining key sustainability terms and introducing students to the OU approach and signposting to activities, in collaboration with the OU Students Association.
- Support student well-being by providing resources to reassure students on the natural responses to learning about climate change impacts (the grief cycle).
- Review signposting so that different activities appeal to different student preferences and cross-reference other apps you may already be using; for example, study aligned actions; personal actions; gamification; individual and collective activities.

- > Seek to run an evening activity to enable those who work full-time to attend a session.
- Review and improve our student-facing communications in collaboration with the OU Students Association including signposting in mass student communications and use of OU Facebook page.



How to get involved in improving teaching and learning at the OU, and what's in it for you

40 students took part in this session.

You told us:

- You didn't understand what the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning really was.
- You hadn't heard about opportunities to be involved in scholarship activities.
- Those who had been involved had found it a rewarding and valuable experience.
- You want to know more about the impact of the information you give in surveys.



We have:

- Created a digital badge to award 'Students as Partners in Educational Research' who have completed 8+ hours scholarship work.
- Encouraged project leads to actively seek students' participation when submitting project proposals.
- Presented on what scholarship is really about (more can be found at <u>Scholarship and</u> <u>Innovation I (open.ac.uk)</u>)

- Add articles to the Student Voice newsletter regarding the development and impact of scholarship and any opportunities to get involved.
- Share success stories.
- > Evaluate students' involvement in projects to continually improve our practice.

Talking TMAs: How can we support you to succeed?

You told us:

- You would like help in meeting expectations and understanding the question
- You find 'Write Now!' online workshops helpful for support when you write your assignments and would like to see them offered on more modules.
- You face challenges with academic writing (such as structuring essays, and referencing)
- Anxiety and lack of confidence are major barriers to engagement in online interactions and collaborative tasks.
- You see that oral assessments provide the opportunity to showcase strengths beyond writing; but you are concerned about equity, and receiving adequate support and training.



We have:

- Incorporated sections on 'understanding the question', and activities to support you with understanding the expectation of tasks to 'Write Now' sessions.
- Commissioned resources to support students to engage with others in online interactions (e.g. to support collaborative work)
- Worked with students as partners to develop some example oral presentations, incorporating their reflections on the process.
- Scheduled some 'Big Write Now!' online workshops to support students with completing their final module assessments in May 2024.

- Roll out 'Write Now!' Workshops to a larger number of Arts & Humanities modules from October 2024
- Release short 'Referencing' How To videos on the A&H Writing Centre from October 2024: <u>Writing Centre</u>
- Provide materials to support the development of oracy skills.

Winning together: race equality and equity for all

You told us:

- There were some challenges when registering to become a student at the OU
- The Disabled Student Allowance process was at times confusing and stressful
- More regular social and in-person events would help enhance your sense of belonging at the OU
- There could be more opportunity to learn about different ethnicities and cultures while studying at the OU
- More information on allyship and antidiscrimination for students would help with your interactions and own understanding



We have:

- Captured your poll responses from the event
- Collated and anonymised some of the key points raised in the event chat-box
- Taken learning from your participation around how students would like to engage in university activity

- As part of our Race Equality Charter Work, identify ways we can improve student sense of belonging and provide more opportunity to learn about different ethnicities and cultures.
- Use your feedback to better understand what students think would be helpful to improve their registration and learning experience.

Personal and professional development in the School of Education, Childhood & Youth Studies

You told us:

- A Personal Development Plan (PDP) could help you to prioritise your goals and manage your time.
- PDP coaches could share ways that they use PDP and offer examples as well as linking to resources.
- You would like the link to the qualification site as part of the module resources.
- You would like help with pre-reading for Level 1.
- You would like to build confidence using online forums.
- Students need to know more about the 'step up' to Level 2.
- You need the different skills needed for assessments on the module to be clear and support provided for these.
- you wanted signposting about where to find information about study breaks and returning to study.



On Education Studies modules, we have:

- signposted PDP in all Education Studies Q94 modules.
- designed module updates, including the new E103 'Learning and Teaching in the Primary years' to include activities to support your confidence in using online forums.
- introduced a new week of study materials focused on preparing for your next module, studying at level 2 and working towards career goals to the new E103 module.
- included activities designed to support specific skills for your assessments in module updates, and new assessment criteria designed with students in E209.

- share some examples of how PDP coaches use PDP to support their study goals in the module forums.
- include a link to the qualification site on our core Education Studies modules.
- offer wider reading support in the forums and start a book club over the summer.
- develop more transition resources and activities for summer and autumn 2024.
- signpost study break and returning to study info on all core modules.

Moving on from Access to Level 1 study: share your story

You told us:

- Studying an Access module has given you valuable study skills and confidence.
- Some of you find you receive too many emails, and this can be overwhelming, although some found them useful.
- You find progression routes unclear and confusing.
- You struggle with time management.
- You'd like to hear more from other students about their experience of studying at level 1.



We have:

- Reviewed our student communications to streamline them.
- Created a 'Student Choice week' in the Access module material to help students navigate to subject sites for more information on further study.
- Implemented a former Access student buddy on the student forums during 'Moving On' week to talk about their experience of moving on to level 1.

- Provide students with more guidance on how to manage your emails.
- Make the wording of our messages more accessible.
- Investigate further options for creating a 'future study' mapping tool.
- Ask Access module teams to consider time management content in the modules when they are next reviewed.

Who belongs in STEM? Inspirational Stories for, and from, our community

You told us:

- Exploring Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) stereotypes in this session helped you to feel a greater sense of belonging in your subject area.
- Hearing role models /STEM stories from other students in this session also helped you to feel a greater sense of belonging in your subject area.
- You would like more events or meetings.
- You are interested to learn about careers in STEM.
- You are worried about disabilities impacting career options.

We have:

 Created a <u>resource to support reflecting</u> on stereotypes in STEM.

- We are planning series of events with similar topics.
- We are linking with Careers and Employability Services to explore topics of interest and concern (careers and disability).
- We will invite more OU student voices to feed back into future events and share their experiences.



The cost of living, The OU and your studies

You told us:

- 88% of you said the cost of living has had some degree of impact on your studies; 75% of you were not aware of funding and finance support at the OU.
- Discussing this topic in this session was very supportive and reassuring that you are not alone.
- Having to take on extra work whilst keeping up with studying has an impact on mental wellbeing.
- The strain on budget has meant potentially missing out on buying recommended study materials as the money is needed for other priorities.
- What you do to save money.



We have:

- Evaluated and shared information and insight with front line colleagues to further enhance their awareness around the impact of cost of living on students' lives and studies.
- Shared your feedback from the session with the Financial Wellbeing Group at the OU to demonstrate how the cost of living may be impacting studies.
- Suggested changing the headings in the Help Centre so you are able to identify the relevant financial support more easily.

Suggestions for action:

- Further signposting of funding and finance support at registration/induction for modules.
- Additional sessions like this one at other times of the year, in co-ordination with other colleagues such as the Financial Wellbeing Group, Fees Team and Student Hub Live.
- Create a funding training video for front line colleagues.

What's stopping you unlocking the careers toolkit?

You told us about engaging with Careers and Employability Services (CES):

- You would like broader explanations of 'career', beyond a focus on employment to include more advice on training, apprenticeships, support for disabilities and to address age barriers and career transferability.
- You wanted us to address areas of stigma and anxiety to put you at ease at initial points of contact. These include unemployment, long-term health issues, anxiety and a lack of self-confidence as well as issues impacting Black and Minority Ethnic students.

We will:

Work with relevant colleagues to make these aspects explicit within the service offer and promotional messages for activities and resources.



You told us about our service information and 'one to many' resource:

- That being sent more information is less concerning than being sent irrelevant information
 - you consider further contact from CES as beneficial if it is adequately tailored to your needs. For example, more specific information regarding job opportunities and trends in specific to regions as well as information related to equality rights and the workplace.

We have:

- Enhanced our new Abintegro Labour Market Information tool and linked job search engine which allows you to search for jobs and related information down to postcode area.
- Updated the ethnicity and equality section of our webpages to ensure that student needs are aligned to equality and diversity in the workplace.

What's stopping you unlocking the careers toolkit?

You told us about employer engagement:

- Our employer engagement activity needs to be underpinned by the need to address intersectionality, in particular support for those with disabilities and mental illness support back into work and in work; employer advocacy.
- To work with employers to tackle age discrimination.

We will:

- You loved our specific employer panels events and Careers Fest (Fair). Our Employer Engagement team will consider how these events, with a focus on diversity and in work support as well as occupational disciplines, could be delivered in the future.
- Consider how advocacy on behalf of OU students can be addressed in more sophisticated ways through our employer relationships.



You told us about our new service tools:

Three minute career check-in - you were not aware of this tool and did not use it very much.

- We have: assisted the Personal Learning Advisor Team to advertise the tool to students who need more in-depth support. Our Race Equality Action Group have reviewed the messaging of the tool so that the text is more suited to best meet the needs of a wide range of students.
- We will: consider your very useful suggestions (such as promotion via module tutors, signposting within monthly communications, and links via Future You) to further promote and embed the tool so you can better access and realise its benefits and impact on your learning and career journey.

Navigating Your Future Pathway – you did not use the tool due to a lack of knowing how to respond to the questions, time and understanding its relevance for you. You provided some great ideas on how to address these issues.

We will: consider your suggestions as part of our Service Design Review for 25-26 and continuous improvement approach to how we deliver our services including self-directed resources.

Library skills for confidence and success

You told us that:

- we need to market our generic library tutorials more;
- you would like us to add information about our targeted and generic tutorials to the weekly calendar;
- you would like to see a standalone Digital and Information Literacy (DIL) course ahead of each module;
- you like the idea of being offered badges for attainment of DIL skills.

We have:

- ✓ Already promoted generic library tutorials on Facebook, X, Student Home (every month and ahead of each session).
- ✓ We loved your enthusiasm for a badged course. It has encouraged us to continue to develop a three-level badged DIL course which we hope to launch in September 2024.

- Update our communications to better advertise that recordings of all our training sessions are available.
- Look into adding information about our targeted and generic tutorials to the weekly calendar.
- We love the idea of a standalone DIL course ahead of each module and are exploring the possibility that our badged DIL course could be offered this way.



Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

Exploring the Language and Perceptions of Mental Health and Wellbeing Student Support

You told us:

- It's sometimes difficult to find out what support is available and how to access it.
- Having someone explain clearly at the start of studies what Disabled Students' Allowance is and how to access it would be really helpful.
- It's important that there are as few steps as possible to accessing MH support as more steps = more barriers.
- Using words like 'disclosure' and 'declaration' about mental health can feel unhelpful and stigmatising.
- More regular forums for students to discuss and share their experiences and ideas would be good.



We have:

- Reviewed our use of language around sharing mental health challenges to move away from the terms 'disclosure and declaration' – we are updating this across Student Support Services.
- Organised a series of online 'DSA Application
 Support Events' next one is 13 August

- Continue to review our webpages to ensure information on support services is easy to find and navigate.
- Continue to review referral pathways to support (e.g. Mental Health Casework) to ensure these are accessible to all who need them.
- Explore ways to provide further spaces for students to discuss and feed back ideas, concerns, and experiences about mental health and support at the OU.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

Wellbeing: Digital apps and their use

You told us:

- That many of you had not heard of either the OU's Wellbeing App or TalkCampus.
- Wellbeing support that is based around the challenges of being an OU student is preferred.
- To promote specific features within these services.
- About specific features that you wanted in a wellbeing/mental health support app. For example; links to external organisations and wellbeing support for TMAS and EMAs.



We have:

- Reviewed the current comms plan, making changes to increase student awareness.
- Asked service providers to create further marketing materials.
- Started to create an assignment wellbeing toolkit within the Wellbeing App.
- Asked subject matter experts to write specific wellbeing content for OU students to go into the Wellbeing App.

- Rewrite Help Centre pages to provide more details on specific features within these apps.
- Consider marketing to students to be more content specific and relevant to the point in the student's academic journey.
- Continue to use the communications methods you said you preferred, for example, StudentHome.
- Add into the Wellbeing App and TalkCampus more signposting to outside organisations.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

Reducing mental health inequity through the Access and Participation Plan

You told us:

- Information about mental health and wellbeing should be promoted within module space/forums and by tutors.
- It is tiresome having to explain to a new tutor every year about issues and how they can help.
- Applying for Disabled Students' Allowance is difficult and stressful.
- The term mental health is ok but wellbeing is better
- Asking students to disclose is negative, share would be better.



We have:

- Included students with mental health difficulties as a priority group in the Access and Participation Plan (APP).
- Set key targets for improved pass rates for students with mental health difficulties in the APP.
- Set key targets for improved progression rates for students with mental health difficulties in the APP.

- Check in regularly with our students with mental health difficulties to better understand your needs and shape interventions that create greater equity for you.
- Deepen our understanding of intersectionality, recognising our students as individuals who have many intersecting characteristics.

Tuition Time Travel

You told us:

What you think the study experience for OU students of the future (2034) will be like:

- Widespread use of AI and immersive technologies for both virtual classrooms and informal spaces, such as augmented reality, virtual reality and virtual cafes.
- Greater interactivity in teaching, you will still need human contact.
- Digital skills / inclusion and open access will continue to be vitally important.
- More start dates / times for modules, and generally greater flexibility.
- More personalisation of teaching, assessment and student support.
- Easier access to information and resources without so much 'information overload'.



We have:

Captured insights from the session, which will feed into a 'Future Of' programme of work at the OU, for example, feeding insights into the development of pilots over the next few years.

We will:

Offer more opportunities to gather wider student views as part of the 'Future of' work, for example through events and Student Consultation.

Immersive 3D and extended reality experiences in our curriculum

You told us:

- Developments in 3D, Immersive and Extended Reality need to be user driven rather than technology driven.
- These approaches would be ideally suited to allowing students to explore spaces that they would not otherwise have access to (e.g. Ancient Rome).
- There is also an opportunity to use these technologies to improve the connection with others and to feel 'in the same place.'

The Open University

We have:

- Feedback has been used to inform the construction of work packages for next phase of the OpenXR Studios project.
- Begun looking at methods to gather a greater range of student feedback as the project progresses.

- Ensure that future work is centred on curriculum and user need rather than being technology driven.
- Develop ways of ensuring the student voice continues to inform the progression of the OpenXR Studios project.

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), Accessibility Tools and the power of assistive technology

You told us:

- We need to raise awareness that receiving DSA does not impact on benefits.
- It would be beneficial for GPs to be provided with enhanced information and guidance on completing the DSA form appropriately.
- We need to continue increasing students' awareness of the support available (for example, the Mental Health Casework and Advice Team and support with DSA applications).
- It would be useful to increase students' awareness of the apps and the accessibility features.



We have:

- Planned a series of online events to provide further support for students applying for DSA.
- Captured ideas for a Badged Open Course on digital skills that will include a section on accessibility.
- Started to developed a suite of videos to support with digital accessibility.

- Share a suite of videos that will support you with digital accessibility.
- Develop a proposal for the OpenLearn team to develop the Badged Open Course.
- Evaluate the events delivered to support students with their DSA applications, with a view to rolling them out further.
- Explore mechanisms for sharing feedback on GPs' completion of DSA forms with funding bodies.

Improving the online student experience at the OU

We worked through activities to get your feedback on the 'Save for later' feature available on OU websites including module pages.

You told us:

- Many of you were not aware of the 'Save for later' feature.
- Some of you had used it, but then found it difficult to find the saved pages.
- You thought the 'Save for later' icon was too hidden at the bottom of pages.
- You gave us feedback on some new design ideas for the 'Save for later' feature.



We have:

- Shared findings from this session with the Product Development Manager responsible for 'Save for later'.
- Ran further in-depth usability sessions on 'Save for later' with members of the Student Experience Research Panel.
- Gathered more evidence to support the key finding from this session that students currently find it difficult to locate saved pages.
- Signed up students who requested to join our research panel during this session.

We will:

Use our findings from this session and the follow up sessions to find solutions to improve the ease of use of 'Save for later'.

OU Students Association Conference 2024

You told us:

- In this session and at the in-person Student Consultation Meetings, we asked you for your feelings and experiences around the name of your Students Association, and the possibility of renaming it a students' union. We gathered feedback and held informal votes in each session.
- Across all sessions, including this one online, 71% said they would be in favour of changing the name to a union.
- We made clear that these votes were informal, but that depending on results and student feedback, we may then put this to a formal vote at Conference.



Since the Student Voice Festival:

- We have gathered together all the input from this session and other channels.
- The Student Leadership Team and our Trustees agreed on the basis of your feedback that we should hold a formal vote at our Conference on this matter.
- Resolution D that was voted on was:

 Students are asked to vote on a
 motion to rebrand the OU Students
 Association to be known as the OU
 Student Union (OpenSU).
- The result was that 83.34% voted in favour as part of the OU Students Association Conference and we will now be taking this decision forward.

OU Students Association: Sustainability for OU Students: what's important to you?

You told us:

- You want more information about how to recycle books and other study related items.
- You want to be able to opt out of receiving printed materials.
- You want the OU to divest from fossil fuels.
- You want to know what students can do personally.
- You want to see sustainability embedded into the curriculum.

Feedback was summarised on The Hoot.



We have:

- Reached out to OU colleagues to ask for more promotion about recycling.
- Shared a statement with key OU departments about a potential books opt-out and received a commitment that this is being investigated.
- The OU have divested from fossil fuels.
- Collected student articles on <u>The Hoot</u> and hosted Sustainability Panel discussions.
- The OU have created the inclusive curriculum tool, which encourages module teams to include sustainability in their courses.

- Work towards our Environmental Sustainability <u>Action</u> <u>Plan</u>, with strands on impact, engagement, policy and the OU.
- Continue to work with OU colleagues to improve communication with students on sustainability matters.
- With our new OU Students Association Sustainability Representative, continue to call for sustainability to be included in the curriculum via our team of Student Representatives.

Your new StudentHome

You told us:

- You liked the new pages available in the prototype.
- More pages in this design would be beneficial.
- You would like links to specific events to be available.

We have:

- Started work on more pages across the platform.
- Looked at how we can enable notifications to include these events.

We will:

Continue to develop these pages across the student journey, enabling links to other areas more readily available.



Forum: Sharing your experience as a HWSC K102 student

You told us:

- The induction was helpful and helped you to prepare for the module.
- The clarity of guidance for some of the assessment tasks could be improved.
- You valued the chance to use a reflective tool for TMA01 but felt it was not necessarily useful to repeat the use of this for every TMA.
- That you felt well supported by your tutors, the Student Support Team and IT support desk.
- You would like to see more examples of practice from a range of cultures in the module materials.



We have:

- Carefully scaffolded induction for the module for students.
- Evaluated the level one Assessment Grid to improve clarity.
- Guidance for reflective tasks is being reviewed.

- Signpost students to the new OU Ready induction materials in addition to module specific induction.
- Refresh the level one Assessment Grid to increase the clarity of assessment criteria for both students and tutors.
- Reconsider and amend assessment guidance for reflective tasks.
- During enhanced maintenance of the module, we will look at ways of increasing the diversity of case study materials.

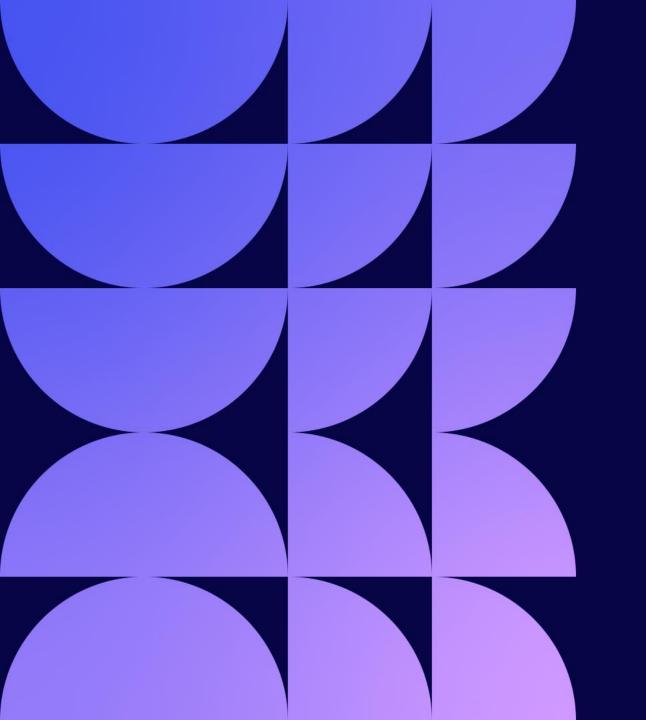
Notes:

The response to the online forums on Director of Student Success and What's in a name? Changing the OU Students Association Name can be found within the Student Consultation Meetings response document.

Not all sessions have responses in this document as some were focussed on community building or information giving, or had very low attendance. For example, 'What it's really like to study for a PhD at the OU' shared a resource on PhD study at the OU. Please do contact student-voice@open.ac.uk with any questions.

We are very grateful for all your feedback and engagement with the sessions.





Thank you!

Please visit the <u>Student</u>
<u>Voice website</u> for more information about Student
Voice at the OU or <u>sign up to</u>
<u>our Mailing List</u>.



