Student Voice Festival 2024

Responses to the Student Consultation Meetings, held in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh, London, Milton Keynes, and Manchester.

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OU Students ASSOCIATION

Background

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

As part of the Festival, the OU's annual face-to-face Student Consultation Meetings were held.

Nearly 100 students attended in total, there was some brilliant discussions, and the OU and OU Students Association are extremely grateful for your feedback and insight.

The meetings focused on three topics: Director of Student Success, the Open University Students Association and Enrolment Services.

This document contains the responses to feedback and insight from students shared at the meetings.

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Director of Student Success
We asked, You said…

Summary of session:

- We asked you to take on the persona of the Director of Student Success.

- In groups, we asked you to devise an idea that the Director of Student Success could undertake in order to help more students successfully complete their first TMA on their first module.

Phase 1 – Wild Idea:

- We firstly asked you to share your ideas, being as radical as you like, before refining them. Over 100 ideas were shared and have been grouped into key themes.

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Wild Ideas – Key Themes:

- Improve guidance and support materials
  - Promote Student Hub Live to new students
  - Provide clear templates and models answers aimed to meet different expectations

- Ensure tuition is consistent and supports the first TMA
  - Make better use of Tutor Group Forums
  - Make first tutorial on the TMA compulsory

- Build a sense of community and peer support
  - Share tips from fellow students
  - Better use of audio and video by tutors

- Personalise support to meet differing needs
  - Provide more options for 1:1 support
  - Create a TMA simulator using AI

- Change approach to assessment
  - Lower the stakes of the first TMA
  - Have one common TMA at level one for all modules

Director of Student Success
You said...

Phase 2 – Idea Development:

- We then asked you to develop your ideas within your group. Approximately 25 ideas were developed and grouped into these key areas:

Developed ideas – key areas:

- Developing TMA templates and models.
- Developing video resources, including featuring students sharing their own experiences.

Developed ideas – key areas (continued):

- Putting in place a more consistent approach to tutor and tuition events from module-start, with an emphasis on relationship building and communications.

- Promoting community, for example by promoting Student Hub Live, building a new community app or introducing a buddy system specifically for the first TMA.

- Using new technology to seek more information from students to then personalise support and signpost students to relevant resources according to skills, experience and confidence.

- Introducing a more consistent and supportive student experience from the outset to build up to the first TMA.

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Director of Student Success
We did…

Tuition and tutor support

- You identified that support in the lead up to your first TMA can be inconsistent and that you had experienced a variety of approaches. We have been working on sharing best practice between modules. This is designed to ensure that staff are aware of proven example activities that have been shown to positively impact students to successfully submit their first TMA. We will continue to build on this work in response to your feedback.

- We have produced some written guidance for staff on the delivery and design of tuition to provide greater consistency across modules.

- We have worked on improving the student Help Centre guidance regarding early tutor-student contact and what you can expect.

- We will continue to review this feedback and see how it can be used to inform our future work to support more consistent high-quality tutor-student interactions.

Communications

- We are trialling new communications for modules presenting in October 2024 that provide reassuring support to students prior to their first TMA submission. The content will be generic, rather than module specific, but timed to ensure that students are informed on deadlines and who to contact/where to go for help.

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Director of Student Success
We did…

Assessment policy and practice

- We are currently running a number of projects on reviewing and developing assessment policies and guidance to ensure it is consistent through your studies.

- We will be reviewing how marking criteria is explained and used to support students. One of our priorities is to develop marking criteria that you will see as students to help you understand how to respond to assessment and how to ensure you do well.

- We are improving the way key information relating to assessment is shared with students and will be publishing it in one place to support students.

Use of generative artificial intelligence (AI)

- We are working on guidance on how to use freely available Generative AI tools to obtain alternative explanations, get feedback on drafts, generate self-test quizzes and such like.

- In order to support students more effectively. We are also planning the construction of proof of concept AI-based tools, trained on OU materials, for the same purpose.

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Director of Student Success
We did…

Community building

- We have aimed to increase the profile of community in our new induction resources.
- There are a small number of peer mentoring opportunities across the University localised to particular groups. There is also a Student Mentoring Framework available for staff to use.
- We have integrated Student Hub Live in subject sites and OU Ready (Induction) materials which helps our students find out about us at the start of their study journey.

- We have revised our induction communications to include a community themed message, which highlights how students can get involved and feel part of the OU.
- We are currently reviewing and redesigning the Community area on StudentHome.
- A community app is being explored by the OU Students Association and is something we hope we can pursue in the future.
- We will continue to review this feedback and see how it can be used to inform our future work.

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OU Students Association

Could changing our name to a Students' Union give greater visibility and a clearer idea of what we do?

Overall, students voted 71% in favour of changing the name to Student Union over 29% who preferred Students Association (n=80). On joining the OU, 84% of students had expected to find a Student Union, as opposed to 13% who had expected to find a Students' Association (based on 31 students who answered this question across all consultation events).

You told us:

"We have an idea about what a student union is, we don't know that about an association"

You got to vote!

As part of the Students Association Conference 2024, we gave every OU student an opportunity to vote on this proposal.

Resolution D 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.

OU Students Association

Proposition from your elected team:

Students should be supported to gain diagnosis for special educational needs, such as dyslexia, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and others, since diagnosis could impact study/support on offer.

You told us:

Student feedback highlighted the key areas that made getting a diagnosis a source of stress and anxiety:

- Long NHS waiting lists
- Cost of getting a private assessment
- Accessing study support without a diagnosis

Where students were in favour of the policy, they highlighted potential benefits such as getting study support, reducing stigma, and ease of getting a diagnosis. They also identified what such support could look like in practice, such as better signposting to information, better support around study-related resources, and more tailored support as we gain a better understanding of additional needs.

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OU Students Association

You told us:

However, students raised concerns over the role that the Association should play here – that of offering support or leading on additional needs diagnosis:

"Is this something the university should do, or the Association? It's the job of the university, the Association should help and support, but not lead on this (similar to other universities)"

"Could this end up taking responsibility away from statutory services (provided by universities)"

Other concerns raised were around costs, getting trained professionals, whether more student representatives would be needed, and how any decision-making processes would work in practice.

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You got to vote!

As part of the Students Association Conference 2024, we gave every OU student an opportunity to vote on this proposal. We clarified that the proposal was for the Students Association to campaign for the University to better support diagnosis, rather than the Students Association taking on the role itself.

Resolution E was:

Approve a motion to support the Students Association to campaign for the University to better support diagnosis of Neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD where students are seeking a diagnosis to support their study.

The result was that **91.28%** voted in favour.

Creating a better enrolment experience for new students

Summary of session:

- We asked you to review our first draft of what should be included in an improved and simplified enrolment service for new students.

- We wanted to know if you thought anything was missing, or in the wrong place, or didn't make sense.

- You recorded your thoughts on post-it notes and then presented your ideas back to us in a 5-minute recorded session.
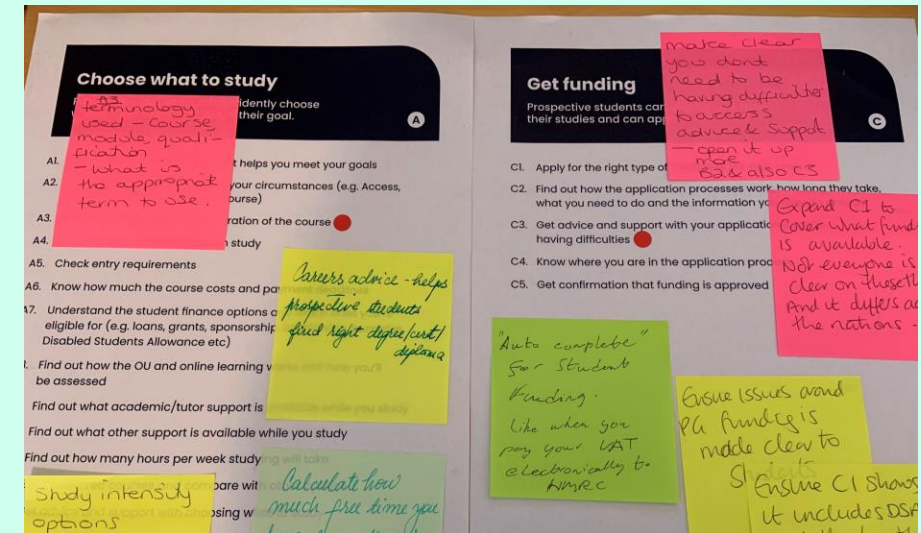
Summary of feedback:

- There were lots of things we hadn't thought of!

- Your experience told us that there were some things that deserved higher priority than we had indicated.

- You also provided some good insights into improving the language and terminology.

On the next slide are just a few of the points that came up most frequently.

Creating a better enrolment experience for new students

You told us to:

‣ Provide accessible alternatives to text-based content, such as visual or video formats.

‣ Set realistic expectations about how Open University study works, including the challenges as well as the benefits.

‣ Provide a way for users to check their readiness for study before applying.

‣ Allow users to track their progress at all stages of the journey.

‣ Give greater priority to explaining the differences between studying full-time and part-time, and detailing the types of advice and support available while studying.

‣ Clarify the language around payment and funding for all nations.

We have:

‣ Added missing items such as credit transfer to the draft service map.

‣ Tested enrolment journey concepts with prospective students and validated points such as the need for clear, timely and relevant communications at every stage.

‣ Prototyped a 'task list' to show users how far along the journey they were, and what was left to do.

‣ Delivered a 'check you're ready' feature to a proportion of applicants in England. We will be measuring success over the next weeks and months.

We will:

‣ Continue to ensure that the overall service map is aligned to the user needs identified through your insights as well as from other user research.

‣ Develop further prototypes focusing on all stages of the enrolment journey using evidence from research with prospective and current students.

‣ Incrementally, deliver parts of the new, improved, simplified enrolment service to new applicants.

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Thank you!

Please visit the [Student Voice website](#) for more information about Student Voice at the OU or [sign up to our Mailing List](#).