

RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON ACCESS MODULES

SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on Access modules offered at the Open University which took place between 13 and 27 August 2021 on the Access Board of Studies Consultation Forum. The forum is available at <https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=24819>.

Students were asked seven questions covering topics including their reasons for studying Access, communications from the module team, barriers to online study, activities in the module (including Careers & Employability), and the financial support process.

Participation in the consultation was as follows:

- Students registered: 115 registered in advance (out of 7671 eligible)
- Posts by students: 212
- No. of students posting at least once: 42
- Total ratings (likes and favourites): 15
- Estimated readers (minimum): 60

A feedback report has been produced and was considered at the Access Curriculum and Student Support Team meeting in November 2021. Module-specific feedback has also been taken to the individual module team meetings.

Key themes emerging from the consultation were as follows:

- Students need clarity around the purpose of the different forums in use on the Access modules
- The support students receive from their Access tutor generally exceeds expectations.
- Student loan application processes present a challenge for many students.
- More input on note-taking online would be beneficial.
- The reasons students gave for studying an Access module demonstrate that the modules are attracting the right cohort of students.
- Students would like greater clarity about frequency/length of tutorials.
- Students would like the opportunity to experience a group tutorial before they start level 1.

Actions that the Access Programme Team are taking as a result of this consultation are as follows:

- A project has been initiated to investigate the use of forums on Access modules. The output from this project will inform decisions around whether to continue to offer both a module-wide forum and individual tutor group forums. If a decision is made to continue with both forums, the module team will provide clarity to both tutors and students around the purpose and usage of the different forums. A welcome post will be included on each module-wide forum to explain how the forum will be used and to introduce the moderators and members of the module team that might post.
- Feedback about the student loan application process has been referred to Academic Services who are responsible for the Open University's relationship with the Student Loans Company.
- The module team will incorporate more information about online note-taking in the Access modules. This will be effective from the 22J presentation.
- Feedback from Y032 students suggested that the Business & Management content was not popular with the majority of students. Work is in progress to separate Y032 into two new modules, Y034 (focussed on Social Science, Health and Social Care, Psychology) and Y035 (focussed on Business & Management and Law). This will enable students to select the disciplines that are most relevant for them.

- The Access programme team will introduce a requirement for all tutors to offer at least one online group tutorial towards the end of the module, in addition to the existing 1-to-1 telephone tutorials. This will be effective from the 22J presentation.

FULL RESPONSE

Question 1

Student Communications: As a student, you receive lots of communications from the Open University. These include messages from your tutor, reminders about TMAs and preparation tutorials, careers and employability information/events, other module-related activities such as Moving On week or options week etc. Please tell us which you found useful/not useful and why. What is your preferred means for us to communicate with you and why e.g. email, text, via the forums, news items on the module website?

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
<p>"Sometimes I feel that there are so many different ways that the OU contacts us that it can be a bit confusing."</p> <p>"I prefer email communication. I feel forum posts can be missed especially at very active times prior to a TMA"</p>	<p>We will continue to ensure that all important/time critical messages are sent to students by email. A welcome post will be included on each module-wide forum to explain how the forum will be used and to introduce the moderators and members of the module team that might post.</p>	<p>Welcome posts to be included from 22B.</p>

Question 2

Online study: What barriers to online study did you face? For example, lack of access to a computer/the internet, a disability, lack of IT skills, cost of equipment? How did you overcome these barriers? What else could the OU have done to help?

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
<p>Despite most people saying that they did not face any genuine barriers to online study, 4 students said they still had a preference for hardcopy.</p> <p>"my personal preference is for hard copy study materials (showing my age perhaps!) and I find it frustrating that only the first of the three study blocks for Y033 is available as a book."</p> <p>One student suggested that students who have a preference for hard-copy materials should be given the option to pay for them.</p>	<p>The online material is written differently as it is not designed to be studied hardcopy. There is lots of interactive material and students lose the benefit of this when studying the online material in print. However, all modules do have a "print on demand" option so students are able to print the material for themselves if this is their preferred method of study.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Question 3

Reasons for studying Access: Why did you choose to start your studies with an Access module? Please specify which Access module you studied/are studying.

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
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Responses to this question clearly demonstrated that students are choosing Access for the reasons we would expect and that we are attracting the right cohort of students.	No action required	N/A
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Question 4

Subject disciplines and module activities: Which subject disciplines in the module did you enjoy most and why? Which were you less interested in and why? Which activities did you particularly enjoy/not enjoy and why? Did you prefer learning about the subject matter or the study skills? Please specify which Access module you studied/are studying.

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
Students provided module-specific feedback e.g. <i>"Without a doubt the section I enjoyed least was the majority of the poetry in units 4 – 7...it went on for far too long and actually had me considering whether to continue with the course at one point" (Y031)</i> <i>"I did find some of the material a little too progressive. There are newspapers other than The Guardian..." (Y032)</i> <i>"The design element was the part I enjoyed the most, I loved doing the experiments that tested design ideas." (Y033)</i>	Feedback has been shared with the relevant module teams for consideration.	Any changes made as a result of the feedback will be effective from 22J (October 2022).

Question 5

Financial Support process: If you applied for financial support, how did you find the application process? Was it easy/complicated, too long/short? Were you able to obtain the evidence you needed? Please specify which presentation you studied on (e.g. 20J, 21B, 21E etc)

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
<i>"I applied for student finance and it was a tricky job. It was actually really stressful and I nearly gave up a few times after being told I wasn't able to apply for a student loan for an access course and then being told I was".</i> <i>"It did seem a bit of a shambles to be honest, but as far as I can see all the blame laid with Student Finance England - the OU staff I contacted were always very helpful and they seemed as exasperated as me that things kept going awry."</i> <i>"I have applied to SFE for a loan for my A111 course and am having some difficulty... It has been several weeks (about 5) and I have</i>	Feedback about the student loan application process has been referred to Academic Services who are responsible for the Open University's relationship with the Student Loans Company.	N/A

still not yet heard if I have been successful.”

Question 6

Careers and Employability activities: Which Careers and Employability activities did you engage in during your Access module (e.g. careers induction in week 2, Moving On week careers activities, appointment with a careers consultant etc)? Which did you find useful and why? If none, please tell us why. Is there anything else relating to careers and employability that you needed (e.g. information about careers using different subjects, some examples of where access students have gone, ideas about how to start to plan your career)? Did you feel you had the right amount of information and support around Careers and Employability during your access module? What actions are you going to take now?

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
<p><i>“I have retired and not intending to use my degree for employment prospects but will use it in my voluntary work, so I have not needed the Careers and Employability support. However, I would like to commend OU on this valuable support that is offered to students and I hope that is taken up by many.”</i></p> <p><i>“I don’t engage with these. I am managing to develop in my own career, and my employer gives me all opportunities so don’t feel I need it.”</i></p>	<p>Feedback about the Careers & Employability activities has been shared with the Careers Consultant for Access.</p> <p>Careers activities can be useful for general confidence and reflection and can also support activities such as personal development or volunteering. We have received positive feedback from students who participated in the “FutureYou” activity in Options week 3 who found it beneficial even though they were not actively seeking Careers and Employability input.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Question 7

Student Expectations: What sort of support did you expect to receive from your tutor before the module started? Did this change as the module progressed? How did this match with the support you actually received? What do you think your tutors expected of you? Is there any information that we could have provided before module start that would have been useful to prepare you?

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
<p><i>“When reading about the access course I read that there would be weekly one to one sessions with your tutor so it was something that I had expected.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would like to have had more live discussions in tutorials with other students, which was not part of the access course. We only came close to this in the TMA preparation sessions when we could write comments in the live text box...”</i></p>	<p>The Access team have initiated a thread on the tutor forum to discuss the best ways to inform students about what to expect. Suggestions to date include making a short video of an Access tutor talking about their role and specifying in the module materials exactly how much contact time with a tutor is included.</p> <p>The Access programme team will introduce a requirement for all tutors to offer at least one online group tutorial towards the end of the module, in addition to the existing 1-to-1 telephone tutorials. This will be effective from the October 2022 presentation.</p>	<p>Review results of the forum thread and decide which suggestions can be carried forward.</p> <p>Communication to tutors re: the requirement to hold one online group tutorial.</p>

Date: December 2021