

# RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON COLLABORATIVE WORKING

## SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on collaborative working which took place between 2 November 2020 and 16 November 2020 on the [Life, Health and Chemical Sciences \(LHCS\) Board of Studies Student Consultative Forum](#). Thank you very much for taking the time to contribute to this forum discussion. It has been interesting to read about your experiences and comments.

You have articulated what collaborative working means in the context of your OU studies and provided comments on all the key elements required for it to work well: participants willing to fully engage, understanding individual responsibilities, tasks and timescales, and participants bringing their competencies/skills to the collaboration.

There were some great examples of where you found collaborative working a positive experience, in particular, the remote experiments using the OpenSTEM Labs and the Chemistry Online Summer School, which helped you to develop academic understanding, as well as a range of practical and professional skills.

Where you found collaborative working unsuccessful, you have highlighted two key issues: other students not fully engaging with the activity/not engaging in a timely manner and other students lacking appropriate digital skills to engage in the activity fully. You have made several suggestions that we will explore with module teams including regular notifications/alerts reminding students via study planners/websites of weekly collaborative activity requirements (with an option to 'switch off' for those already working on the task) and links to related digital tools. We will also explore the role of the tutor encouraging participation and pre-TMA check-in sessions to highlight group issues/provide missing data. Your suggestions for alternative IT tools will be passed on to colleagues in Learner and Discovery Services (LDS) working on the virtual learning environment (VLE) development.

You commented that you would like to see a mechanism for allowing some student-led discussion of approaching TMA assessment, as experienced by students in other institutions, possibly on open forums. We will explore if we can trial this in some of our modules during the revision period/next presentation.

You also identified the importance of all students feeling part of a community, being able to 'get to know' the people you will be working with. We recognise how important this is for collaborative working too; we had planned to offer a LHCS student day conference, but unfortunately plans have been delayed because of the pandemic. Through the Science website, we are offering a series of [monthly events](#) across our curriculum, and are publishing newsletters for all LHCS Staff and students and would very much welcome your contribution so do [get in touch](#) if you would like to be involved.

## FULL RESPONSE

You said	OU response and action
Some of the most intense learning occurred when you met with other students to discuss an assignment or test. Could there be some 'halfway house' in enabling co-operative work during some assessment, such as an open forum to discuss a past year's paper or TMA.	A few modules presentations have created student common rooms in Adobe Connect, which were open for students to run informal sessions to discuss past papers etc but uptake has been extremely variable. We will pilot provision of student rooms on one or two further modules, facilitating student-led discussion of past assessment-type problems for the 21J (October 2021) presentations.
You would like to see more notifications/alerts reminding students via study planners/websites of weekly collaborative activity requirements (plus option to switch off for those already working on the task) to improve overall student engagement with collaborative working.	Different options are already used on a few modules (eg SDK100, S294 and S317). We will explore with module teams how best to add prompts and reminders for collaborative tasks on their module websites, and ensure they have a clear activity checklist. We will review notification alerts and check lists for collaborative activities ahead of 21J (October 2021) presentations.
The OU needs to ensure students, including credit transfer students, have been taught key	The Science subject site contains links to numerous resources, including materials on skills development.

digital skills and are confident using them before embarking on collaborative work.	Module teams do advise students to refresh their digital skills ahead of collaborative work starting, and provide links to suitable resources, well in advance of any scheduled collaborative activities.
The existing IT Guides for the collaborative tools take far too long to work through, so many students simply give up and muddle their way through.	Where simplified guides exist, we will ensure LHCS Modules Teams provide the resources on their websites and point to these resources well in advance of any scheduled collaborative activities. We will also request colleagues develop quick access guides and/or videos for using the current collaborative tools.
VLE forum structures were less familiar to current OU students as they are 'old tech', compared with Facebook and WhatsApp. Students suggested the OU explores some alternative tools such as WhatsApp, Slack, Discord and Miro.	Please note that the University is currently developing a new policy in relation to the use of social media which will give students additional guidance on benefits and boundaries. We have fed back the comments raised in this consultation with colleagues working on VLE development.
You commented that collaborative working skills need to more fully developed for all students to ensure they were equipped with the required skills to use the collaborative medium confidently. Module Teams create 'How to do collaborative work successfully' setting out clear expectations for all team members with each activity.	This was discussed at a LHCS Board of Studies Executive meeting regarding developing a generic guide across the LHCS curriculum, some collaborative activities are quite limited in scope, however and it was felt a general guide would be of limited value. We will add a section on collaborative/group working on the Science website and will ask the student interns (working summer 2021) to review these resources.
Module teams agree pre-TMA dates to release missing data for those groups with non-contributing students, so that tasks can be completed in time	Module teams will liaise with their tutors and agree dates by which substitute data is made available to groups that have non-contributing students.
Opportunities for face-to-face study days.	This is something that the LHCS Board of Studies had planned for later this year, but plans have unfortunately been put on hold due to the pandemic. The online summer school will be running again in Summer 2021. We will look to host an event in Summer 2022.
You commented that students need to feel part of an online community to engage in collaborative work.	Over the last year, we have been developing ways to make students feel part of our online community by offering several different monthly events, primarily through the Science study website. We have asked module teams to explore with tutors ice-breaker/get to know your group activities early in presentation. Some module teams are also exploring further module team engagement for non-TMA discussions and guest lectures. It is great to hear how much you enjoyed the Chemistry Online Summer School and we plan to expand the offering in 2021 to include experiments for both biology and health science students. We very much welcome further input from students, to ensure that we are creating the types of experiences you would find valuable. Do <a href="#">get in touch</a> if you would like to be involved further.

**Date: 06/07/2021**