

RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON STUDYING MULTIPLE MODULES (FSI STUDY) IN PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELLING

SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on studying multiple modules (often referred to as flexible study intensity (FSI) study) which took place between 11th and 21st June 2021 on the Psychology and Counselling Board of Studies consultation forum. The student feedback can be found at <https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=24462>.

The forum was open to undergraduate psychology and counselling students with experience of studying more than one module within an academic year. The forum included 209 posts from a group of 153 students who registered to participate in the forum with over 180 readers. Discussion threads included questions around the decision to study multiple modules, the key challenges, tips for students studying multiple modules, changing study intensity and study support resources.

Key headline messages from students included requests to offer more modules with a February presentation to facilitate staggered study at Levels 2 and 3, and designing modules to avoid clashing deadlines. In addition, it was requested to vary tutorial dates to allow more time before assignment deadlines and further opportunities to build community. The visibility of guidance for students studying at FSI was raised along with some concern regarding negative messages seen or anticipated in relation to studying multiple modules. Feedback further highlighted that the key reason for students studying multiple modules relates to the desire to complete their qualification in 3 years, especially where linked to career or postgraduate aspirations. Tips offered by students for studying at full-time intensity including getting ahead of the study planner, creating own assignment deadlines to avoid clashes, the importance of planning and time management, asking for help and looking after yourself and your mental health.

This feedback has been shared within the Faculty FSI group and will be discussed in full at an upcoming Psychology and Counselling Board of Studies. In addition, headline messages from this forum have also been shared with the central university group looking at FSI study. Initial actions include the use of student feedback to inform the design of new curriculum to avoid assignment clashes where possible. A review of the advice and guidance to improve consistency in messaging to reflect support for FSI study and this is being further strengthened in sharing feedback with the Student Support Teams (SST). It is recognised that the resources and dedicated forum currently provided for students studying multiple modules do lack visibility so how best to improve their visibility and reach more students is being explored currently. The student feedback requesting the provision of dual presentation to allow staggered study at Levels 2 and 3 will be shared with School and Faculty for discussion as well as consideration of how tuition timetables correspond to assignment deadlines. Updates on these additional points will be added to the student voice website when possible.

FULL RESPONSE

The table below outlines some of the key messages emerging from the forum feedback along with the OU response, and how the feedback will be taken forward where relevant. The messages have been organised according to the key forum discussion threads and where the same topic has come up in two places, the response has been included again for completeness.

Making the choice to study multiple modules

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
You would like to complete your qualification in three years	The importance of facilitating FSI to allow students to study 120 credits per academic year is recognised and supported on all Undergraduate Psychology and Counselling modules and qualifications, and with additional support resources found on the qualification site, Study Home	

You tended to avoid contacting the SST to discuss studying multiple modules due to concerns that they might question this plan and some had received emails/phone calls that felt unsupportive	The SST regularly discuss study intensity with students. It is understood that questions designed to facilitate this discussion could be perceived as questioning the decision	Update SST with feedback from the forum to further enhance these conversations (briefing booked for end Sept. '21)
You studied Level 1 through staggered study and would like to be able to do this at Levels 2 and 3	Currently in FASS only Level 1 modules are offered with dual presentation across the academic year.	Share student feedback requesting the provision of dual presentation to allow staggered study at Levels 2 and 3 with School and Faculty for discussion
You changed from one module a year to two modules or vice versa as and when your personal circumstances have allowed it	Being able to slow down or speed up study intensity is recognised as of great value to OU students and will continue to be offered	

The key challenges of studying multiple modules

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
Time management is challenging and balancing your studies with your other commitments	There is a very useful interactive time planner which can be found through the help centre or the dedicated 'studying multiple modules' resources under 'Plan' on Study Home that allows you to add your current time commitments for each day and help you identify the hours you have available for study and when these are in a typical week	
Knowing submission dates for assignments and clashing deadlines	On the subject site, there are separate documents for each level which include all of the assignment deadlines for modules within the psychology and counselling qualifications to help with planning and preparation	As new modules and qualifications are produced by the School of Psychology and Counselling, these will be designed to avoid clashing deadlines where popular module combinations are known although it should be noted that some modules are based in other Schools or Faculties and therefore it is not possible to avoid clashes for all possible combinations
You found significant differences in the time needed for studying multiple modules at different levels	While the overall planned study hours are broadly the same across the qualification, at Level 1 FSI students may find they complete different tasks faster than indicated in the study planner due to consolidating skills development across both Level 1 modules. At Levels 2 and 3, more of the planned weekly study hours are used for independent literature searches and self-directed study on each module, so students may find they need more time to complete the work for their modules.	This feedback will be discussed with module teams and qualification leads to consider production of dedicated guidance for multiple module study at Level 2 and Level 3 to assist FSI students in planning and time management at these levels of study
Tuition events timetabled close to assignment deadlines which made it harder to plan and prepare for clashing or close assignment deadlines	The tuition schedule is prepared for each module separately. On psychology and counselling modules there is an overview taken to ensure tuition events don't clash between modules but these are not currently	The feedback regarding tuition will be passed to the team who conduct timetabling to facilitate a wider range of dates for assignment-related learning events on psychology and counselling modules wherever possible

reviewed in relation to early assignment preparation

Study support resources

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
Some students flagged that they didn't know that the dedicated FSI resources and forum on Study Home were there while others were only able to find them once so visibility was an issue for you	Currently, a news item is added to all psychology and counselling modules to signpost students studying multiple modules to the relevant section of the qualification site but it is recognised that the resources would benefit from greater visibility so how to achieve this will be discussed further	The feedback will be shared with module teams and the qualification manager to explore additional signposting possibilities to the FSI resources and forum on Study Home
You found the study map provided for DE100 to be really useful and missed this on other modules	The module map provided on DE100 is designed to provide Level 1 students with an overview of where they are in their studies and study tasks to complete. There are no current plans to provide these at Levels 2 or 3 but the feedback will be shared with module teams	

What would be your top tip or advice for students considering studying multiple modules?

You said	OU response
You recommend good preparation, for example by getting ahead in your studies by a week or two is important 'breathing space' for when/if something unexpected comes up	Students new to FSI regularly comment that they find top tips from other FSI students to be hugely beneficial so these feedback points will be incorporated into the 'top tips for studying multiple modules' found on Study Home here: https://learn2.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=206348&cmid=1378010
You look at upcoming assignments so that you can look out for useful content as you work through the module materials and create your own assignment deadlines to help avoid clashes	Students new to FSI regularly comment that they find top tips from other FSI students to be hugely beneficial so these feedback points will be incorporated into the 'top tips for studying multiple modules' found on Study Home here: https://learn2.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=206348&cmid=1378010
You also talked about the importance of building in time off from your studies to relax and look after your mental health	Students new to FSI regularly comment that they find top tips from other FSI students to be hugely beneficial so these feedback points will be incorporated into the 'top tips for studying multiple modules' found on Study Home here: https://learn2.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=206348&cmid=1378010

What do you think would help students who are studying multiple modules?

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
That it would be helpful if modules on the same level for a qualification planned assignment deadlines to be further apart	On the subject site, there are separate documents for each level which include all of the assignment deadlines for modules within the psychology and counselling qualifications to help with planning and preparation	As new modules and qualifications are produced by the School of Psychology and Counselling, these will be designed to avoid clashing deadlines where popular module combinations are known although it should be noted that some modules are based in other Schools or Faculties and therefore it is not possible to avoid clashes for all possible combinations

<p>You would like to have some tutorials timetabled earlier as you currently find them scheduled too close to the assignment deadlines to be beneficial if you begin assignment preparation early to help manage close or clashing deadlines</p>	<p>The tuition schedule is prepared for each module separately. On psychology and counselling modules there is an overview taken to ensure tuition events don't clash between modules but these are not currently reviewed in relation to early assignment preparation</p>	<p>The feedback regarding tuition will be passed to the team who conduct timetabling to facilitate a wider range of dates for assignment-related learning events on psychology and counselling modules wherever possible</p>
<p>You would like tutors to know both modules being studied on your qualification pathway and therefore, also be more aware of any differences and/or expectations on the other module you're studying, for example in relation to referencing systems</p>	<p>Tutors are currently appointed to individual modules rather than across study pathways and are therefore only able to advise and support your studies on the module they are teaching you. Also, due to the impact of the pandemic, the planned introduction of a single referencing system across modules was interrupted</p>	<p>The Board of Studies will review the current implementation of the Cite Them Right referencing system across Psychology and Counselling modules.</p>
<p>You would find it helpful to have the option for staggered study at Levels 2 and 3</p>	<p>Currently in FASS only Level 1 modules are offered with dual presentation across the academic year.</p>	<p>Share student feedback requesting the provision of dual presentation to allow staggered study at Levels 2 and 3 with School and Faculty for discussion</p>
<p>More opportunities to build community among FSI students would be helpful to share the study experience</p>	<p>A dedicated moderated forum for students considering or studying multiple module study is provided on Study Home and can be found under 'connect'</p>	

Deciding not to study multiple modules

You said

OU response

You've made the decision around whether to study part time or at full-time intensity based on different factors including work requirements, the impact of the pandemic, the demands of particular levels of study etc.

Being able to slow down study intensity according to external commitments or in relation to your study goals is an important facility we provide for students and will continue to be an important part of our study provision

Date: September 2021