

# RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON STUDY AT HIGHER THAN PART-TIME INTENSITY

## SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on study at full-time or high intensity which took place between 11<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021 on the [Social Sciences and Global Studies \(SSGS\) Board of Studies Student Consultation Forum](#).

The number of students who are studying at an intensity of more than 60 credits a year is growing every year. We are continually looking to maintain and improve our understanding of the experience and challenges of studying more than one module at a time, and to explore how we can help students in that position to achieve their study goals more effectively. Because this is a matter of interest common across Boards of Studies, the SSGS forum was part of a (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences) FASS-wide approach to flexible study intensity (FSI) and took place at the same time and with the same questions as forums in the School of Arts and Humanities and the School of Psychology. We will share learning between us.

To this end, we asked students who have experience of this intensity of study six questions. These questions were around their reasons for choosing to study at this rate; the support resources we already offer; what else they think subject-teams or the university as a whole could do (or what we might do differently); and sharing experiences, challenges and top tips for success.

Levels of participation (at less than 1% of potentially eligible students) was disappointing; this could be a result of factors such as timing, and this being the second consultation for this Board of Studies in fairly close proximity this year. The Board will be working with the student voice team to understand if there are lessons to learn from other areas with a view to increasing participation in future. Despite relatively small numbers of participants, the engagement, observations and suggestions from those who participated were excellent and gave the Board some very helpful insights.

In making the decision to study at a higher intensity, it was clear that speed of completion for professional and career outcomes was an important motivation for participants, in some cases prompted by life-changes and the pandemic. Students commented that the opportunity to stagger module start dates was appealing, and at level 1 this, coupled with the knowledge that this level of study was low risk in terms of affecting their overall qualification outcome, was an attractive way of trying it out. There was positive feedback about the advice and support from the university when students were making the decision and that the OU did encourage students to think carefully about full study intensity at level 1; some students had been proactively contacted by the OU to query their study intentions for FSI and felt this might be discouraging for some while others welcomed the OU contacting them to help with any questions they had about FSI. Where FSI had become too much, students spoke well of support from the Student Support Team and the advice that they could go back to FSI on future modules once any difficulties in their ability to study at that pace had subsided.

We were pleased to see one contributor noting how helpful they had found the free OpenLearn material on study skills in preparing them for study. One of these courses is part of our OU induction and linked on our disciplines' pages (Study Home) but the lack of comment in response to our question about use of the 'studying multiple modules' resources on our disciplines' study sites (Study Home) would suggest that these are not widely known. This is something we will act upon as it is clear that these are not sufficiently visible and would address a number of concerns around student preparedness for FSI at level 1 and the step up involved to FSI at level 2.

Challenges arising from clashing assessment deadlines surfaced as a key issue, as did maintaining discipline and momentum. The increase in complexity and challenge as you move up to level 2 was noted, and at least one student commented on the value of talking with their level 1 tutor as part of their decision-making. On managing workload, where pre-populated dual-study planners have been available, these were welcomed and found to be useful. The Board will continue to explore ways in which it may be possible to make this sort of resource more widely available, and available earlier prior to module start.

Clashing exams (2 exams in the same 3 day period) was highlighted by one student, and contrasting tutor/module approaches to referencing, a consequence of the university's gradual move from OU Harvard to Cite Them Right

was also mentioned as an issue across levels. It was positive to hear that tutors were approachable and a source of knowledge and support.

There was lots of helpful practical help shared in a 'top tips' thread; these included suggestions for self-motivation, the value of talking with your tutors and maintaining wellbeing, as well as practical tips around time management, spending time before start exploring the module calendar and planning study around your other commitments.

Going forward, students on the forum made a number of helpful suggestions; to review guidance to new students registering for FSI to balance pros and cons; where modules are often studied together, the module teams to work together to stagger TMA deadlines; for the step up from level 1 FSI to level 2 FSI to be supported with advice and guidance; for the links between modules commonly studied together to be explained/explored and for existing resources to support FSI to be more clearly signposted. The Board will explore all of these, and actions can be seen in the full response below.

## FULL RESPONSE

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
You would like to see staggered module start dates, especially at level 2 where study becomes more challenging, and preparation for TMAs requires more time.	At present we have this at level 1. We are committed to having two start dates for all level 1 modules going forward. At present, student numbers make two presentations at level 2 and 3 difficult, but their provision will remain a subject for discussion.	Notify the faculty's Associate Dean (students and teaching) of the views expressed at this SSGS flexible study student consultation.
Tutors don't always agree on points of technique in essay style or referencing at Level 1.	The universal introduction of a common form of referencing should go a long way to alleviating some of these disparities which we know have been a source of difficulty and frustration for students.	The Board will check on the implementation of Cite Them Right across SSGS modules.
You would like to see assessment submission dates staggered. In instances where students are likely to be studying a particular combination of modules together, you would like to see module teams work more closely together wherever possible to try and avoid TMA and exam/EMA cut-offs occurring at the same time.	The university's flexible study working group are looking across a range of challenges presented for high intensity study for opportunities for mitigation and solution. This is something we are very conscious of, but one of the challenges is the variety of combinations that modules are studied in, depending on students' chosen qualifications. However, there is flexibility of submission, so TMAs (and indeed EMAs) can be submitted early if that works better for you. In exceptional circumstances, there is always the opportunity for requesting an extension. Of course (and as was discussed in the forum) over-use or reliance on extensions can bring problems too. We encourage students to always talk through issues with their tutors; these discussions can surface ideas and should make sure that a workable and sensible study plan can be reached.	The Board will encourage module teams to work with each other to ensure clashes are minimised, and that this is considered at each approval and review stage in a module's life cycle.
You would like to have assessment cut-off dates earlier, and wider availability of dual study planners.	This is another key issue we're aware of and actively looking for solutions for in consultation with the university's flexible study	The Board of Studies to explore expanding the range of joint study planners to level 2/3, subject to demand.

	<p>working group. There's something of a tension between seeking to set cut-off dates that try to take account of other likely combined modules, and getting dates fixed early, but we remain hopeful that an automated solution will be possible that will facilitate our ability to make these ready earlier so that you can maximise your planning time, and hit the ground running when the module starts. In the meantime, we will continue to offer dual study planners across the widest possible selection of modules.</p>	
<p>You would like modules to offer 'time management' sessions at the start of each presentation, offering tips and practical advice for dual study, but to also make clear the path of the module and when peak periods within it are.</p>	<p>All modules now provide a 'Getting Started' guide to help with navigating the module and help identify peak periods. One of the principles that many OU students value is that of our flexibility, affording students ability to study (and submit) where and when works for them. We need to be careful to avoid the risk of losing this benefit by over-mandating use of time. In module design, module teams are encouraged and supported to make sure that 'directed' module workload is planned and managed so that an appropriate proportion of the time for study is left free for 'undirected' study- this includes independent reading, but also studentship actions like exploring the library, and planning your study time. We will work hard to make the flexible study support and guidance resources on the study site more visible, and hope that this will help too.</p>	<p>The Boards of Studies need to understand the lack of visibility of the Study Home pages, which provide a range of discipline specific and general support resources. We will work with relevant areas of the university to see how we can increase their visibility.</p>
<p>Time management could be aided through the development of a dynamic time management tool</p>	<p>A tool exists in the studying multiple modules resources on Study Home. Improving visibility and knowledge of this site is essential</p>	<p>The Board of Studies have explicitly incorporated this in messaging to new students as part of our induction messaging. We will explore the wider advertising of this too.</p>
<p>Post level 1 training/discussions to prepare students for changes in intensity and criticalities – enabled through webinars and forums</p>	<p>The SSGS Board of Studies currently offers bridging forums during the summer between levels 1 and 2 and levels 2 and 3</p>	<p>The Board of Studies will ensure this issue is built into the materials developed to support the forums.</p>
<p>Review promotion of academic skills development as part of each module content</p>	<p>We were pleased to see that the OU induction material that develops study skills was noted for its value for preparation by at least one participant. We'd like to find ways of making this more visible and encouraging use ahead of module start, so students who would like to do so can take advantage of this before they start studying module content. For others though who need to wait</p>	<p>A need for Boards of Studies to understand lack of visibility of the Study Home pages and Induction materials and influence relevant areas of the university to increase this for students.</p>

	until the module started, it was noted that modules are increasingly incorporating explicit study skills development in the module materials	
'Making connections' sessions could be organised, showing how one module 'fits' with others around it	We were pleased to see that students were looking to make links between different modules and in the cases of many joint degrees, these materials in the form of audio discussions and text commentaries were already available.	The Board of Studies to liaise with qualification leads to publicise material where it exists and to work with them to develop these where they currently do not exist.
There are areas where messaging to students to encourage conversations with their tutors may be valuable Build in guidance to students, to seek conversations with their current tutor or tutors before moving forward with full-time study at the next level	We recognise that tutors can be an invaluable resource for students both in supporting student induction and in helping students at the end of the module. The greater role that tutors will have in supporting students with the introduction of the new AL contract will help, and in the meantime we can encourage tutors to mention the support available to students in module/qualification decisions available via the Student Support Team (SST).	We will add this to the studying multiple modules resources on Study Home to emphasise the breadth of the support that tutors can offer in student induction. Consider using module study planners to prompt thinking at end of modules and to encourage students to talk to their tutor and then the SST if they have questions around study pace/choice.
Perceived discouragement on registration. Seek a review of how initial advice is given to new students seeking to study full-time so that a balanced representation of pros and cons, and issues to think about, is set out	The OU is committed to supporting flexible study. We recognise that our students are studying whilst juggling a wide variety of life-demands and differing circumstances. It therefore feels responsible to ensure that students are making fully informed decisions about intensity of study and aims to support students feeling prepared as they embark on their study journey. We are sorry if this comes across as discouraging or unsettling and have been pleased to read one follow up comment that "Since completing the year, I have been very happy to have signed up to both modules. I have found support on hand as required and the course overall has been very manageable".	The Board of Studies to liaise with the Director of Student Support and SST to develop appropriate scripts for discussion with students and to make SST colleagues fully aware of resources to support FSI.

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**Date: 21<sup>st</sup> July 2021**