RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PLAN

SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on the Teaching and Learning Plan (hereafter 'the Plan') which took place between 1 July and 15 July 2021 on the Student Consultation Panel forum. The summary of student feedback is available here.

Students were asked to provide their views on the aspirational aspects of the draft Plan, in order to further develop and finalise the content.

The focus of the draft Plan was to state what the OU currently delivers in relation to teaching and learning, and then to look forward with aspirations of what we anticipate we will do in the future. This included new initiatives that we think will improve our ability to hear from students at key points in a module and respond to them more quickly than we do at present.

The feedback from students has made a valuable contribution to a wider stakeholder consultation exercise, including all Faculties, Nations (OU in Scotland, Wales and Ireland), Associate Lecturers (tutors) and other key units. This is currently being considered by the academic team leading the development of the Plan in order to progress the approval of the Plan through university governance.

Summary of action taken:

- A thematic analysis of all comments (over 600 in total) has been undertaken over the summer in order to inform the next stage of the Plan's development.
- Specific comments relating to issues with current technology platforms (eg. Adobe Connect, Careers system) and missing Library materials have been shared with relevant colleagues.
- Specific suggestions around the wording of the principles and/or actions made during the student consultation are not covered in this response but have been taken into account during the development of the next version of the Plan.
- The Teaching and Learning Advisory Group meet every two weeks to discuss the development of the Plan and key issues arising from the consultation process.
- Outputs from the Teaching and Learning Plan consultation (including student feedback) are also being used to inform the development of the wider OU Strategy, and vice versa.
- In order to align with the development of the new OU Strategy, the intention is for the final version of the Teaching and Learning Plan to be considered by Teaching Committees and the Senate in early 2022.

Headline messages from students:

- Students predominately reacted positively to the principles and aims.
- Particular mentions include the importance of creating opportunities for students to feel connected to the OU family and the importance of peer support and its continual development.
- Students also felt confident that there is great potential for the OU to regularly engage with students for research opportunities and co-creation.
- A lot of the comments were focussed on the implementation of activities and opportunities, however the scoping and planning of these will be covered by more detailed implementation plan to be produced in due course. Key stakeholders, including students, will also be invited to participate in that phase of work.

FULL RESPONSE

Overall plan / general comments

You said	OU response
A limitation on the courses that are available to students who are not comfortable with all online material, which does not support the Teaching and Learning Plan vision to support students to choose the "right course" and for "open entry".	The University has a blended approach to teaching and learning and provides support to students to ensure they are on the right study path to achieve their study goals.
One comment not directly linked to the Teaching and Learning Plan was that international students find it difficult to prove they are a student, other than carrying paperwork, as the NUS cards are not for students living outside of the UK.	Clarification has been made around the scope of the plan, particularly in relation to international students and learners on alternative platforms such as OpenLearn and FutureLearn.
There was confusion about the term "Nations colleagues" and whether this refers to only the four nations (Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England) or international students as well. The needs of international students should also be considered.	
Tutors should be equipped with the skills and resources to "support students in unique circumstances" to achieve their study goals.	Staff development for continuous enhancement of teaching and learning provision (for all staff, not just tutors) has been added into the Plan.

Principle 1: Supporting students is central to our teaching and learning approach

You said	OU response
A student highlighted that there is no reference to "module day-schools" which support students learning and the aims of online tutorials are also missing. Other students described how student interaction with the OU is fragmented without tutorials.	The Plan has been expanded to highlight the strengths of the OU's tuition model, including day schools and tutorial provision.
Students highlighted that slow or no internet connection and digital skills are also barriers for students studying with the OU.	Recognition of, and actions to address digital inclusion have been added to the plan. This links to work already underway with the OU Students Association.
There was concern that alternative materials should and could not be eliminated. Alternative materials may always be required for some students. It was also noted how paying for printed versions may create inequalities between students and how students study styles vary with some using a combination of online and offline materials.	The challenges of providing accessible learning materials for all students is ongoing and the University is working towards providing equitable access for all students.
A student wanted to see more scholarships offered by the OU.	The availability of funding for supporting students is considered to be out of scope for the Plan, however, specific initiatives will continue to be considered by the OU as appropriate.
There were mixed responses from students around previous experiences of peer support, both positive and negative. However, many students saw peer support as important and those who hadn't been involved looked forward to exploring the opportunities.	Peer support for students (and staff) remains a key action in the Teaching and Learning Plan to enable interaction between fellow students who are at different points in their academic career and on different programmes of study. Scoping of specific activities and opportunities will be considered as part of the more detailed implementation plan.
Students showed interest but were unclear in how the analytics will be used and what data will be measured.	The Plan now recognises that data should be used systematically *and ethically* to identify and provide

students with tailored teaching and learning support. The implementation of this aspect will be considered by experts in the OU's Data and Student Analytics team.

You said	OU response
A student suggested new initiatives should be developed for submitting assignments online. For example, submitting Microsoft Word documents through a tablet is difficult.	Scoping of specific activities and opportunities will be considered as part of the more detailed implementation plan.
A student suggested that more support is required in the form of online training videos and live training sessions, for instance through Zoom.	

Principle 2: High quality lifelong learning should be accessible to everyone	
You said	**OU response**
Students sought clarity on what the inclusive curriculum tool is, which was answered by another student on the forum.	The 'inclusive curriculum tool' is one way in which the OU can ensure its curriculum is inclusive. The plan now recognises the tool as an example of good practice but also that there are potentially other ways to address this.
More support is required when enrolling on full-time study intensity. As some skills taught in one module were required simultaneously in another module.	Flexible study intensity remains a key aspect of the Plan, in support of the increasing numbers of students (many with protected characteristics) who need to complete qualifications more rapidly than part-time study has traditionally allowed.
A student commented that flexible internal internship and work experience opportunities should be offered more widely across the OU.	Scoping of specific activities and opportunities will be considered as part of the more detailed implementation plan, and in consultation with the Associate Lecturer Contract Change Programme.
Students wanted clarity on what "tuition hours used more flexibly" means but did support tutors being able to be flexible to support students.	
A student commented that on top of tutorials social activities for module groups should be offered online to combat the isolating nature of the pandemic. This is something seen to be offered by other universities.	The Plan now includes a specific principle around building academic communities - this includes opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction at module, qualification and institutional level and is likely to involve collaboration with the OU Students Association.
Students supported the proposal for a qualification tutor. Although there was some concern about how this may link with the Student Support Teams.	Scoping of specific activities and opportunities will be considered as part of the more detailed implementation plan.

Principle 3: OU teaching and learning is designed as an academically rigorous, research informed process	
You said	**OU response**
Scholarship centres should be promoted more widely to students.	Scoping of specific activities and opportunities will be considered as part of the more detailed implementation plan and shared with colleagues in the Research, Enterprise and Scholarship unit, who will be developing new research plan(s) as part of the development of the OU Strategy.
It is important that tutors are aware of upcoming research opportunities which can be shared with students and that tutors can direct students to where they can find out more or ask questions about the opportunities.	
A student suggested it would be helpful to have an 'opt in' option for tutorial recordings.	

It would be great to see "Masters and Doctoral students / early career researchers" involved in careers events and to hear about their experiences.

Offering mentorships and career development in academia for students on and off campus would be well received.

Offering online lectures, seminars or resources where students can find out more about the research projects staff are working on would help students to develop wider learning.

Principle 4: We aim to improve our teaching to support our students' aspirations	
You said	**OU response**
Some students expressed that they don't actively engage with FutureYou and felt that FutureYou should not become compulsory.	The Plan acknowledges that tailored personal development tools should be embedded to enable students to take charge of their personal and/or professional development as appropriate. It does not suggest that the use of personal development tools should be made compulsory.
A question was asked about what can alumni offer, how are they selected or what criteria will be used to identify alumni mentors. This aim needed to be made clearer.	Scoping of specific activities and opportunities will be considered as part of the more detailed implementation plan
Students supported expanding opportunities for virtual internships including for international students.	
Students supported the aim for a greater range of assessment options, particularly for online remote options for exams. Many supporting reasons were given including financial cost savings, travel time, caring responsibilities, reduces stress with travel logistics. Other comments included improving the current invigilation method as home environments may not be suitable for all students.	The feasibility and implementation of providing online exams is being addressed by the OU. Specific comments raised in response to the Teaching and Learning Plan consultation will be shared in order to help shape that work.

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