

RESPONSE TO STUDENT CONSULTATION ON CHANGES TO TEACHING AND ASSESSMENTS AS A RESULT OF COVID-19

SUMMARY

This is a response to the Business Board of Studies consultation on changes to teaching and assessments which took place between 15th April 2021 and 27th April 2021 on the [Undergraduate Business Board of Studies Student Consultative Forum](#).

The Undergraduate Business Board of Studies meeting is due to take place in September 2021 which will include this student consultation, we will endeavour to update students on any actions that are taken as a result of this student consultation.

Purpose of the consultation

This consultation sought students' views on changes to the way teaching and assessment on modules were carried out following the first national lockdown in 2020 as a result of COVID-19. In particular, we were interested to find out how this affected study, whether the changes made were positive, and what aspects of the delivery worked well. Face-to-face tutorials had to be replaced by online versions and some exams, which had previously always been face-to-face in specified venues, had to be converted into alternative formats. Due to the need to implement these changes within such a short timeframe, prior consultation of the study body, which would previously have occurred for any major change, was not possible.

Details of Student Participation

Consultation forum

- Students registered: 120 registered (14,497 eligible students)
- Posts by students: 35
- No. of students posting at least once: 15
- Total ratings (likes and favourites): 10
- Estimated readers (minimum): 61

Forum threads were set up to cover the following areas:

- What worked well
- Changes to teaching and assessments
- Whether the changes were positive

Summary of Findings and Highlights

There are important headline messages:

- The support provided by tutors and accessibility of the resources are widely recognised and valued
- Online tutorials provide flexibility and allow students to manage their study around other commitments. Recorded sessions are valuable as a means to catch up
- Face-to-face sessions are still widely considered valuable because of the opportunity for a different level of learning interactivity along with the social aspect of meeting tutors and fellow students in-person
- Technical issues with Adobe Connect around its perceived unreliability and the need for more IT support for tutors have been noted
- Improvements to the management of online sessions are required to enhance the learning experience. Requests for sessions to be more interactive, collaborative and practical with greater use of video and audio resources and more group work
- Extended TMA turnaround marking time and tutorials close to TMA deadlines have an impact on the learning experience
- Communication, including cancellation of exams and alternative arrangements has been frequent, thorough and relevant.
- An option for a remote exam remaining available to those who may have problems accessing exam centres would be appreciated

OU position on Adobe Connect

The university continue to monitor new developments in digital collaboration, teaching and online meeting tools, and Adobe remains a best-in-breed according to independent industry metrics and user research. As an institution we regularly review needs to ensure that we are aware of all options and requirements, and are able to balance features and complexity against scalability, familiarity and ongoing training overheads.

We have been actively exploring the use of Microsoft Teams, running some trials to learn more about how we might use it as an additional student-facing meeting tools and are rolling out the optional use of Teams for ad hoc one-to-one support conversations in parallel with Adobe Connect for scheduled tutorials.

FULL RESPONSE

You said

OU response

Next steps, if appropriate

Question set 1 - What worked well?

Theme: The flexible study model and support

I have found the support second to none. The online tutorials are brilliant for me as it means they are not intruding on the rest of my day so they fit in easily around my life.

Thank you.

The resources available from the OU are great, and I believe are very adaptable to changes with the current events,

I have been able to interact with other students via the forums and if I chose to, there are WhatsApp groups too.

In terms of social media use, this sounds very positive but don't forget that these sites are not moderated by the OU.

One student: The only trouble I had was around registrations and payment for my module which started in October 2020. The OU enrolment and Student Support Team's were inundated. My queries were resolved but there were significant delays.

The OU experienced an unusually high level of registrations in September 2020 and this impacted our ability to respond as quickly as we would have wanted to.

One student: I would propose to use an app that is used in business such as Teams/Zoom. This is business studies after all and most businesses have switched to these platforms.

Please see the "**OU position on Adobe Connect**" statement above.

Theme: The importance of face to face sessions

I did see that we were able to book face-to-face tutorials at LBS, and it was something I was looking forward to attending when everything was back to "normal". It is something that I would like to experience when I have time, and gain views from an array of lecturers.

Thank you. We recognise the value of face-to-face sessions to students. However, with ongoing uncertainty around the easing of restrictions in all four Nations, and to protect both students and staff, it is unlikely that there will be a return to face-to-face events before October 2022. The online alternative events are all planned to cover the full detail of face-to-face events and in terms of academic learning, are fully equal.

One student: I struggled to understand why tutors required longer to mark assessments when we were all in lock-down anyway.

The pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have affected students and tutors alike. It was recognised that tutors, who also have responsibilities of care and a variety of other

I received feedback and marks to my previous TMA in the close run up to the next therefore it was difficult for us students to apportion time to fully explore the feedback and learn from it.

commitments, should be supported with the extended marking time.

Theme: Managing online tutorial delivery

Tutor's proficiency in terms of recording the tutorial from the get-go (some tutorials recordings were started half-way through the sessions because the tutor forgot to record it)

We are sorry to hear about those issues. Support and training are provided to tutors on an ongoing basis, but a reminder to tutors will be provided.

Tutors must ensure the working order of the online system prior to the sessions.

Theme: Issues with Adobe Connect

The only thing that I would recommend moving forward is Adobe Connect, it does have a tendency to be unreliable and speaking to some students within live tutorials they feel it doesn't give them a collaborative experience. I understand people may feel uncomfortable using audio/video but I do think it would be a good option to offer both types of tutorials if day schools are paused for a while. The option being, if you prefer a quieter tutorial where you listen to slides and type questions if needed then there is an option for that or if you like live audio and/or video and prefer more collaborative presentations then there is an option too.

We are sorry to hear about those issues but see the reply above on this topic.

I think the only other thing I'd add would be Adobe Connect - it has felt glitchy for a while, and hasn't really improved. Perhaps some additional IT support to tutors could help?

Connectivity issues seem widespread.

One student: There has been very little TGF engagement and activities etc not posted or fed back on by our tutor as on other modules - I don't know if this is normal for level 3 courses (this is my first) or different tutor styles.

Thank you for this feedback, which we will pass to the Module Team for them to consider.

Theme: Limited interaction during online sessions

Student microphones are switched off and limited use of chat box meaning the tutorial is didactic and feels like a traditional lecture.

We are sorry that this was your experience. Whilst interaction among and between students is strongly encouraged, this is not always a mandatory element of the

The online tutorials did not work at all for me (bar one, which was acceptable). You don't feel part of a group (no video/audio being used), perhaps encouraging students to put your hands up and talk might have improved the experience? There was very little group work so then you may as well just send a presentation out? learning and if some students refuse to engage with fellow students we must accept their right to do so. However, we continue to improve opportunities for interaction so that as many students can do so as possible.

Question set 2 - Changes to teaching and assessment

Theme: The flexible study model

This style of tutorial worked perfectly for me. I did not feel as if my learning was of a lesser standard at all. Thank you

I chose the OU for the convenience of my studies fitting around my current commitments, and being able to choose whether I study mostly from home or decide to travel when I have the extra time is great. I believe having the options there for students who do wish to travel is amazing, but also having the option to be mostly online for those who have more commitments is great too.

I have a very demanding job where sometimes I'm working overtime, so recorded lectures are a life saver.

Theme: Cancelling EMAs

I was disappointed that our exams were cancelled, as the final exams count as 50% of the final grade. I felt as though I was denied the opportunity to increase my grade, which was only assessed on TMA's. Thank you and we are sorry to hear that this was your experience.

With regards to the EMA, I was lucky to have done well in my TMAs but I could have ended up with an unfair grade. Why cancel online submissions which examiners can still review in their own home/time. As a result, I lost interest in the course, didn't finish the modules (which I would have done otherwise) because I had already achieved a distinction.

I was slightly disappointed as last year was my first time studying with the OU and I missed out on submitting 3 EMA's which has led me to feel nervous about EMA/Exams that I have coming up but I do feel confident that my tutors will help prepare me as much as possible.

One student: I had an exam scheduled in March 2020 (module B292), right as we went into lockdown. This was cancelled and we were informed of the Thank you, this is great to hear.

alternative arrangements for assessment. This worked well for me and we were kept well informed. I was happy with how this was managed, particularly under such difficult circumstances.

Theme: Online tutorials cannot provide a complete substitution of the face-to-face experience

With regards to tutorials, pre-COVID-19, I really enjoyed the opportunity to meet others face to face for these. It is the one opportunity to do this when studying with the Open University, and I would really like to see these continue once restrictions ease. I do take part in the online tutorials too, but they are not replacement for the interactivity and social elements of the face to face tutorials.

Although, not having that freedom and option to travel to lectures has seen me lose some inspiration for the module, as interacting with people online does not have the same effect as seeing and hearing a lecturer in person. It does not seem to feel real. Similar to an online friendship to a real in-person friendship. The lack of a day school has limited my opportunities to engage in discussion of concepts both with a tutor and my fellow students. Online tutorials do not effectively replace this so my learning feels more distant and detached rather than engaged and involved.

I feel that there is a great loss of not having face to face tutorials,

One student: We are assigned tutors at the beginning of the year and we can go on various tutorials with different tutors for the modules, but if you have any issues, you have to refer back to your assigned tutor. It would be helpful if you could interact more with the specialist tutors such as the author of block 3 in B100

Thank you. We recognise the value of face-to-face sessions to students. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing uncertainty about how the pandemic will progress, it is difficult to plan for a full return to established patterns of face-to-face activity.

Thank you. The tuition model used by the OU is one of distance learning based on the content of modules delivered primarily through module sites. The authors of modules are not expected to act as tutors but instead, dedicated tutors are employed to provide guidance and support to students. Employing more dedicated tutors would inevitably increase the cost of modules but through group tuition, students have an opportunity to interact with other tutors on the module, whilst retaining their dedicated tutor. All tutors delivering on a module are well prepared to deal with questions relevant to particular topics and the resource of your Student Support Team is also available.

Theme: Delivery of online tutorials

The online tutorials (possibly due to the speed of putting them together) were less professional, with a lot of "erms"(really annoying), break-out rooms that didn't work, skimming over topics you didn't have time for. The most critical

Thank you. The OU did not create online tutorials specifically as a result of the pandemic but has always provided these in addition to face-to-face events, so that students who cannot

Refer issues around TMA and EMA preparation to module

part, ie TMA preparation was usually one slide with exactly the same info as you see on the TMA itself.

The tutorial style on my current module has been different - previously, tutorials have worked through examples, triggered additional thinking, etc. On my current module, they have mainly focussed on walking through the guidance notes which are available in the TMA assignment sections and whilst I don't know how the tutorials are written and prepared, I feel I could have got more through them (enhanced learning) in the "old style," whether face to face or online

attend face-to-face events are not disadvantaged. The issues highlighted of poor presentation and skipping over elements of the presentation will be looked into. Issues with break out rooms are a known issue with Adobe Connect and the OU works continually with Adobe to improve performance. The comments about TMA and EMA preparation will be referred to the module team.

One student: Overall the facilitation of the sessions has been good but I have noticed that the audio quality can sometimes be quite poor and tutors have been using cheap built in headphone microphones or headsets. This can be quite distracting. It would be great if tutors could be issued with high quality microphones to use when delivering tutorials to increase the quality of the audio.

Due to the number of tutors employed and differences in requirement across modules, tutors are not provided with IT hardware by the OU. However, all tutors are expected to use appropriate equipment to provide the best experience for students.

Theme: TMA feedback and tutorial timings

Another impact on results comes from a delay in receiving feedback and results from submitted TMA's. The OU granted extended time to tutors to mark TMA's meaning students received feedback and results in the close run up to the next TMA diminishing this learning opportunity. I struggle to understand how the lockdown experience could affect the time taken to mark TMA's when having work was a welcome opportunity.

The pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have affected students and tutors alike. It was recognised that tutors, who also have responsibilities of care and a variety of other commitments, should also be supported with the extended marking time.

The University has announced that the arrangements for extended marking time will cease at the end of 2021. After that, the usual 10-day marking turnaround will apply.

Many of my comments can be captured through "what was positive" but I would say the lack of interaction with fellow students, the tutorial times, the inconsistency at times across tutors in terms of word counts/how this is applied (I know it's in the guides, but... different people apply different things!), what to include, information and advice etc (ongoing from my study experience and not Covid specific), tutorial dates close to assignments and longer turnaround times on TMA marking have all had an impact (reduction of enjoyment).

We are sorry to hear about those issues but see the reply above on these topics.

One student: Another thing that could be improved is the issue of pre-reading materials. This has been happening on the day before or the day of the lecture itself, this sometimes doesn't give us enough time to read, digest and complete the activities that are recommended before the tutorial. It would be great if these were available to download from the resources area in advance of the

Tutors should send all students who have signed up for a tutorial an email around a week in advance of the session. This will contain any materials required for the session if applicable

Tutors will also be reminded at the briefing to let students know how/when materials will be made available.

tutorial so that I could complete this in my own time as part of my existing study plans.

One student: Not having course materials from my current course, to refer to in the future, for me is a major negative. As mentioned on the other thread, I don't know if this is due to Covid, but at £3k plus for the module, I'm sorry but I simply know I won't have learnt every aspect of the module and the opportunity to keep and refer to materials in the future is such a valuable asset that is missing.

All study materials are available in a format that is easy to download and/or print for later use and are available for three years after the end of the module.

Question set 3 - Were the changes positive?

Theme: The flexible study model

For me, this system is perfect as I don't have to make travel arrangements (including childcare). Notwithstanding, I would be happy to attend face-to-face sessions sporadically.

Thank you. This is great to hear.

I have found the OUs handling of the pandemic brilliant, and have not felt like I have missed out on anything. The online tutorials have meant that I have been able to choose which ones I attend and if something comes up it is easy to rearrange them or catch up later. I also think the online exam is going to be a huge benefit as I am not concerned about having to travel or find childcare, or take time off work on a specific day, I look forward to being able to do the exam online. I feel like this change could easily be a permanent fixture for OU and may encourage more people to sign up.

Theme: Remote exams a preferred option

I had an exam for B205 changed into a remote exam --which I haven't taken yet, it will be in June-- but it saved me a ton of stress about travelling to an exam centre, and I couldn't help but think how great it would be if the option for a remote exam was left available to those who had problems accessing exam centres.

Thank you, that's very positive.

Theme: The face- to-face learning experience

Whilst appreciative of the online alternative tutorials, I really enjoy the face to face tutorials. It is the one opportunity to meet others face to face when

Thank you. We recognise the value of face-to-face sessions to students as well as online versions. At the moment, the university very much hopes to be able to return to face to face events when it is safe to do so.

studying with the OU, and I would really like to see these continue once restrictions ease. I do take part in the online tutorials too, but they are no replacement for the interactivity and networking/social elements of the face to face tutorials.

One student: I do find the module forums quite repetitive so it might be worth cultivating a FAQ thread for people to check first. The moderators often point to previous posts but the search function isn't very intuitive and a single thread to check through which is curated by the moderator could reduce a lot of the repetitive topics.

Thank you, noted.

This will be referred to the Board of Studies for consideration.

One student: I would also appreciate the OU offering a mix of tutorial times - for example, the majority on my current course are evenings with some weekend dates, but EMA prep tutorials are all week day, day time. I have a job where I can attend, but this may be more difficult for others so a variety would be helpful.

Thank you. In terms of the choice of date and time, we offer a wide range of these on most modules. However, tutors have other roles and we cannot always offer as wide a range of times as we would like.

One student: On B208 I only have access to the TMA preparation tutorial provided by my own tutor which I find particularly frustrating as I feel I have previously benefitted from different explanations provided by a range of other tutors. A slightly different explanation often helps my understanding and the OU often encourages us to seek information from a range of different sources.

Thank you. This is not a result of the pandemic as the B208 module is designed to offer a combination of Tutor only and Cluster wide tutorials.

One student: I was slightly disappointed in my EMA being cancelled last year, and have also found some of the tutorial dates (close to assignment/EMA submission dates) and the extra turnaround time for tutor marking (close to next TMA dates) a challenge at times so reviewing this would be appreciated please.

Thank you. We will consider how to improve this, however, modules offer a wide range of dates to choose from, including earlier dates.

One student: On my current module, I have been disappointed that hard copy materials are not provided - I'm not sure if this was as a impact of Covid (module started October 2020) or not. If the course materials were available to download as a PDF that would be great and absolutely fine - but they are not. The only option is to pay for printed materials, but the cover note says a lot of the course material will be missing, and there are certain frameworks etc that would be very useful to have in the future and to apply in my day to day working environment.

All business modules are set up as online, although not all documents uploaded are in PDF. Modules and all materials are available online and produced in a way which allows for student interaction with the materials. Materials are available in a variety of forms (word, pdf, and as eBooks) to give students options as to how they would like to access these. Furthermore, where students require printed materials as a reasonable adjustment then these will be provided.

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