Student Consultation Panel
CONSULTATION ON THE TEACHING & LEARNING PLAN

1–15 July 2021

The complete record of the discussion can be viewed on the forum: https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=24532

Record of contributions

In total there were **56** posts by **20** students out of the **218** registered, with **20** like/favourite ratings. There were at least **57** independent readers of the forum. Below are extracts from most 'liked' posts.

I welcome that the OU is considering online remote options for exams. Students do not necessarily live near an examination centre and factors such as travel arrangements, arriving on time, not knowing where you are going, etc. can make sitting an exam a more stressful experience than usual.

It is also great to hear that the OU is looking to expand its virtual internships. My understanding is that the Career and Employability Services offer virtual internships as and when a Faculty requests it and that its own students are prioritised. Is there any intention for each Faculty to offer its students a virtual internship, say on an annual basis? Wondering how these intentions might be bedded as long-lasting practices.

Everything here sounds good, but what stands out to me is seeing online remote options for exams. That just makes me want to give a standing ovation.

Yes, this, please.

It would be a huge lifesaver for overseas students who have to travel just to sit one exam at a distant exam centre because there are no suitable exam centres where they live.

First thing is that the OU Careers they use a different type systems from those of the OU systems, that means that in order to access one of their training sessions (as students) we will need another type of account. I found that really annoying. Because I was expecting them to be part of the OU and not needing to use another type of login for accessing them.

…

When I asked … reply was that the OU Careers use their own systems with their own login system. I found that ridiculous because that means a student needs more than one type of account to access OU services?.

I dont know why the OU cant just use just one type of credentials for students to access all their services?. Because this has been the 2nd time I was interested in joining one of the OU Careers virtual sessions but knowing how painful is to login into an OU secondary IT system with a different type of account left me in tatters. So yes, Accessibility should be improved.

1. Supporting students is central to our T&L approach

The first principle of the new Teaching and Learning Plan is:

Supporting students is central to our teaching and learning approach

We are aiming for:
- *Better use of analytics to enable a more individualised approach to learning*
- *Greater integration of students into our academic communities at module, qualification and institutional level that will enable us to be more responsive to their needs.*
- *Peer support to be further developed with opportunities to interact with fellow students who are at different points in their academic career.*
- *Ensuring that all materials are provided in an accessible format and exploring how to tackle issues of digital poverty that disadvantage those who wish to study with us*
- *Exploration of we can design our teaching material and assessments in such a way that eliminates the need for alternative formats*

- a. *What is your response to these draft suggestions?*
- b. *What do you like and what could be improved and how?*
- c. *Please feel free to comment on the clarity and wording as well as the overall ambition.*

Students predominately reacted positively to the principle 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 shared a wide range of suggestions, improvements and questions in relation to the aims of this principle.

- Students showed interest but were unclear in how the analytics will be used and what data will be measured.
- Students highlighted that slow or no internet connection and digital skills are also barriers for students studying with the OU.
- There was concern that alternative materials should and could not be eliminated. Alternative materials may always be required for some students. It is 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.
- A student posted that the OU should commit to accessible materials including printability and readability not only accessible formats of current materials.
- Many students had differing experiences of peer support. Some students have experienced peer support not working in practice and receiving incorrect information, partly due to noticeable absence from tutors. This resulted in dissatisfaction for the students involved in the process. However, another student had a very positive experience of peer support with regular involvement from tutors and module teams. Regardless of the experiences many students saw peer support as important and those who hadn't been involved looked forward to exploring the opportunities.
- Students felt peer support should also include student mentors.
- A student said they felt inspired by the aims of the OU to provide more support for students. Another student liked "the approach with blended learning and recognising how different students learn in different ways, it also helps modules be more interesting and interactive".
- Students commented about the ambiguity of the term "academic communities" and this term did not appear to be defined.
- 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.
- A student wanted to see more scholarships offered by the OU.
- A student suggested wording changes to the last aim "*An* exploration of *how* we can design...".
- A student suggested that more support is required in the form of online training videos and live training sessions, for instance through Zoom.
- A student suggested new initiatives should be developed for submitting assignments online. For example, submitting Microsoft Word documents through a tablet is difficult.

2. Lifelong learning should be accessible to everyone

The second principle of the new Teaching and Learning Plan is:

High quality lifelong learning should be accessible to everyone

We aim to:
- *Develop routes through qualifications for students who wish to study full time to support them to complete their studies more quickly.*
- *Improve systems so that tuition hours can be used more flexibly to enable tailored support for students. We will use data systematically to identify students in need of tailored support.*
- *Evaluate all current curriculum with the inclusive curriculum tool and modify as necessary to ensure an inclusive curriculum.*
- *Provide students studying a qualification pathway with a qualification tutor, to provide pastoral support and employability support.*

a. *What is your response to these draft suggestions?*
b. *What do you like and what could be improved and how?*
c. *Please feel free to comment on the clarity and wording as well as the overall ambition.*

Comments by students include:

- Students wanted clarity on what "tuition hours used more flexibly" means but did support tutors being able to be flexible to support students. How will the OU identify the needs of students to tailor the support and flexibility?
- Students sought clarity on what the inclusive curriculum tool is, which was answered by another student on the forum.
- Students supported the proposal for a qualification tutor. Although there was some concern about how this may link with the Student Support Teams.
- A student commented that flexible internal internship and work experience opportunities should be offered more widely across the OU.
- Comments were made about the inaccessibility of Adobe Connect.
- 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.
- More support is required when enrolling on full-time study intensity. As some skills taught in one module were required simultaneously in another module.

3. OU teaching and learning is designed as...

The third principle of the new Teaching and Learning Plan is:

OU teaching and learning is designed as an academically rigorous, research informed process.

We aim to:

- *Create enhanced opportunities for students to actively engage with and contribute more fully to our research communities and in external work-based learning settings.*
- *Proactively underpin our teaching with the latest research as appropriate and work towards enabling all our students to develop research and communication skills that contribute to their employability.*
- *Ensure through subject based educational research and the scholarship of teaching and learning that our student learning provision is current, relevant and effective, aiming for the best possible outcomes for our diverse student community.*

a. *What is your response to these draft suggestions?*
b. *What do you like and what could be improved and how?*
c. *Please feel free to comment on the clarity and wording as well as the overall ambition.*

Unfortunately there was particularly low engagement on this thread. Points made included:

- Positive reaction to creating "opportunities for students to actively engage with its research communities". However, research opportunities need to be made more clearly available for OU students and the advice currently given by tutors should be reviewed.
- Students feel confident there is great potential for the OU to regularly engage with students for research opportunities and co-creation.
- Scholarship centres should be promoted more widely to students.
- A student suggested it would be helpful to have an 'opt in' option for tutorial recordings.
- The University should ensure that research opportunities are equally offered to students both on and off campus.
- 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.
- 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.
- Offering mentorships and career development in academia for students on and off campus would be well received.
- It would be great to see "Masters and Doctoral students / early career researchers" involved in careers events and to hear about their experiences.

4. Teaching practices must be improved

The fourth principle of the new Teaching and Learning Plan is:

Teaching practices must be improved to support our students' aspirations.

We aim to:

- *Explore new methods of assessment that include a greater range of options for students, including online remote options for exams and creating new audio-visual assessment approaches*
- *Expand the use of our tailored personal development tool, FutureYou, so that all students can take charge of their learning and personal and professional development*
- *Work closely with our Nations colleagues to offer programmes designed to address nation-specific, professional development needs.*
- *Expand our Careers and Employability Services to offer more virtual internships*
- *Work more closely with our alumni to create career mentoring opportunities for our students.*

a. What is your response to these draft suggestions?
b. What do you like and what could be improved and how?
c. Please feel free to comment on the clarity and wording as well as the overall ambition.

Comments included:

– 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, home environments may not be suitable for all students, "to avoid situations like the Bar Standards Board fiasco".

– Students also supported expanding opportunities for virtual internships including for international students. The moderator did provide more insight from the Careers and Employability Services team regarding the current status of virtual internships.

– Some students expressed that they don't actively engage with FutureYou and felt that FutureYou should not become compulsory.

– 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.

– 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.

– A student expressed accessibility problems with the OU Careers system that appears to be hosted on a different IT system to the main OU student systems, requiring students to login to different accounts using different credentials. The student had investigated this with the OU Careers and Employability Services team but was not satisfied with the response. This post was "liked" by two other forum participants.

5. Other comments

Do you have any other comments on the draft Teaching and Learning Plan?

Comments included:

– Focusing and engaging consistently with OU students who have "diverse perspectives [which] keeps [the] OU on the cutting edge of changing ideas (in a part of the labour market) and in touch with students' needs."

– 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".

– Tutors should be equipped with the skills and resources to "support students in unique circumstances" to achieve their study goals.

– Some materials appear to be missing from the OU Library including "Social Science essay writing guidebooks" to help students prepare for their exams.

– 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. Other universities provide virtual or physical ID cards, it would be useful for potential employers, accessing library resources etc.

Date: 23/07/2021