STUDENT CONSULTATION MEETINGS 2022 RESPONSE

Student Consultation is a central part of the ongoing relationship between the University and its student body. As a part of this, a series of 11 online consultation meetings were conducted in Spring 2022. In total 191 students participated, and The Open University and Open University Students Association are very grateful to all students who got involved.

A summary of student feedback on the two major discussion topics, University Strategy and Tuition, is available on the Student Consultation VLE website. The summaries have been considered by a wide range of staff members involved in improving the student experience in these two areas and beyond and is being used to inform further action.

Below is a short update on some of what's happening as a result of your feedback.

FUTURE DELIVERY OF EXAMS

SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on 'The Future of Exams' which took place in March 2022 as part of the Student Consultation Meetings.

The OU is undertaking a project to consider the future of online exams in a more systematic way and colleagues leading this area of work are committed to consulting with students as part of a programme of stakeholder consultation.

Student feedback was sought to respond to and in some cases, confirm internal consultation discussions.

The questions asked were broad and open, to ensure that students were able to share experiences and initial responses in their consideration of an online move for assessment.

RESPONSE

Question 1: How would you view an online exam differently to a face-to-face exam?

You said	OU response
"Online exams are less onerous, you have more time and in a familiar environment, so less daunting".	Alongside the Student Consultation Panel, a survey has gathered feedback from students who undertook an online exam in 2020/21.
"Remote exams are on the whole better as no cost and stress of travelling".	Internal consultation has also raised some of the concerns discussed.

"Online provides greater flexibility … a 24 hour timeframe provides more time for considered thought".	Feedback has been largely positive in principle and the project team will now be focussing on how we address the issues raised throughout consultation.
"More focused on skills than memory".	
"Just because I can write a TMA on my PC does not infer my equipment may be powerful enough to run monitoring software for exams, this is a huge issue for some students".	
"The in person was harder there was a real sense of achievement with the result".	
"Online appears not as rigorous".	

Question 2: What would your hopes, fears and expectations be if you were to do an online exam?

You said	OU response
"I want my qualification to be credible, I do not want it to be diluted by poor reputation".	Many of the responses have been anticipated by internal discussions and we recognise the challenges raised.
"Would consider modules that offer EMAs to avoid some exams".	
"I think the OU could review the weight allocated to exams".	There are a number of aligned projects and aspects of the Future Delivery of Exams project that will be considering and addressing this feedback. These include reviewing sector practice, how we invigilate and identify students, work with and assure professional bodies and partnership employers of our exam integrity and addressing digital inclusion.
"How are remote exams invigilated? How would integrity be maintained online?".	
"Not everyone has a private room, work space or even a laptop".	
"If other universities are still using in person exams to validate results does it devalue the course or degree to drop them".	
"Would online exams be viewed by employers as valid".	

Question 3: How could the OU reassure, prepare or support you for an online exam?

You said	OU response
"Opportunities for a mock exam so as to experience what it is like".	In any recommendation made to the OU, ensuring that students are prepared and supported is our priority. We are working closely
"Tutorials and exam preparation such as past papers".	

"More guidance as to what to expect to allow you to structure your revision accordingly".	with associated student teams that will have clear information, advice and guidance in place to support students.
"Be clear about what will happen when something goes wrong … work out in advance how students can communicate with the exam centre if they have difficulty with technology".	This will include materials that will inform students on the processes of online exams, what to do if things go wrong, who to contact and how to prepare.
"It would be useful to know what is expected during remote exams at the beginning of the module … it would reduce anxieties".	We actively involve members of The OU Students Association in these discussions, who are also involved in the project teams involved in progressing this work, to ensure the support and guidance is clear, relevant and appropriate.

Staying on Track with Your Studies

SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on 'Staying on Track' which took place between 2nd March 2022 and 26th March 2022 and were delivered as on-line meetings.

Over 190 students were involved in the consultation process. Colleagues in PVC-Students and the Data and Student Analytics Team involved in Retention have considered the feedback.

The consultation required feedback on:

- Stumbling blocks to staying on track
- How students overcome stumbling blocks
- What could the OU do to help students stay on track?
- The one thing the OU could do to help students

Students suggested there was a perceived lack of interaction with both tutors and other students which can make staying on track more difficult and is the primary cause for concern.

Other issues that contribute include the difficulty in achieving a study/work/life balance, insufficient induction/preparation and a simple lack of time to complete TMAs. The main way students say the OU can help them stay on track is through more frequent and personal tutor interaction

The Tuition Programme has been established to enhance the tuition experience for both students and staff. We will be building on the current work taking place across the OU and supporting the Teaching and Learning Plan. Tutors are at the heart of the student learning experience and our activities will aim to maximise opportunities for them to support their students. This feedback, along with the experiences and ideas students share through other channels, will feed into the Tuition Programme's evaluation of tuition, and inform innovations.

Helping students build and maintain their connections to other students is an area we are looking at to enhance student communities and sense of belonging. We are hoping that improvements to students' online environments will help us make strides in this area. This feedback will be shared with the teams redeveloping student online experience and incorporated into requirements for new student community spaces.

The feedback received will help us determine the priority and signposting of the induction resources most important to our students to help them prepare for study.

Within the institutional Assessment Programme we are exploring ways to simplify assessment and support students to understand learning outcomes for the whole module and at each assessment point. As part of that review we will look at how we can deliver more transparent and meaningful marking criteria.

RESPONSE
Stumbling blocks to staying on track

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
Lack of personal interaction with tutors can cause concerns – this can be both from tutorials and F2F	A number of strategic programmes are underway which aim to deliver much more personalisation in our support of students. We are able to get greater insights into students' needs by increasing the use of digital tools, which will enable us to deliver more personalised and pro-active support.	The University has a number of existing and in development tools that advisers and tutors can now use in supporting students, we are currently looking at ways to scale up use. The Tuition Programme will be exploring tuition innovations and will take into consideration the importance of providing opportunities to foster tutor-student relationships.
Infrequency and poor attendance at tutorials and their non-recording also impact staying on track	We often find many students sign up for tutorials but then do not attend. We are keen to understand why but offering recordings is one way students can not miss out on the support given in an online tutorial. We do have a policy in place that states there must be a minimum of one recorded tutorial for each learning event unless exemption criteria	The University's Tuition Programme Team will review how the Recording Online Tutorials policy is being followed in practice. If appropriate, the Tuition Programme's working group will review the current processes and explore where they can be improved, to ensure that policy is consistently followed. The Programme Team will also explore whether

	are met. However, it is interesting to hear feedback this might not be as consistent as it should be. We are planning to review the provision of recordings across the OU, to establish whether processes need to be put in place to ensure that the practice reflects the policy.	students find recordings easy to locate, or if more can be done to make them easier to find.
Response times from some tutors is also viewed as taking too long	We have standard policies that all tutors must mark and return TMAs within 10 days of the submission deadline. This was extended to 15 days at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the University has returned to standard TMA marking turnaround times, some tutors may still be experiencing challenges. Where marking times are extended students will, wherever possible, be kept updated. If students are concerned about general tutor response times we would very much like to hear from you by contacting your Student Support Team.	
Ineffective induction and lack of early planning can hinder progress	Your feedback is appreciated and resonates with other student research we have recently gathered on student's readiness before study. As a result, improving student's induction experience is a key focus area and student success priority	A number of strategic programmes and projects will be working together to deliver a more coherent, targeted and consistent experience to improve student readiness for study. Further student feedback will be requested to assess the impact of this work.

for the university over the next 3 years.	

What can the OU do to help students stay on track

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
More personal contact and support – be that F2F or 121 tutorials – would help students stay on track	The University is keen to learn from our experiences during the pandemic, so when module teams designed their tuition strategies they were encouraged to reflect on what the best approach to tuition events would be for their students from October 2022 onwards. Face-to-face tuition will be reintroduced from the autumn where appropriate (not all modules will be reintroducing face-to-face tutorials), but the University will continue to monitor the situation and measure the impact of any changes as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic.	The University's Tuition Programme will continue to research and build on good practice across the faculties, and externally, in the post-Covid-19 landscape. We will be evaluating our tuition and exploring innovations, with a view to helping more students stay on track.
More frequent contact and tutorials are felt to be beneficial - the more contact time the better	The Tuition Programme has been established to enhance the tuition experience for both students and staff. We will be building on the current work taking place across the OU and supporting the Teaching and Learning Plan. Tutors are at the heart of the student learning experience and our activities will aim to maximise opportunities for them to support their students.	This feedback, along with the experiences and ideas students share through other channels, will feed into the Tuition Programme's evaluation of tuition, and inform innovations.
More preparation and relevant induction materials, time management tools, information on how TMAs	This feedback will help us determine the priority and signposting of the induction resources most important to	

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are assessed would be valuable	our students to help them prepare for study. Within the institutional Assessment Programme, we are exploring ways to simplify assessment and support students to understand learning outcomes for the whole module and at each assessment point As part of that review we will look at how we can deliver more transparent and meaningful marking criteria.	
More time for TMAs to be completed and more sensible timing of TMA deadlines would help some	The number and timing of assessments is included in an overarching priority within the Assessment Programme looking at how we can simplify assessment and increase student understanding. We also have a policy for TMA extensions.	
Improve the connectivity with other students – past and present	Helping students build and maintain their connections to other students is an area we are looking at to enhance student communities and sense of belonging. We are hoping that improvements to students' online environments will help us make strides in this area.	This feedback will be shared with the teams redeveloping student online experience and incorporated into requirements for new student community spaces.

SUSTAINABILITY

SUMMARY

This is a response to the consultation on 'Sustainability' which took place in March 2022 as part of the Student Consultation Meetings.

There were two questions on sustainability that were used as the starter session within the meetings.

How the OU is responding:

Question 1:
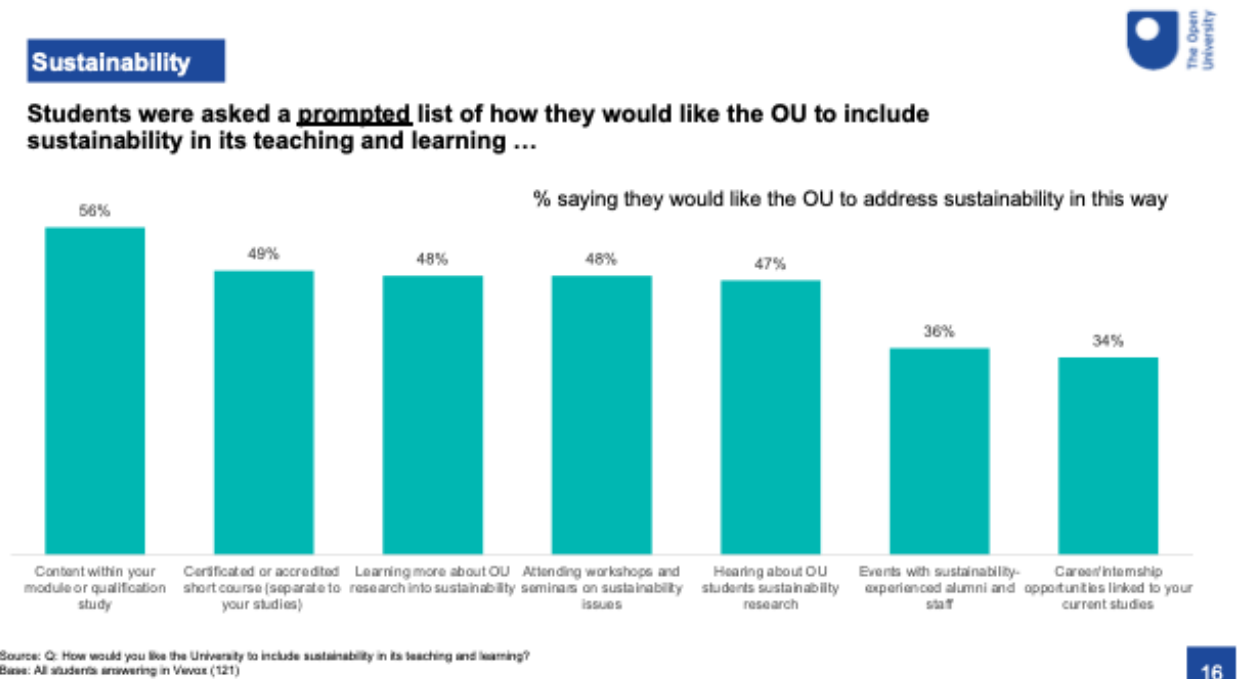
Content within your module or qualification

We are conducting a student-led audit of the curriculum to identify which modules cover issues related to the sustainable development goals and the five ways of working for sustainability (long-term, prevention, integration, involvement and collaboration). Results are due in October 2022 and will be published on our website. In September 2022, we launch Responsible Futures, a Students' Association and OU partnership, leading to institutional accreditation for inclusion of sustainability and climate justice in the formal, informal and subliminal curriculum with strong links to Equality Diversity and Inclusion. Students interested in being part of the delivery group can email: sustainability@open.ac.uk

Certificated or accredited short course separate to your studies

The OU in Wales and our sustainability experts collaborated with the Carbon Literacy Project and Students Organising for Sustainability (SOS-UK) to develop and pilot a Carbon Literacy Project accredited 8-hour training session. Carbon Literacy training is freely available for all OU students from September 2022. *So far, 200 students and staff have expressed an interest in the course and 100 have completed their Carbon Literacy Training, 60 are now certified as Carbon Literate.* Students can sign up here:

[Sign up for Carbon Literacy Training in English here](#) or [Sign up for Carbon Literacy Training in Welsh here.](#)

Learning more about OU research into sustainability

The OU Research Plan 2022-27 aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It develops a societal challenges programme with three broad areas: living well, equality and sustainability and it aims to reduce the negative environmental impact of research, encourage interdisciplinary teams and explore new approaches to ensure global contribution from our research, enterprise and knowledge exchange. In September 2022 *The Future of OU Research and Societal Impact event* features Research Excellence Awards including for work on sustainability. Research projects will be shared across student media channels including how these feed into our BBC co-productions.

Attending workshops and seminars on sustainability issues / Events with sustainability-experienced alumni and staff

We are developing '*Open Conversations'* in partnership with OU MarComms – inter-generational, inter-disciplinary conversations on key sustainability challenges. Events will be advertised by the end of 2022

Hearing about OU student sustainability research

We are reviewing the topic areas for our postgraduate dissertations and PhD students and will share our findings in 2023.

Career internship opportunities linked to your current studies

We shall engage with our Careers colleagues to provide a series of sustainability briefings for students and focus on 'green skills' and careers in sustainability and regenerative practice in 2023.

We'll promote our 2022 Green Careers conversations with BBC Regenerators and seek other disciplines to engage with.
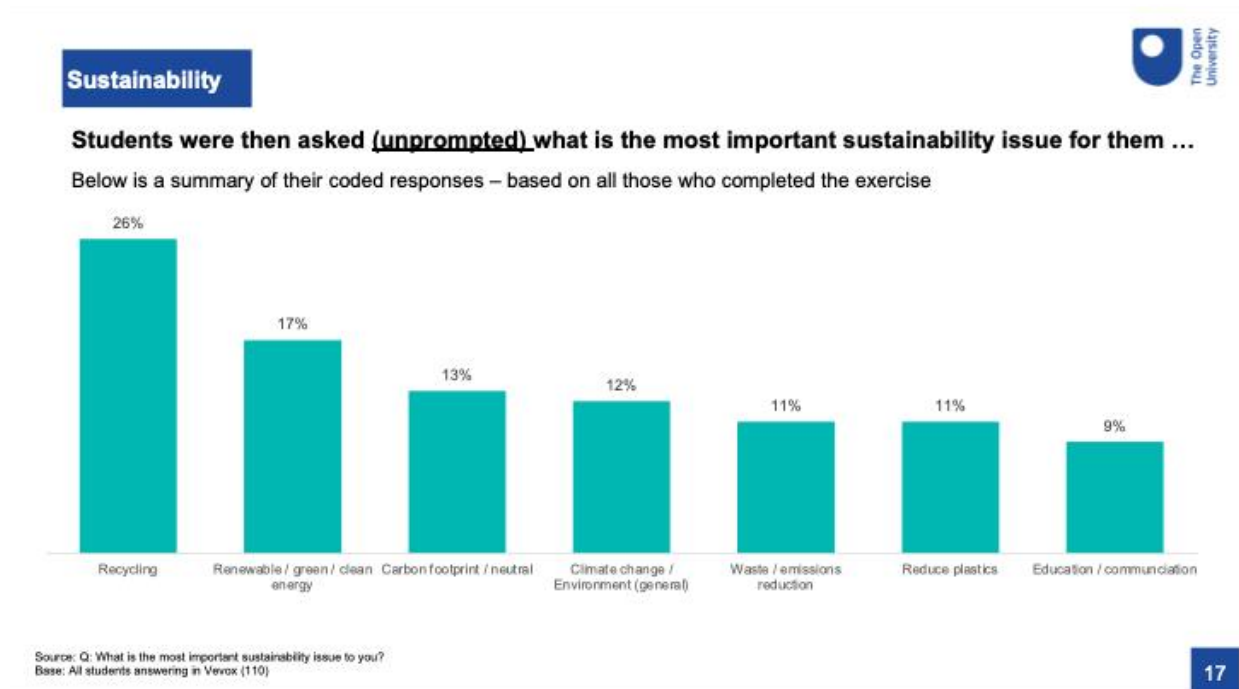
Other

We surveyed our students for the first time on sustainability, via the 2022 National Student Survey. 52% of our students responded to the optional questions on sustainability which found that:

- 57% of students believe the OU 'encourages good environmental practice'
- 45% agree that 'my course has encouraged me to think about environmental sustainability'

- 24% agree they 'have had opportunities to take part in activities supporting environmental sustainability'

We shall use the NUS Student Skills Survey for the first time in Autumn 2022 to gain further input from OU students and plan actions to respond to our student feedback.

Question 2

Sustainability

Students were then asked (unprompted) what is the most important sustainability issue for them …

Below is a summary of their coded responses – based on all those who completed the exercise

Source: Q: What is the most important sustainability issue to you?
Base: All students answering in Vevox (110)

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Student responses will inform our focus and include:

- Designing out waste, Circular Economy resource flows, collaborative consumption and reuse
- Renewable energy
- Carbon footprinting (also covered in the Carbon Literacy training)

Date: November 2022