Student Consultation Meetings

Feedback on tuition

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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 consultation meetings and other forums were conducted in March 2021. These were designed to cover both student reaction to the five strategic goals of the OU, and to explore tuition

The following is an overview of the emerging themes from this consultation, covering the area of **tuition**

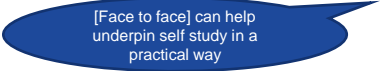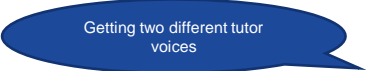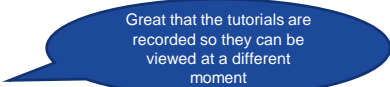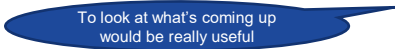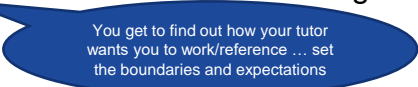This feedback is based on four areas of particular interest within the consultation:

* What elements of tuition they found useful / not useful
* How they saw tuition differing since pandemic
* What each delivery method is best for, and what motivates them to attend each type
* How tuition should work in the future

The consultation included multiple online forums dedicated to the strategic goals and tuition, and 12 online student meetings, covering a range from 'all students' to also: Wales, Ireland, Scotland, International, BAME, Younger (under 25) students and PRG

Over 300 students were involved in the consultation process, across the forums and meetings, including International and PRG

Students identified useful areas of tuition mostly in relation to how it was delivered:

- All face-to-face time was highly valued – sometimes virtual, but especially day schools where the desired outcomes in terms of supported learning are intensified

> [Face to face] can help underpin self study in a practical way

- Online sessions can be valuable where you are able to ask questions in real time – also where students feel remote or isolated

> Getting two different tutor voices

- Access to different tutors within tutorials allows for multiple viewpoints and a broader experience – sometimes additional moderating too

> Great that the tutorials are recorded so they can be viewed at a different moment

- Consistent accessibility to recordings was viewed as important – this does not seem to be always available

- Materials being presented in advance of tutorials were deemed useful, often to manage anxiety and aid planning

> To look at what's coming up would be really useful

- A focus on TMAs within tutorials was mostly well received as this is where much student focus is - although a few did see the benefit in time being used for other things within these sessions

> You get to find out how your tutor wants you to work/reference … set the boundaries and expectations

Tuition – what they found useful: outcomes

Although it was easier for students to identify the specific delivery aspects of tuition that are useful, some also spoke to areas related to more emotional outcomes from tuition …

- Engagement, connection and interaction were highly valued outcomes from tutorials – this could be from tutors and/or student peers – and this helps to combat issues around anxiety and isolation

It lifts your day, to know you are not alone

They make you feel like you are not on your own

- Flexibility and access were key attributes to successful tuition – a choice of times, dates, locations, delivery methods

- Collaboration, with small enough group sizes, were also valued – most forms of interaction are valued by students but anything meeting other students is highly valuable

Meet other students doing same subject and can create a supportive learning environment

Opportunities to meet and interact with other students and tutor are invaluable

- Well delivered tuition can reinforce learning and enhance engagement

They give you confidence you have learnt what you need to learn

For confirming learning, questioning and recognising you are often not the only one struggling

- Insufficient time or tutorials being too short to cover what was needed – this is exacerbated where students believe a day school event has been crammed into a two-hour session

  > Far too many students in a group … inhibits conversation

- Overcrowding was an issue, especially when using a tool such as Adobe Connect on tutorials – leading to a lack of engagement - and for some poor attendance levels were also something of a concern

  > Some tutorials are large groups comprising students from different modules or areas of study … this feels impersonal

- The technology being used by the OU for online tutorials, Adobe Connect, did not provide appropriate interaction – many prefer Teams or Zoom, which are also viewed as being more reliable – staff also appear uncomfortable using them

  > Adobe Connect is an unreliable platform and it's a shame not to see people

  > Adobe Connect hampers discussion between students

- The bland spoken presentation of module content, through Powerpoint slides in a lecture style, was commonly reported as uninspiring

  > Being talked at by tutors reading from slides

  > Sometimes feels like ALs are just reading a script when going through Powerpoint slides

- The drop off in frequency of tutorials from Level two onwards was also noted, and not liked – to some just one tutorial per TMA was insufficient and made the session feel like their only shot at relevant tutor interaction

  > There is certainly a lack of tutorials, my course has one tutorial per TMA

- There was an inconsistency in recordings of tutorials being available

- For many, collaborative working and discussion, which can be motivating, was absent from online tutorials

  It's worse when tutorials are delivered in a seminar format, instead of group discussion

- Time could be 'wasted' in their view, on individual feedback on assignments within online tutorials

- For some the lack of materials being available in advance of a tutorial was an issue – this was particularly useful to counter anxiety ahead of a session

  Sometimes there is a huge difference in the quality of some of the tutorials

- Tutor inconsistency was also identified as a problem for some – both between how different tutors deliver and manage sessions, but also occasions where tutors within the same tutorial would disagree over marking or requirements

  [had] a tutorial with them [tutors] disagreeing how they would mark something

- For some, online tutorials had not recently been helping them manage levels of anxiety – even though some interaction can be better than none

  It has just been making my situation worse

- Many simply prefer face-to-face interaction, and would rather that be the delivery method than online tutorials

  Meeting them face-to-face is the best way for me

There appeared to be limited discussion of this area within the consultation, however some highlights identified were:

Face to face really missing it … particularly good in motivating you to keep going

- The clear reduction in face-to-face tuition, particularly day schools was noted - to the detriment of study and confidence

Miss the day schools

I'm really missing tutorials this year … going to my face to face it helps me remember I know quite a lot of stuff

- An overall net loss in teaching time was identified by some – understandably not well received

Miss the informal interactions

- Students were missing engagement and interaction with other students (as well as tutors)

- An increase in their reliance on technology has been exacerbated by the issues they have with Adobe Connect

When there hasn't been good preparation or tutors don't know how to use the technology, it shows

- Tutorials were felt to have become more time pressured (the fitting of the same material into less time)

In some cases tutor groups were combined which led to lower levels of connection and motivation

Tutorials are more time pressured now … will think about whether it is worth attending

Tutorial delivery – Face-to-face

What it works best for

Longer sessions and more involved time

Space to understand and absorb material and content

Getting to know your tutor and course mates

Engagement and conversation with all involved

Informed debate and discussion

Individual response from tutors

Practical work (where applicable)

No technology issues to deal with

More focused learning in a discreet time period

Noted that it is impractical for International students

> Energy is better when people are in the same space

> I prefer to go there to consolidate my knowledge

> A full day course is very valuable to the learning curve, by meeting other students we can exchange the knowledge and experience

What motivates attendance

Convenient locations and timings

Event accessibility (inc. for those with disability)

Smaller, tighter numbers involved

Meeting real people – relationship building

Social interaction and engagement

Tutor enthusiasm

They learn better through interactive learning

> Tutors can see if anyone is struggling which is always difficult online

> You can't underestimate the importance of face-to-face tuition

> Dedicated period in which you can actually meet people and solve issues … be undisturbed because you have the allocated time

What de-motivates

The inverse of all above

Can be too short for some subjects (Physics)

Lack of advance clarity of what will be involved

Cost of travel / time / accommodation

> The lack of face-to-face tutorials because students work best when they collaborate

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Tutorial delivery – Online

What it works best for

Convenience – easy to attend and book

Some degree of interaction and engagement

Detailed TMA preparation

Breakout rooms can work if managed well

Providing access for International students

Questions can be asked of tutors

Often positive if materials available in advance

Recordings available (most but not all the time)

Better for the more socially anxious students

The best option if living in remote areas

Better than no interaction at all

> An important way of learning …you can ask questions in real time of your tutor

> Easy to access and no travel

What motivates

The more interactive the better – students on mics not in chat

If the sessions are recorded – less pressure to note everything, you can absorb material

> Tutorial recordings … helps to clarify learning if you didn't quite catch it in your tutorial

Having them in small groups (<10)

Hints and tips on TMAs – a crucial element of tuition - although some prefer a wider coverage

Well structured if planned properly in advance and materials available early

Dual tutors works well – one to lead, one to manage chat

If it were something other than Adobe Connect

> MS Teams is much better for tutorials than Adobe Connect

What de-motivates

The inverse of all above

> Frequency of online tutorials is not enough

Tutors talking from slides and not interacting

Packing a 6-hour day school into 2-hour tutorials

Screen and digital fatigue

> No breathing space you feel a little short changed

For some, the anxiety of having to speak / interact

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What they work best for

Discussion and the sharing of ideas

Collaborative work

Allows students to take time to think through a response

Useful for TMA preparation

When tutors pose the right questions and manage the time

> Would engage more if had better moderation, focused on academic discussion

What motivates

Having reminders and advance signposts of content

Preset discussion questions to stimulate in advance

Structure – when it is present

Simply taking part can motivate

What de-motivates

Feeling intimidated and that everyone else is cleverer

General anxiety over level of engagement expected

Some students taking over

Can get overwhelming and impersonal due to numbers

Lack of engagement once questions are posed

More informal groups (WhatsApp) felt to be better suited

Using Adobe Connect – not an appropriate tool for forum interaction (Teams preferred)

> it can be very intimidating to write in forums where you know lots of other people can view your comments

> The tutorials go too fast for me as I am dyslexic ... Prefer tutorials with actual tutors

> you assume people know how forums work … I don't understand it

> Tutor group forums are completely dead

Tutorial delivery – summary of how it works best and what motivates attendance

	Face to Face	Online	Forums
Works best for	• Student & tutor engagement • Relationship building • Focused learning	• Convenience / availability • Detailed TMA preparation • Best option if remote or International	• Discussion and sharing ideas • TMA preparation
What motivates attendance	• Convenient locations / times • Focused with limited participants • Relationship building • More interactive learning	• More engagement the better • Can work if well managed • TMA preparation important • Course Value For Money	• Reminders and advance information • Structure and pre discussion preparation
What de-motivates	• Distance or travel issues • Cost of travel / overnights	• Tutors delivering 'lectures' • Lack of engagement • Groups too large • Inappropriate TMA focus • Screen / digital fatigue • Technology issues	• Lack of interaction • Overwhelming size • Lack of structure • Engagement anxiety • Technology issues

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Tuition in the future

Ideas for improving tuition in the future mostly echoed areas highlighted within discission up to that point:

- A blended mix of face-to-face and online tutorials – recognising they both have their place – but a clear desire not to have face-to-face removed entirely

> Individual session support from tutor

- One-to-one time with tutors is greatly valued – be that in person or online – preferably at least monthly

- TMA support is identified as a priority by some within tutorials – but as with some issues other students can have the counter view

> Tutor groups concentrate heavily on TMAs so no time for sharing new ideas to enhance your learning

- Crucially, delivery within a tutorial needs to add value rather than simply read out the content

- The OU does need to address a perceived level of tutor inconsistency – both ability but more so the interpretation and feedback given

> Sort out the technical issues for online sessions especially things like breakout rooms which often go wrong

- An improved technical format is desired by students – not Adobe Connect

- Other practical elements such as consistent tutorial recording, audio access and use of subtitles would be well received

> Recorded tutorials embedded into the study planner as standard

> Use subtitles for recordings/tutorials – this will help students who have learning difficulties or who are more visual learners

Students are looking for a bit of everything: improvements, more consistency, and the maintaining of the strengths of their experience surrounding engagement and learning – along with technological solutions to help deliver this

THANK YOU