

Student Consultation Meetings

Final feedback on tuition



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Background

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 and April 2020. Some of these were adapted in terms of process and media due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The following is a full overview of the emerging themes from this consultation, covering the area of **tuition** (communications will be covered separately).

This feedback is based on the following:

- Online forums on tuition
- Adobe Connect meetings on tuition
- International student forum
- F2F Student consultations in Leeds, Glasgow and Birmingham, before the COVID-19 outbreak
- 53 students were involved in the F2F consultations, and at least 48 individuals can be identified within the online forums, including International – meaning over 100 students were involved in the process

Tutor support - what is working well

Students identified many areas where they believed tutor support to be appropriate or working well:

- Tutors can be supportive, available and proactive in their communications – this can relate to TMA specifics or general development – and include good practice of sending tutorial information in advance
- Tutors can also be seen as approachable, flexible, responsive (fast replies to e-mails, quick turnaround of TMAs) and constructive in their feedback
- Face-to-face (F2F) interaction, where it exists, is greatly valued – it provides detail (both general and individually specific) that could be missing from online interaction
- Online tutorials work well where there is interaction and/or some form of video element (especially if this can be accessed afterwards – recordings of these are highly valued)
- Technical ability is mixed among tutors – some handle it well although the need for more training has been identified – possibly even pairing up the more “competent” tutors with those less so

My tutor was exceptionally supportive, far exceeding my expectations

Face to face time with your tutor is always valuable

Tutors should have some training in how to present module materials ... and not just read from a powerpoint

However, there is a degree of inconsistency among tutors (even sometimes within modules), on the above – discussing tutor support in “mixed subject” groups (the F2F forums) served to highlight what were perceived to be inconsistencies

As a group we have had varied experiences, good and bad

More consistency [needed]. The three [tutors] I have so far have all taken different approaches

Tutor support – where it could be improved

MORE CONSISTENCY AND CLARITY

- More consistency of tutor approach in terms of support, attitude and even skills
- More information in advance of tutorials of their content (not consistently delivered at present)
- More information on what help / support is available from your tutor and how to access it
- Marking and guidance to be more consistent from and between tutors
- More consistency on referencing requirements (presumably between both modules and tutors)
- Inconsistencies were often highlighted within the student F2F consultations - discussing their varying experiences

My tutor is excellent .. But not on all tutorials and quality is extremely varied from excellent to quite poor

Need a lot more consistency ... between tutors, referencing requirements, assignment requirements

MORE REGULAR & ENGAGING SUPPORT

- More interaction with tutors (and other students) in a general sense is valued - as much F2F as possible
- More F2F tutorial delivery rather than relying on online is preferred – day schools were particularly valued
- More time within online tutorials to enable the answering of questions – these are often skipped over or ignored – some students suggest pairs of tutors on tutorials, with one delivering, another reviewing questions/chats
- Students would like tutors to be more engaged with them away from TMAs and tutorials (with little specificity)

More one-to-one support, the tutor checking on us once a week

Students may simply not know what help is available or where to find it

Tutor support – where it could be improved

More support and empathy

SUPPORT TAILORED TO THEIR NEEDS

Contact to feel more human/personal ... to feel that it is customised to the individual

- More individual and tailored support, especially feedback on TMAs (rather than copy and paste responses)
- Agreeing a communications plan on an individual student basis that is appropriate to individual needs
- More time within online tutorials to enable the answering of questions – some see this as valuable to them, others find it can lead to the flow to move in tangents

OTHER AREAS OF SUPPORT

- The technical ability of OU systems themselves needs to be upgraded – this can hinder any support provided
- The ability to watch back videos of tutorials would be greatly valued – this is inconsistent in terms of it being experienced / accessed
- Make tutors accountable for results and student retention – this being dependent largely on the support you receive
- More opportunity to discuss the module more generally rather than a specific TMA was suggested – however for some there needs to be more focus on TMAs within tutorials (!)

Visibility across modules or schedule of recordings

Two different types of tutorials – one set to teach, and one set to practice for exams

Tutor support - what were their initial expectations?

What did they expect?

Didn't know what to expect

[Awareness] Not really ... I gathered they were there when needed it

- Many were unsure in advance about the detail of how tutor support would be delivered
- Some were not even looking for any information on tutor support prior to study – or even understood they would have a tutor
- Those with some experience of the OU had clearer ideas – closer to the reality
- Where tutor support had been considered, there was an expectation of more 1-2-1 support and perhaps even weekly online contact
- A significant number had thought far more about course content – and appear to have spent less time imagining what tutor support would look or feel like
- Where expectations could be recalled (and where they had no previous experience of the OU), they did tend to differ from reality
- Crucially, any gaps appear to be based on their vague expectations, rather than “promises” made by the OU

Expected face to face tutorials and more regular tutorials

Tutor support – how well informed were they in advance?

How well informed were they?

- Little specific information was recalled about how support would be delivered
- Little was explained to them in terms of what tutor support would look or feel like
- Many seemed unsure how and when they would be making any contact with tutors
- Many assumed the delivery of tutor support would be consistent (where a view was formed)
- **Crucially, course content is much better explained by the OU in advance (and sought out more)**
- Any information that was recalled tended to be generic, broadly descriptive, but certainly not detailed in terms of their tutor or how they would support them

Lacking information about tutor's availability and what to expect from your tutor

There wasn't much discussion about what the tutor was for

Good written information but lacking tutor interaction

Tutor support – falling below expectations

Having accepted that more pre-study focus was on course content than how the material was delivered, students highlighted many areas where their experiences did not match their (vague and sometimes patchy) expectations:

- Some expected a more hands on approach from tutors and to receive more personal support
- Some expected more regular contact / faster responses and more ongoing engagement from tutors
- Many expected the same tutor to be delivering tutorials and coursework
- Many expected more F2F interaction and engagement than they got
- There has been less individual feedback than expected
- F2F tutorials were believed to be more widely available – both in terms of quantity and geographical location
- Tutorials are often viewed as lectures, not tutorials, when delivered online – not what was expected
- Some felt they would be able to access recordings of tutorials more easily
- Students certainly did not expect such inconsistency in tutor support across modules – it is accepted this could not be highlighted in advance – the OU should simply address it instead

Expectation of being able to meet tutor in person on one-to-one basis was not met

[expectations] Vary between fairly met and not at all

We had few expectations but for the few that had this, it was mostly met

The “vacuum” of little firmly formed advance concept of tutor support represents an opportunity to shape this

Tutor support – what advance information should include

Students identified several areas where more advance information (in retrospect) would have been useful ...

- In practical terms, information on timings of TMAs, exams, deadlines
- Specifically (on reflection) more information on how tutoring is delivered ...
- The volume (and purpose) of F2F and online tutorials
- What tutorials are used for (covering assignments rather than general teaching)
- Your tutor is not always your lecturer or main deliverer of teaching (to manage expectations about variances)
- How online tutorials work and how you interact within them
- Where and when F2F tutorials will take place
- What to expect from your tutor – their workload, how often to expect communications
- Personalising this expectation “promise” from a tutor ... what other modules they cover, how many students they are responsible for, satisfaction of their students
- Establish a code of practice in advance (student charter with a tutor) covering what to expect

Email from tutor explaining when TMA results are released and marking process

What your tutor does ... how many hours they work, how many tutor groups they have

Clear indication at beginning of module on what you can ask your tutor, average amount of contact, what is not allowed

Tutor support – what advance information should include

Explaining levels of help available and where it comes from is valuable ...

- What the contact centre does and doesn't do
- A “welcome pack” either online or through the post explaining support available
- How much contact time you will receive from your tutor – and when you can contact them
- What is the most appropriate channel to contact your tutor
- Clarity on what is and is not appropriate to contact tutors about (“what you can ask your tutor”)
- How long they will take to respond to queries
- How long before you receive TMA responses and feedback
- How the level of contact varies by module
- They also value hearing more authentic student experiences and honest opinions in advance – relevant to the course

Contact details for support and times

Information about how and when to contact your tutor

Explain to new students what a tutor is and how they can help

Tutorial content – the most useful elements

Across all formats, tutorials were valued ... but the closer the interaction, the better ...

- They offer a deeper dive into the course (rather than just reading textbooks/PDFs)
- They can provide interaction and debate with both tutors and students – student support is greatly valued
- Feedback can be instantaneous (or nearly so)
- They provide some opportunity for social interaction and engagement with other students which are both important in distance learning
- Some students appear to prefer TMA-focused tutorials, others look for wider discussion / coverage if available
- Day schools are specifically valued as they provide deeper understanding and more interaction
- An introductory F2F tutorial is greatly valued
- Recording of and access to previous video tutorials is useful to many – as is a slide bank to refer to
- Access to a variety of tutors and their broader specialist knowledge is valued

Peer support, face to face is better than online for this

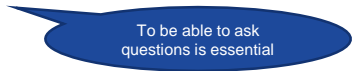
Providing focus on broader subject

Answers to TMAs ... hints and tips

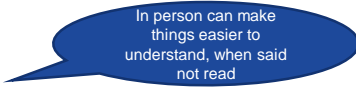
Recordings of tutorial available to those with time constraints / anxiety / different learning styles

Tutorial content – what they expect (to make them work for them)

- There to be a day school and an online tutorial available for every TMA
- Tutorials to include practical elements: problem solving, exchange of ideas, not just reading and listening
- To feel engaged, listened to, and valued
- There to be more preparation (by both them and tutors) for online tutorials compared to F2F, as they are shorter experiences and are shared
- The ability to ask questions and have them answered and issues clarified there and then
- There to be more F2F tutorials, and for them to be in more convenient locations
- Assessment expectations and requirements to be clearly explained with examples
- Individual feedback to be available (accepted this is easier with F2F)
- Access to previous tutorials via video
- Clearly, F2F is a superior interaction experience as they are more likely to be engaged both during and afterwards
- All content to be thoroughly up to date
- Consistency and continuity between tutors (both content and support/performance) within a module and course



To be able to ask questions is essential



In person can make things easier to understand, when said not read

Tutorial content – their preference in summary

- Online is no substitute for F2F interaction and day schools
- They value the contributions of other students and sharing ideas
- Tutorials are better if there is a degree of heightened and relevant preparation from both them and tutors
- Online does offer some degree of greater access to other tutors and their expertise
- Online is better than nothing, even if it is usually inferior to F2F
- A tutorial provided in any mode needs to inspire them to carry on studying (as well as prepare them for a TMA)

They want to end a tutorial (of any mode) enthused, engaged and excited

Tutorial attendance – what drives and prevents it

	F2F	Online
Why they attend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human element of meeting tutors and students • You can ask questions and get answers - quickly • You can listen to other students and access peer support • You can gauge how well you are doing compared to others • It is more inclusive & engaging • No need to navigate technology • They help consolidate learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It should provide wider coverage of all relevant information you need • Any TMA guidance and preparation is useful • There is at least some contact with tutors and students • You can listen to other student views (and guess how you are doing) • You are paying, so you use all resources available
Why they might not attend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to physically travel • Time taken and distance to travel (plus overnight stays) • Cost of travel / accommodation is an issue for some • Building / venue access for some • Internationally a challenge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration with lack of personal interaction • Prefer to view recordings in own time and at own pace • Sometimes technical issues • Different tutors who are sometimes unfamiliar • Too many held in evenings (daytime preferred by some) • Anxiety if not prepared • Can simply forget (if no reminder)

Tutor attendance – what could improve it

For F2F (and indeed any type of tutorial):

- More central and/or convenient locations that are easily commutable
- Longer sessions (at day schools) to maximise the value of the time out of their lives
- Knowing in advance how many would be attending (so they can judge whether worthwhile going)
- Travel costs to be covered (or at least offset somehow)
- Timing to be centred around the middle of the day (to avoid overnights and ease travel)
- A clear understanding of what they would gain from attending
- Tutorials not just being focused on TMAs (for some)
- More focus on TMAs (for others)

Longer day schools
would make the time
more valuable

Providing a "what's in it for
me" message

Advance notification of
topics to be covered

Tutor attendance – what could improve it

For online tutorials specifically:

- Having an expert tutor rather than just your course tutor deliver
- More information in advance (as well as preparation) on what the tutorial covers and time allocation within it
- For some, more TMA focus, for others less (more generic on the module)
- A range of tutorial times being available (not just evenings)
- Having the ability to ask questions when you need it and not be cut off
- Having a second tutor in the chatroom to handle queries and questions
- The use of breakout rooms – or smaller groups involved to increase interaction
- Use more interactive tools for delivery and overcome technical issues that exist – also train tutors to use the tools better
- Record them for playback (to reduce the pressure during the session)
- Remind students it is worth attending even if you feel underprepared for it
- Send out reminders via SMS / email / phone call – preferably as close to the event as possible
- Have a personal invite from tutors

Send content to attendees, so they can prepare questions

Having an option to talk or type is good

Recordings, because some people find the pace too quick

Reminder for tutorial attendance needs to be sent closer to the time not so far in advance

More general reflections on tuition

- The more interactive the delivery the better (in any mode) – clearly reading off a script and slides is unproductive
- Tutorials are focused on tackling assignments – there can be an over-emphasis on results rather than broader subject-based learning
- More prompt and (crucially) consistent feedback timings from TMAs is desired – sometimes this arrives too close to exams
- Expand the availability or recording / playback for greater access – so tutorials are more like streamed lectures
- OU's website and perceived technical issues can be a hindrance to access
- Make it easier to access previous recordings of tutorials
- For some, tutorials should be shorter (therefore more focused) but more frequent
- Students should be encouraged to participate more widely in tutor group forums
- More consistency (in a positive direction) between tutors and how they deliver their tutorials is needed
- Ultimately, provide a solution that is more interactive and engaging for both students *and* tutors

THANK YOU



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