Student Shadowing

A guide to The Open University student shadowing initiative, designed to offer current students the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of how the OU works.
What is Student Shadowing?

The Student Shadowing scheme is the opportunity for an OU student to visit a staff member, in order to gain a greater understanding of an OU unit, process or initiative – and be in the position to offer student focused feedback on its development. It also allows the chance for a student to observe the daily workings of an individual or team.

The scheme also allows an OU staff member to shadow a student and gain further understanding of what it’s really like to study with the OU. The opportunity can last anything from 1-5 days, with some opportunities for remote attendance.

Student Shadowing is one of many opportunities for OU students to give comment and be asked their opinion. Where appropriate, you may be able to provide feedback in meetings, and offer a student viewpoint in relation to a project or initiative.

Through participating in this scheme there may also the opportunity to visit a National office and gain insight into how the work done there feeds into the OU structure. Students will have their travel expenses paid.
Where did the idea come from?

The Student Shadowing scheme came about as an initiative from The Open University and Student Association partnership, and is designed to provide the opportunity to see the inner workings of the OU. A typical student’s study experience might at times not allow them to interact with a physical space, campus or lecturer – and the scheme has been brought about to help demystify the workings at the OU.

It allows the student to see how the Open University works and allows them to find more about their academic community, which for some OU students is a huge area of interest. The scheme also offers students the opportunity to share their experience of being a student at the OU. Their feedback and thoughts can help with problem solving, and contribute to the development of the Open University.

Why be part of OU Student Shadow Scheme? For students, you can

- Get the opportunity to shadow staff members at The Open University and network with Higher Education professionals.
- Understand how the OU works to support its students, and gain an understanding of the environment at your institution.
- Give feedback to the OU and raise issues as and where is appropriate.
- Understand the needs and priorities of the university, department or faculty.

For staff, you can

- Utilise student perceptions and their experiences to develop your processes or initiatives.
- Develop student based communication across your faculty and share your experiences with OU students.
- Gain student feedback on specific issues, and understand the barriers affecting students.
- Gain publicity and an internal understanding of your unit or faculty, and view your role or department through a fresh perspective.
- Develop your student engagement skills, and help develop an academic community that students feel part of.
How does it work?

An OU Staff member expresses an interest in the scheme, and sends their details to the Student Engagement Manager. They will then discuss how the hosting will be formulated eg: location and format of experience.

Opportunities are advertised on the Student Voice Website with a closing date for applications.

The student applies for the opportunity via the Student Voice Website and their details are sent to Student Engagement Manager. All applications will be considered by a panel made up of students at staff at the OU and the Students Association.

Students are shortlisted based on their willingness to share their experience of being an OU student, and also their preparedness to write a student facing article or case study based on their experience when undertaking the shadowing.

Then, the student visits the host to start the shadowing experience. Expenses will be reimbursed for the students. Tours, and site specific visits may be able to be arranged on request prior to the visit taking place.

The experience is written up by the student, where there is an opportunity to share their thoughts online, on social media and in the Students’ Association newsletter.
Quick guide for students

Before the Shadowing

- Formulate questions for your host, and start to read any documentation that has been sent to you to read.
- Consider if there are specific tasks or elements that you would like to see, and explore your perceptions of the host’s role.
- Make sure that you comply with the host’s requirements (e.g. dress code) and be sure you to inform your host of any special requirements you might have to make your visit as comfortable as possible.

During the Shadowing

Be prepared to discuss your experiences as an OU student. You might be asked about any needs you face in your studies as well as any barriers you face being able to study, i.e. work/family commitments, previous experiences of education. Prepare for the experience and be open to ideas and questions from your host. Offer feedback throughout the experience, and you can also present an outline as to what you are expecting from the experience.

Learn as much as possible about the environment, the process and the day-to-day working of the host and their teams. Take notes so that you can remember facts, thoughts and observations from the experience. This will allow you to fully reflect on your experience, as well as support you in writing about it afterwards. Remember to present yourself in a professional manner, and think about your timekeeping. Inform you host if you are unable to attend your visit for any reason. Show respect and discretion if situations arise that require the host’s immediate attention during your stay with them and maintain confidentiality at all times. If you are unsure about confidentiality, you can ask your host.
After the Shadowing

Write a blog for the Students Association magazine or newsletter (https://www.oustudents.com/magazine) and feedback to your peers about your experiences. Reflect on your day and consider whether there are any elements that you can utilise to develop your study or career advancement.

What you might like to put in a blog

- What did your day entail? Did you go to any meetings, events or have a tour? How did your host share their experiences with you, and what do you understand about their role?
- What you learnt about the OU that you did not already know. Reflect on any preconceptions you may have had, did you discover any elements to the working of the OU that you think students would like to hear about?
- Identify any feedback or comments you made during or after the experience and whether they were discussed and taken on board by your host.

Did you have the opportunity to explain any barriers to your learning, and how did your host respond to these?
Quick guide for staff

Before the shadowing

• Discuss the shadowing with your team to make them aware that the visit will be taking place, and arrange the logistics of having a student in. Do they need a visitor’s pass and car parking? If the student has accessibility needs, do they require a Personal Evacuation Plan?
• Consider what might be the best time to host the visit to ensure that the day is meaningful to both you and the student. Find out if there are elements of the day also that would be unsuitable for students, due to specialist work or confidentiality.
• Are there any specific areas where a student’s input would be valuable, either at a workshop, meeting or an event? Also consider if there is any particular demographic of student that you might need.
• Do you need to send any resources or documentation over to the student before they start the visit, and do you need to inform chairs of meetings that they will be in attendance with you?

During the Shadowing

• Provide the student with an outline of the day and explain each element to them. Allow time between sessions for students to be debriefed, and for questions to be asked. Discuss your expectation of the student and any particular requirements you and the student may have. You may also need to brief other members of the team about the shadowing experience.
• Introduce the student to the team and all individuals that you deal with throughout the experience and provide the student with an overview of your Unit/Faculty/initiative where appropriate, and how they can feedback into it.
• It is important that you listen to any feedback offered from the student and make a note of it. This will help you with your internal developments as well as help towards creating a summary of how you respond to their feedback. Provide constructive feedback to the student.
Quick guide for staff

After the Shadowing

Consider the feedback you have received from your student and the immediate and long term implications of that feedback. Share the experience outcomes with your team and colleagues, and see if there are any changes that can be made to services or projects as a result of this feedback.

Support the awareness raising of the Student Shadowing scheme, and offer a response to any feedback that the student has given. We will also ask that you write a brief summary of your experience which can be used on the Student Voice website. You may like to include:

- What feedback you have received from students throughout the whole experience, both from questions asked and from informal discussions.
- Whether this experience has offered you a different perspective on any part of your role.
- How will this feedback help develop your role/initiative/Unit/Faculty, or even you as a person.

Would you like further information?
Get in touch here:

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