

Response to student consultation on Student Feedback

Introduction

This is a response to the consultation on Student Feedback which took place during 10–20 March 2017. The summary of student feedback can be read here

<https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/discuss.php?d=83668> with the full record found in the [forum](#).

Since October 2012, the Student Experience on a Module (SEaM) Survey has been a key mechanism within the University for collecting student feedback from students whilst they are studying on a module. As part of the consultation we asked students various questions about how they would like the survey to change. The consultation was organised in such a way that we could explore with students various aspects of the whole survey as well as the actual question content and wording, and was organised under the general headings of what you are asked, how you are asked (and when), how the University should respond, the frequency and approach to surveys. The consultation also considered feedback mechanisms (surveys along with other forums, polls, meetings, etc.) and students' priorities for feedback. The consultation made space and time for other issues which led to some great suggestions that SEaM will adopt (for example, having 'not applicable' as an option for every question, and not assume one-size-fits-all for a diverse student body).

During the consultation it was made clear that further work will be required to achieve all of the things that students would like and that not everything suggested will be possible in the first iteration of the survey's redevelopment. However it should also be noted that student feedback arrives from many channels into the University, and that although this response relies on many examples from the SEaM Survey, a longer term vision for all feedback is anticipated to follow many of the examples shared here. Some of those things are already beginning to happen, such as the planned Student Voice website, to be launched in autumn 2017, becoming a new focus for feedback and action.

Summary

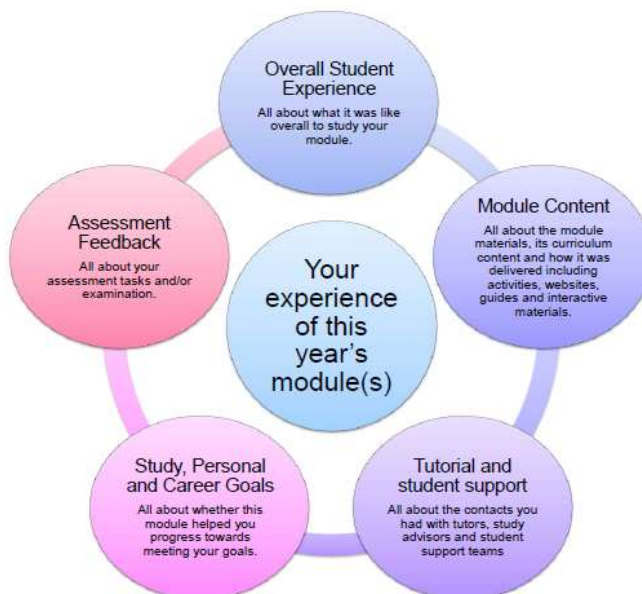
- Key messages from students included issues about speed of action after feedback is collected, ensuring that feedback is treated seriously and acted on. 'Closing the loop' was also a key need – students want evidence of improvements made based on their feedback. If actions can't be taken, or changes can't be made, the University should always report why.
- Many of these requirements are being acted upon through the redevelopment of the survey but also within the University's broader Students First strategy which seems to be well aligned to the student wishes as expressed in the consultation, as well as improving the overall student experience and putting students and their needs 'into' the curriculum improvement processes.
- Some highlights of specific changes that have already been made in response to student views include the proposed changes to the redeveloped survey which will be shorter, clearer, more proactive, and hopefully have faster turn-around times. By faster responses we want to act on

students' needs more quickly, but the current cycle of module presentation means that often it is not possible to change content during presentation.

- Some of text changes that we would like to make in response to student feedback are not possible as the computer system we currently use is outdated. Thus we will use interim questions within the older system until the University adopts a new system. We are making plans to start research into a new system this summer and will be using some of the points identified in this consultation to feed into the requirements specification for this, particularly around being able to tailor questionnaire to the needs of individual students.
- We plan to create a student centred launch pack that will be shared with a wide audience including students, tutors and University staff by mid-September 2017. The pack will explain how and why we're changing the survey and how we intend to keep students involved in formal survey mechanisms. Part of the pack will outline the key steps and milestones anticipated and we hope that students will find this a very useful guide for the various ways forward in collecting and responding to student feedback.
- The Project Team will share a fuller report with students explaining each step in the process to show how we have used student feedback in the development of the new survey, as we are very keen to keep students involved in the ongoing process. For example, as part of this involvement students have participated in the cognitive testing of all the reformulated questions. We have removed all double questions and we will continue with guaranteeing anonymity.
- Associate Lecturers (tutors) were also involved in the process. Key messages from tutors about the redeveloped questions were considered and the goal of a great survey is to act both as a way to improve the student experience whilst at the same providing anonymous, mediated feedback to allocated tutors. Further work is required in this area.

Full response

- We asked: To what extent does the diagram reflect the areas you would like to give feedback on about the module you are studying? The diagram shown below depicted the five key areas that the Survey was likely to be 'split' into – Overall Experience, Module Content, Tutorial and Student Support, Study Goals (includes Personal and Career Goals) and Assessment and Feedback. We also asked students to tell us: What aspects of your module do you think it is most important to have an opportunity to provide feedback on?



- We have tried to separate each of the five key areas below for easy of reporting, but it was clear that some issues have overlap across the areas. We observed 29 comments, with the Student Experience and Module Content being the most cited. The Project Team mapped every response to the five major areas shown above. We circulated widely the findings within appropriate areas of the University and discussed many aspects of the consultation with respect to our major survey which takes place during the module presentation. In some boxes the text refers to Question number which are shown as Q1 for Question 1 – these questions are listed in Appendix 1 at the end of this document.

You said	OU response	Next steps, if appropriate
<p>With respect to the overall experience that</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The survey needs better signposting 2. Open questions are preferred over Likert scale 3. You want assurance of seeing the draft questions at a later stage. 	<p>The revised survey working group will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Embed clearer instructions within the survey 2. Ensure open comments stay in, and that in future developments we will not be restricted to a single Likert scale. 3. Ensure that students are consulted on the draft questions 	<p>The revised survey project will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check instructions with students during pilots. 2. Retain open comments and consider use in analysis and improvements (see the three open comments questions after Q9 and Q18. <p>The interim questions have been cognitively tested, and they are included in this document.</p>
<p>That for Module Content it was important to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Feed forward each cohort's comments to the next year including for pre-study students 2. Be able to comment on how up-to-date the content is 3. Comment on activities within the learning 	<p>The working group will recommend that</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Module Teams take your feedback on board every year when possible, or at minimum reply to your comments within the Module Reviews website or other appropriate online area 2. Datedness is an issue to be addressed by OU Redesign 3. Activities as a question has been removed from the survey – Q6 does ask about opportunities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This is part of the OU's Annual Quality Review (AQR) currently and the new Student Voice website will make responses to survey results more accessible for students before they start their next module. 2. Datedness is an area that could be highlighted for students within open comments. 3. This question has been removed and as such there is no mechanism to track this unless students mention it within the open comments.
<p>For your Tutor (Allocated Tutor) and tutor support</p>	<p>Project Team Response</p>	<p>The revised survey will</p>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It should consider quality of feedback and responsiveness 2. Should be linked to Tutor Support Statement but be handled sensitively, anonymously 3. Should recognise that there are different types of 'tutors' 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We agree and tutors in general also agree. 2. Agreed – the survey should remain anonymous and we will map final questions against the current statement. 3. The wording will be changed to capture this. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cover this in both Teaching and Learning but also in Feedback on My Tutor (Q17, Q11, Q12). 2. Comments will still be mediated by academic staff, and we will work with the OU Students Association to ensure guidelines are clearer. 3. Retain emphasis on your Allocated Tutor as marking and feedback are the key ingredients. Feedback about Tuition (and Group Tuition Policy) will be collected elsewhere.
<p>Concerning goals (personal, study or career):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Goals need clarifying as motivations are complex and multiple. 2. Not Applicable can be an acceptable entry. 	<p>Project Team Response</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In general we agree, however there is a large number of students who leave this area blank. 2. We agree. 	<p>The revised survey will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Will only enquire about self-confidence and skills within the module (Q18, Q23) and place emphasis on having clear information about choices (Q20, Q19) for each student's next steps. 2. Always have the option of selecting Not Applicable.
<p>That Assessment and Feedback questions should</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus on the usefulness of feedback from your tutor. 2. Allow comments on OCAS and OES including clarity and usefulness. 	<p>The redeveloped survey will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. include a question about the tutor's feedback in preparing for the assignment 2. include a direct questions about clarity (see Question 10 of the list in Appendix 1) but usefulness wasn't identified by student testers. 	<p>Next Steps</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. See Q15-Q17– this is very close to usefulness or utility of feedback. 2. Usefulness won't be included, but could be commented on in the open text. See also Question 18 about skills developed.

Long-term plans

There are some things that the University won't be able to do in the first phase of the revised survey and these are discussed below. We've tried to explain what the barriers and constraints are because we want students to understand why it might not be possible to achieve everything required at least in this first change to the survey, which is expected to roll-out for students studying with February 2017 start dates. Some of things we can't do relate to the fact that with less questions, there will be less opportunities to ask about very specific things (like activities, or the possibility of a mid-module survey) which it is likely that the University would not be able to do without major changes to systems.

The structure of the current survey can't be changed due to the constraints of the surveying software, however our best endeavour will be to consider changing this in the future when new software is introduced. We're also subtly changing some of the rubric and instructions to make the survey simpler and more user-friendly. Despite this we have managed to condense the current approximately 45 questions into about 25 and still retain the key themes that students are really concerned about. There is also still plenty of space for open comments which are valued by module teams and other students.

At this point in time the University does not have the correct mechanism to feed-forward some sort of annual summary from students open comments to module teams as rapidly as students would prefer, but this is an area which we feel can be improved to make the student journey much better. By feeding forward students' comments into the module reviews in a more timely fashion, and adding the module team response, we expect this could become an important part of refreshing the module, if and wherever possible. We would like to place more value and emphasis on students' open comments and make them more widely available as summaries within a more transparent webspace that all OU students can interact with. In the future, with better software systems, this may be easier to accomplish and the whole process of closing the feedback loop might be much quicker. A key institutional principle is that feedback collected should be acted on, it would seem that the You Said, We Did style of communication should be a key focus for all types of feedback. A final point which comes through many student requests is that the University needs to respond more quickly to feedback, and that actions taken should be clearer and more clearly communicated to all student parties.

Date: 04 AUGUST 2017

Appendix 1: Student experience on a module survey – revised questions

We felt it would be useful to share the current status of the questions here in the simplest form, as a list within each of the three main section headings. It is expected that all of these subtle changes might raise the survey response rates whilst simultaneously reducing survey fatigue.

The response scale for each question is:

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements by clicking on the appropriate button: Not applicable/Definitely Agree/Mostly Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Mostly Disagree/Definitely Disagree

Teaching, Assessment and Learning (Questions 1-9 with two open text questions, with a maximum of 4000 characters)

1. The way the module materials were presented helped to maintain my interest.
2. The study workload on this module fitted with my personal circumstances.
3. The structure of the module meant I could interact with my peers when learning.
4. Resources I accessed through the Library (e.g. journal articles) helped me to understand the core concepts of the module.
5. I was satisfied with the opportunities I had to attend tutorials (either face to face or online).
6. Sufficient opportunities were provided to check my understanding on the module, for example by completing iCMAs or TMAs.
7. The instructions on how to complete the assessed tasks were easy to follow.
8. It was obvious how the module materials related to the assessed tasks on this module.
9. There was enough time in the study planner to prepare for the end of module assessment.

If you answered 'Disagree' to any of the statements above, we would like to understand why so we can make improvements in the future. Please give the number of the statement and expand on your answer to explain the reason for this.

This box only allows 4,000 characters. You will receive an error message if you input more than 4,000 characters.

Do you have any further comments about your teaching, assessment and learning on this module?

This box only allows 4,000 characters. You will receive an error message if you input more than 4,000 characters.

Feedback on your Tutor (Questions 10-18 with one open text question of 1000 characters) – please note that there will be extended text here to highlight that this section refers to **your allocated tutor**.

10. Contact from my tutor at the start of the module helped me get started with my studies.
11. I could get in touch with my tutor when necessary.
12. I was satisfied with the support provided by my allocated tutor on this module.

13. My tutor encouraged me in my studies.
14. My tutor used a friendly/personal tone in feedback on my assessed tasks.
15. My tutor's feedback on assessed tasks explained the mark that I received.
16. My tutor's feedback on assessed tasks helped me prepare for the next assessment.
17. My tutor's feedback on assessed tasks helped me to learn.
18. My tutor supported me in developing professional or work-related skills.

Please add any further comments about your allocated tutor Anne Other. Constructive feedback is welcomed.

Please note, your comments will be included in your tutor's feedback report. They will be anonymous but your tutor will see any identifying information that you include.

This box only allows 1,000 characters. You will receive an error message if you input more than 1,000 characters.

The Module Overall (Questions 19-23 with one open text question)

19. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my module.
20. I have a clear idea about my next module choice.
21. I was satisfied with the quality of the module.
22. I would recommend OU study to other students.
23. My studies have helped me develop my self-confidence.

These questions have been tested by students within the cognitive testing framework and are in the process of being prepared for roll-out in September for the module which started in February this year. The Project Team will be logging any issues during the roll-out for students completing their studies in September 2017. The project team will also be reporting to the Student Experience Committee as well as other stakeholders and we look forward to continuing to work with students to make a better survey that meets all the principles of the University's robust Institutional Survey Framework. Those principles are attached as Appendix 2.

Appendix 2: These are the principles of the Institutional Survey Framework and many of these were noted in the consultation and also within our discussions with students and academics. These principles could be used in the future to test and ensure that our feedback processes are indeed delivering improvements for students (see Principles 1 and 5) – through actions. The working group continues to work on Principle 3 to ensure that students are part of any changes but hope that the new Student Voice website and further consultations via forums and workshop may enhance this aspect.

Principle 1: Internal student feedback mechanisms drive institutional action planning and improvement to meet requirements for Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement.

Principle 2: Issues raised in external surveys which concern the quality of the student experience are identified and resolved through internal feedback mechanisms.

Principle 3: Students are active partners in the design, operation and evaluation of the institutional feedback framework.

Principle 4: Student feedback is monitored effectively through robust mechanisms at key points in the student journey.

Principle 5: Student feedback mechanisms support and enable action to be taken to improve the student experience.

Principle 6: Student feedback mechanisms are based on a robust methodology for evaluating the student experience – metrics, measures, census points and ethics.

Principle 7: An integrated and holistic approach is fostered to strengthen insight and research knowledge on the student experience for Quality Enhancement.