

Executive Summary

Our Open University students come with a wide range of personal, social, cultural, educational and employment backgrounds. In some cases, the combination of such circumstances means that a student decides to register several months in advance of the start of a module they wish to study. Frequently the University then does little to help that student, build on their enthusiasm or, in some senses, “reward” their commitment. Whilst initiatives such as our “Freshers’ week” have been introduced we still rather neglect some students for several months and then ask them to begin the module, and increasingly at least one other module, at a fixed date in October.

It seems at least feasible that some students would like to take advantage of a facility to start their study on a much more flexible basis. Students have expressed views that it is “good” to get ahead with study if possible and this pilot has given students on M140 *Introducing Statistics*, an opportunity to start their study on a rolling basis, at a time of their choosing and up to three months in advance of the usual module start. The approach is different to that of the several “revise and refresh” options running in STEM because it offers a tutor supported, flexible start, and uses the actual module materials.

Around 400 students were offered the opportunity of a flexible early start and just over two hundred responded by email to say that they would like to take up this offer. Students who registered early, compared to those who did not, tended to already have some OU credits. The sub group of students registered early and who then took part in the programme were even more likely to already have some OU credits. It might be argued that such students were already aware of the high October workload and they seemed to wish to minimise it- using their time over the summer.

A special website for the programme was built and this linked together existing electronic materials for students. The online questionnaire tools within the website enabled student views on the programme to be requested very early in the programme and again just before it closed. Additionally a separate survey, six months into the main module, enabled student views “with hindsight” to be collected. Responses were overwhelmingly positive from students and many attended online tutorials, contributed to forums, loaded and used module software and studied early Units with tutor support.

The number of students at the 25% fee point is usually taken as the base for the calculation of pass rates. The pass rate for M140 16J using this definition was 73.2% in for 2016J and for 17J was 73.4%. However, in 17J there was an improvement in retention in the period between when a student registered and the 25% fee point. This increase was 4.1% and was largely maintained throughout the module with almost an additional 40 students passing M140 out of the just over a thousand initially registered. The increased retention occurred so early in the module that the only new initiative operating was the early start programme. The increase in retention is therefore highly likely to be attributable to the programme.

An important consideration was equality of access to the pilot. The pilot was designed to be open to all students registered before a certain date, regardless of the student’s geographical location. We were aware that, by delivering access only electronically, it was not be possible for some groups of student to participate i.e. some disabled students, SiSE students etc. This limitation would need to be addressed for any further flexible start programme.

Aims and scope of project

The aims of the pilot were to establish if there was demand from students for an early start on M140 *Introducing Statistics*, and if so, the scale of the demand, the issues involved and whether this demand could be met cost effectively on M140 J presentations. The key research questions were:

- Are students willing to take part in a flexible early start programme and what are their assessments of the benefits?
- Does an early start option increase student “engagement” and lead to a detectable difference in retention?
- Is this a cost effective way to improve retention on the M140 and concurrent study modules?
- Are there identifiable benefits to students who have the same tutor from Early Start to module completion?
- Does participating in an early start option alter the factors used in the predictive probabilities models?

Activities

Pre Pilot preliminary analysis

An analysis of 16J M140 J data was undertaken to understand the potential demand for an early start on M140t and to help shape the content. Tailoring of contents and processes, to help improve retention and achievement, was informed by insights from the previous J cohorts. The analysis was essential in that it provided an evidence base that there was an issue of drop-out between registration and module start. Traditionally, for a Level 1 module, we just regarded this as an inevitable consequence of “life events”. As key performance measures such as pass rates are calculated from the 25% fee point (25% f.p.) increasing the numbers pre 25%f.p. would not improve pass rates and actually might decrease it if more “at risk” students were retained initially but then withdrew during the module.

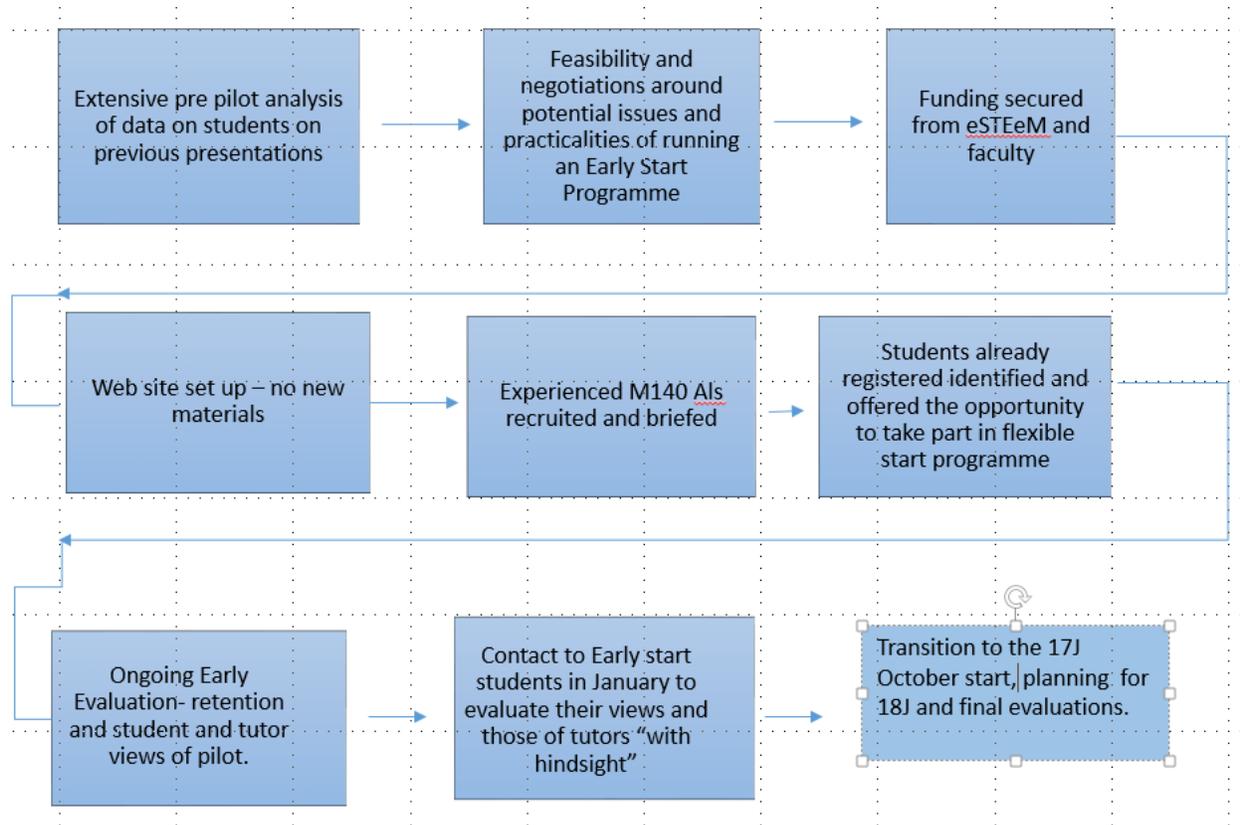
The pre –pilot analysis also enabled the most effective sources of information about the 17J cohort to be identified and preliminary programs for relevant data extraction to be built. A substantial amount of the information required could be sourced from the OU Institutional module dashboard.

A Dedicated web site

The logistical difficulties and cost implications involved in altering mailing dates for paper module materials were perceived to far outweigh the potential benefits in a pilot programme. The decision was therefore taken to rely solely on electronic versions of our module materials for the pilot. The school programme manager built an old style VLE site with an OU live (Blackboard Collaborate) room for tutorials, a moderated forum for student discussion, the software (Minitab) and loading instructions, and the early Units/ practice quizzes/screencast and interactive computer applets. A practice TMA01 (effectively the previous year’s TMA01) was also loaded with the associated datasets for students to “try” and have marked by their tutor if they wished.

Initially we loaded the first three Units of the module and subsequently, in response to student requests, loaded two additional units but not the associated materials.

Figure 1: Activities for Flexible / Early Start Programme



Recruitment and briefing of Associate Lecturers

Initially two Associate Lecturers were enrolled to provide the usual ‘on module’ tutor support to students on the programme. Two telephone briefings took place; the initial to outline the plans and the second to finalise details of tutorial content, moderation of forum etc. Further funding was sought and secured when it became apparent that we would have much larger numbers of students taking up the opportunity than anticipated. We therefore held an additional conference call briefing and we had four highly experienced AL’s and the module chair/project lead available for most of the project.

The increase to four ALs opened up a possibility that active students on the programme could continue their M140 studies, after the Early Start Programme closed, with the same tutor. M140 is tutored in four cluster groups and it was possible to arrange that we had one tutor from each of the four clusters involved in the programme.

The Associate Lecturers received a spreadsheet with basic information about the student, similar to the information they receive at module start. This included a notification if the student was also studying MST124. The negotiations phase of the pilot had identified concerns that students might be diverted from spending time on MST124 “revise and refresh” materials onto the M140 early start programme. To

allay these fears the briefing sessions asked AL's to stress to the students the importance of looking at the MST124 materials first. The initial contact similarly gave this advice and the first item on the website reminded students of the advice.

The Associate Lecturers were asked to record a range of information to build up a picture of how much the student participated. This information was summarised and recorded in VOICE and also sent to the AL the student was allocated to for the October start of the module; the October allocation of students to tutors largely followed the usual allocation method.

Enrolling students

In the interests of fairness it was decided to offer the opportunity to take part in the Early Start Programme to all students who had reached "PA" (registered) status by a certain date. The initial plan was to select a single date. In reality we had such large numbers enrolling that a phased approach to enrolment was introduced. The only difference between phase 1, phase 2 and phase 3 was the date by which the student had reached registered status. For the final phase, phase 4, the process was changed with the Early Site programme URL merely being sent as part of an explanatory email to any students who reached PA status before the 16th August. These students were not allocated a tutor but, with the exception of having the opportunity to have a practice TMA marked, everything else on the programme was available to them.

The students were identified by bespoke SAS programs run against the main University databases and contacted, via an email, from the module chair/project lead to outline the Early start programme. Students were asked to respond if they wished to take part and also if they wished to ask any questions. The questions that were commonly asked were compiled into a FAQ document (see Appendix) and this was sent to all the phase 1 students and subsequently the phase 2 and phase 3 students. Those who responded that they would like a place were then allocated to a named tutor, the student and tutor informed and the student given access to the site.

Ongoing early evaluation

Student views were formally collected using the questionnaire tools within the website. These tools enabled multiple answers and free text responses in addition to yes/no type responses. SRPP agreement was sought and received to contact students who took part in the flexible start programme including for a contact six months after the programme closed. The questionnaire used at this point was issued electronically, via the JISC online questionnaire tool, and timed at roughly half way through the module. Students were asked to respond, with free text responses, to four brief questions about the programme "with the value of hindsight".

The project lead and the Early Start tutors held three discussions to enable experiences to be shared and the pilot modified in situ as much as was felt necessary and possible.

Several interim analyses were undertaken from module start onwards to track the retention of the cohort of students both in the programme and those offered a place, but who did not take up a place. This analysis enabled TMA submission rates, for example, to be compared across these groups and also with those who registered too late to be offered a place. Information for previous years, for the whole

cohort of students, enabled the impact of the project to be placed in the context with the “usual” patterns of retention.

Transition to the October start and further ahead

Care was given to how to provide a smooth transition at formal module start for students involved on the programme. The initial plan was to keep the students with the same tutor. This was rapidly modified when it became clear how many students wished to be involved. In reality with over 200 students on phase1-phase3 of the programme, and only four tutors involved, there was no possibility of all Early Start students continuing with their own tutor through the main M140 study period. It was possible to use the flexibility to manually allocate specific students to specific tutors and to utilise the flexibility that the tuition strategy offers in terms of students attending tutorials NOT given by their tutors. The meant all flexible start students from Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, East and West Midlands, and the South West and most in R01 were able to at least stay with one of the four tutors Early Start programme tutors. For the remaining students, the students’ new tutors were informed that the students have been on the Early Start Programme. Participation of all students is recorded in VOICE.

Findings

Pre pilot analysis- see Annex 1 for further details

An initial analysis of enrolment data for October in 2014, 2015 and 2016 M140 presentations was undertaken. There was a consistent pattern that around a third of around a third of enrolments had taken place by the end of June. This led to an initial assessment that there might be a pool of around 300 students to draw upon by 1st July and, with an arbitrary predicted take up rate of 20%, that would potential give us around 60 students to take part in the pilot. In the event we had over 200 students enrolled (see Table 1).

It seemed reasonable that students who registered early might differ in many ways, from those who do not register early, perhaps in terms of education experience or vulnerability as OU students. Perceived wisdom has been that students who register early are perhaps more able and more engaged. The pre pilot analysis however, using 16J data, showed that really there very little difference between the two groups.

Figure 2: Data for 2016J M140 students registering early compared to those who registered later.

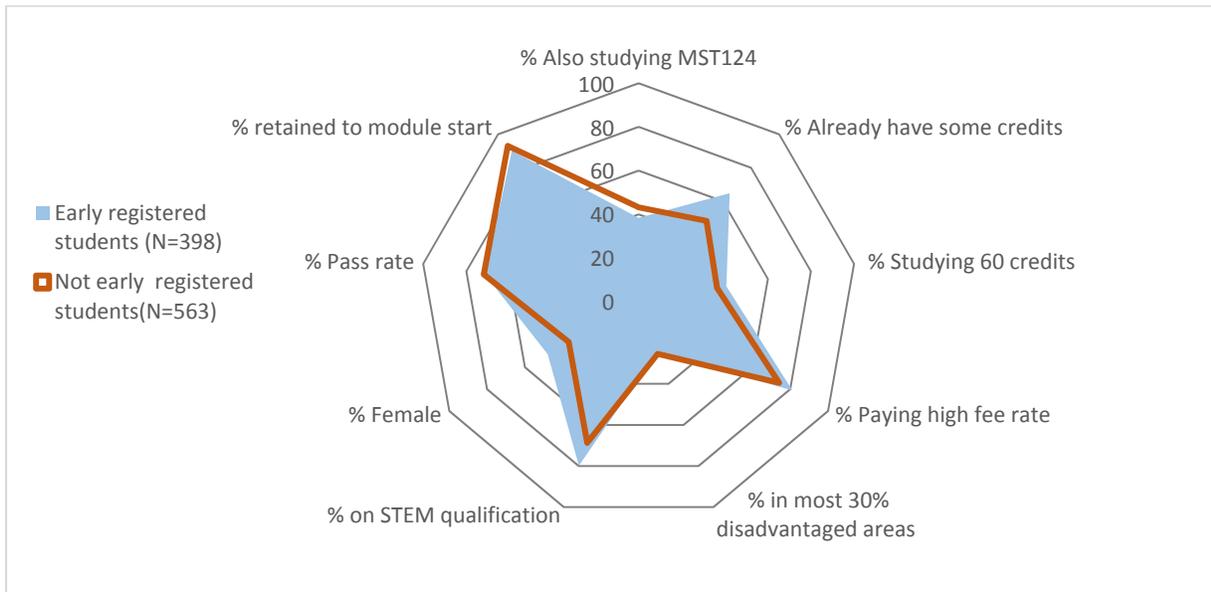


Figure 2 displays the “profiles” of the group of students who registered before 22nd July 2016 and those who registered later. The chart has “contour lines” running at 0%, 20%, 40%, 60%, 80% and 100%. The shaded area (blue) is the profile of the early registered students and the outline (orange) shows the same characteristics for those registered later. The “profiles” of the two groups are very similar apart from the percentage of students who already have some OU credits. Pass rates are very similar for the two groups and marginally fewer early registered students were retained until module start - 90% compared to 93%.

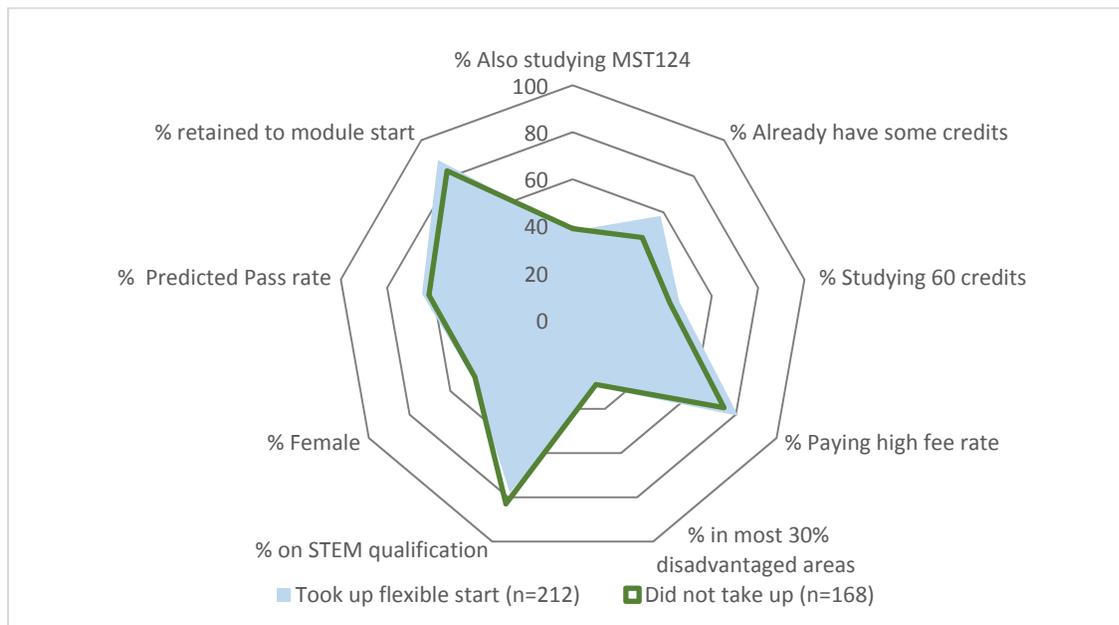
Analysis during programme

Predicted probabilities of passing the module

Over a number of years Open University researchers have developed sophisticated statistical models, based on very large student cohorts, to predict the likelihood of success for students studying OU modules. The models use retrospective data to identify patterns of success for students with a variety of characteristics. These studies have enabled University educational statisticians to accurately predict, even as early as enrolment, which students are most likely to be successful and which more likely to struggle or fail. The probabilities of success, prior to module start, can thus be used as a proxy for “prior ability” and aggregated to give a predicted pass rate for a cohort of students.

Figure 3 shows the comparable information for the 17J students to that shown for 16J in figure 2. Actual pass rates are replaced by predicted pass rates. It tells the general same story as the 16J data which is reassuring. In particular it shows virtually no difference between the two groups of students in terms of their “prior ability” (predicted probabilities of success)-patterns in the actual pass rates for 17J students are given in detail below)

Figure 3: Percentage Data for 2017J M140 students taking part in the flexible/ early start program and those who did not



Enrolment of students

Table 1 shows that, fairly consistently, just over 50% of the phase 1, phase 2 and phase 3 students who were offered the opportunity of a tutor supported, flexible early start, on M140 emailed back to the project lead that they would like to take up the opportunity.

Table 1: Numbers taking up the opportunity for an early start

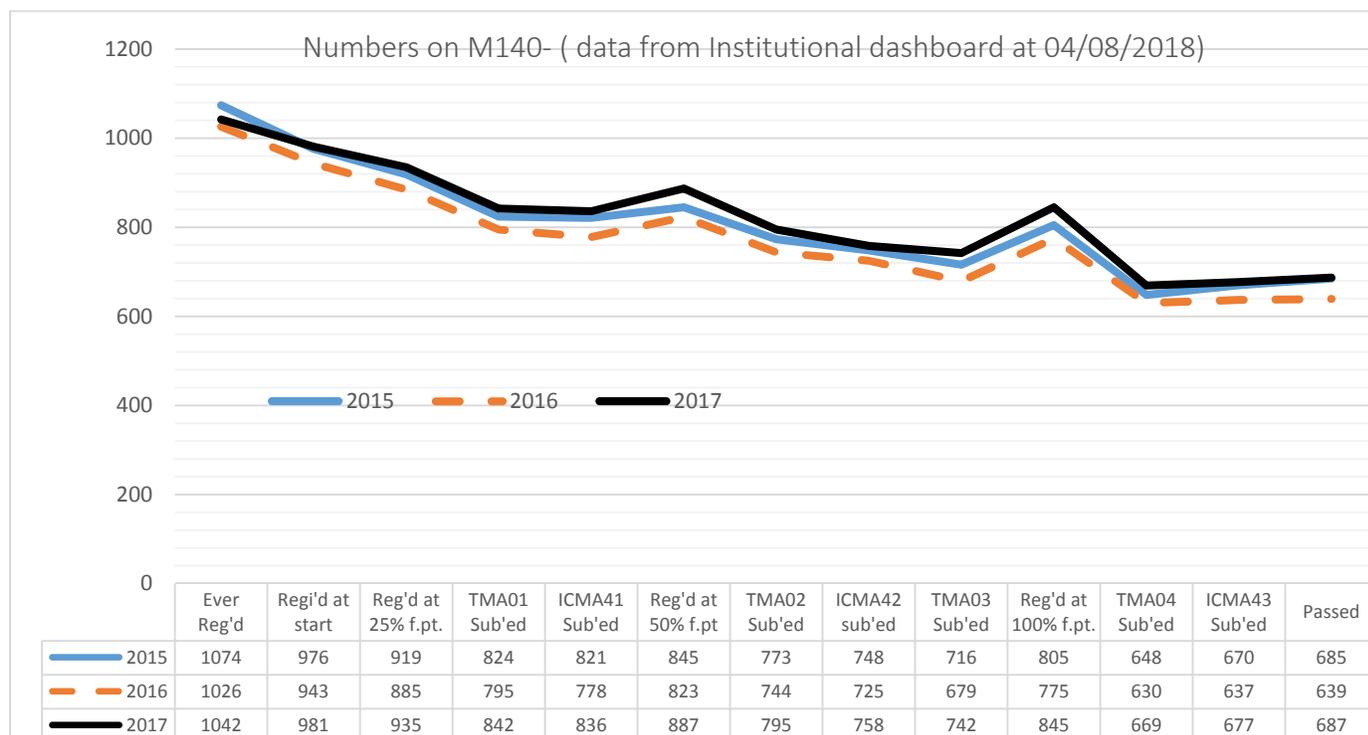
Intake by M140 registration period	Number of students offered	Number who accepted	Percentage enrolled
Phase 1- registered by 22 nd May	187	99	53%
Phase 2- registered 22 nd May to 22 nd June	89	47	53%
Phase 3 – registered 22 nd June to 22 nd July	123	66	54%
Totals	399	212	53%

Note: In addition 140 students who reached PA status between 22nd July and 16th August were identified as a Phase 4 group and all were simply supplied with the site URL.

In module retention and pass rates

The retention picture shown in Figure 4 is straightforward at the early stages. The percentage of students who were registered on M140 at some point and who were still registered at module start was 90.9% in 2015; 91.9% in 2016 and 94.1% in 2017. So there was an increase in retention to module start of 2-3 percentage points. The easiest comparison, for passes, to make with 2017 is actually with 2015 as the numbers passing are so similar- 687 compared to 685 and yet 2017 had 32 fewer registrations.

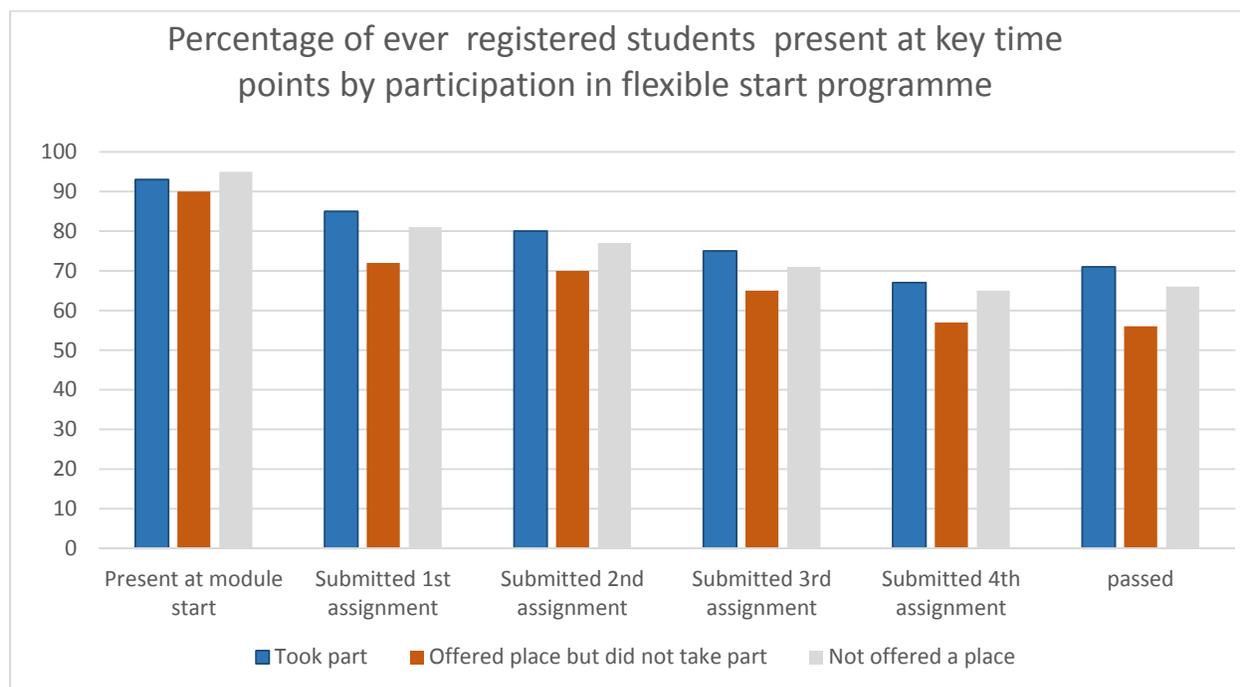
Figure 4: Retention on M140 compared to previous years



At a slightly deeper level the picture is more complex but it does explain an initial observation that sparked this work i.e. that students who register very early do NOT always do better on M140. Figure 3 showed that the predicted pass rate for the early start students who did/ did not take up the offer of an offer start place were very similar. Students who were offered a place and took it up had an average predicted pass rate of 65% and those offered, but did not take up a place, had an average of 62%. Those who registered later, and who thus were never offered a place had the lowest predicted probabilities of success with an average of 60%

Figure 5 shows that the group with the lowest pass rate, in terms of those ever registered, was actually those offered a place but they did not take it up. These were not the group with the lowest predicted pass rate -this was the group who were never offered a place. Figure 5 shows the large difference between the students who took up an offered place and those who did not. This is not simply a reflection of the weaker students being more likely to not take up a place because they are not the weakest group. It is a reflection of registering early **and** being a weaker student – perhaps these are more anxious students or perhaps it is an indication that they have had less contact with the academic world and its academic cycle and so less likely to register around the time most students do so? It is certainly a “risk factor” if a student enrolls early enough to have been offered a place but did not engage and take up the place

Figure 5: Retention on M140 by whether a student was offered a place on the early/flexible start programme and if so if they accepted a place



Student views

A standard VLE questionnaire item (**Annex 2**) was added to the dedicated web site and was open from the 23rd July 2017 (9pm) to 30th July 2017 (9pm). The questionnaire was anonymous and consisted of four questions and an open text box. It was designed to get early views from students who were actively using the site. The students were emailed once to say that there was a questionnaire there and could they complete it and with a reminder just a couple of days before closure. Three students additionally emailed because 50 characters was insufficient for them in the free text box. There was a 34% response rate.

A second, similar questionnaire, was added to the site just before it closed and there were 51 responses over the ten days the questionnaire was open i.e. around a 24% response rate. Results about the pattern of activities undertaken and why the student took part in the early start programme were similar to those in the first questionnaire. The responses to the free text box about activities to change were very positive with most students indicated that we should change nothing!

Table 2 shows that students frequently indicated that multiple factors were important and these most frequently included having time to study over the summer, wanting to ease the load in October as they were going to study more than one module and wanting to get ahead. This might be interpreted as some students are positively planning their future October workloads.

Table 2: Q1 “To help us understand what you were hoping for from the Early Start Programme please click on as many of the reasons below that apply “

	Initial questionnaire	Second questionnaire
Number potential respondents	146	212
Actual number of respondents	34	51
	Numbers (and percentage of actual respondents who included this option)	
It seemed a way to start gently	12 (35%)	25 (49%)
I am studying more than one module in October and it seemed a good way to ease the load in October	20 (59%)	29 (57%)
I had time over the summer and wanted to use it for study	24 (71%)	29 (57%)
I wanted to get ahead	18 (53%)	33 (65%)
It seemed a good way to get used to returning to study	6 (18%)	12 (23%)

(see **Annex 2** for Responses to other questions)

Students used the free text boxes in both questionnaires and several also chose to email the project lead directly. Two quotes give the flavour of the overall response

Having studied before, but not for some time, my personal hurdle could have been getting used to web access, software loading, and forums. For me this early start option has given me the confidence that the formalities surrounding the studies (including TMA) really are manageable for me. It prompted me to write a full study calendar for all three modules that I'll be doing live from October (M140, MST124 and MST125). As their content is revision for me, the question mark was going to be how to handle the study time and assessments. I know feel well-prepared, not just for M140 but for going back to studying in general. Thank you so much. I count myself lucky to have been given the opportunity to participate in this pilot.

I have been an OU student for a great many years. During that time I have seen some good ideas come and go. But being able to start the course this early is quite simply the best idea I have seen in a very long time.....

The final questionnaire, issued in February, and was designed to collect views with the value of hindsight as students would be over half-way through the module. This questionnaire was emailed to 208 students and had 45 responses i.e. 22% response rate. This questionnaire used all free text responses and Q1 and Q2 were designed to ask about ideas for changing the programme. By asking about a single item for change / no change the strength of feeling of the student was reflected. The analysis of Q1 and Q2 is presented in Table 3 together.

Answers were grouped looking for similar themes and then categorised into the emergent groupings. It was clear from both questions that the format of the Early start programme worked well and was appreciated by the students. The second questions highlighted the value placed by the students on the tutors / tutorials and the “informality” of the programme in terms of sign up/ what to study when was

appreciated. However that flexibility, in terms of what to study when, did need some guidance as evidenced by the requests to introduce a study calendar.

Table 3: Student “with hindsight” responses to change questions

Q1: Suggestions for a single activity to change	Number of respondents	Q2: suggestions for a single item to retain i.e. do not change	Number of respondents
Do not change anything	17	Keep as it is	17
Open up more units on M140	7	Keep the tutor	8
Enable real assignments to be submitted earlier	6	Keep tutorials	6
Have a study planner for the early/flexible start	5	Software available for loading	3
Have hard copy of units	4	Flexibility of sign up and study pattern	3
Explain the range and purpose of materials available	2	Other	2
Other	4	No response	6

Students were asked if they felt being part of the Early start programme had increased their confidence. As expected this was a much harder question to ask in an online questionnaire and 19 of the survey respondents (40%) left this question blank. Of those that did responded, 9 said they left it made no difference to their confidence and 17 saying they did feel more confident- 13 of the 26 responses cited time pressures were easier to juggle and 8 said it made the study feel less daunting. A couple of student quotes give a flavour of student views -

“Yes. I feel more confident for all three courses that I am doing right now. It was a real ice-breaker in terms of finding out how the different on-line elements work. Minitab, iCMAs, TMAs all important confidence boosters.”

“No. I did not take advantage of the early start offered to me. Had the early start program emphasised the dual MST124/M140 study demands I would have fully committed to the early start program- I think the dual MST124/M140 schedule is very unrealistic (1wk to study a unit!) and has caused me increasing scheduling problems. Hindsight I know- but in future please emphasise the explicit advantage to be gained over the MST124/M140 schedule.”

The final question asked if the students felt it mattered if they had the same tutor in October as they has on the early start programme. Again responses were low on this questions with the majority stating it did not matter- frequently accompanied by comments that all the tutors were great!(see **Annex 2**)

Student engagement

In terms of student engagement with the web activities: 47 did post a hello message; 96 viewed the post on how to get a free version of Microsoft office and 106 viewed the student post on setting up a WhatsApp group.

Students were offered two types of **online tutorials**- one set on study skills and one set on content. The tutorials were recorded- as is increasingly our standard practice on M140. There were 12 attendances across three study skills session and 45 attendances across 6 content sessions.

The phase 1-phase 3 students all had a named tutor who was available to give students feedback on a practice TMA if the student wished. Just over 20 students took up this opportunity i.e. around 10%.

Tutors' views

M140 is a newer module and is relatively straightforward. Generally tutors receive little contact from students after the initial start-up in October – other than to ask for extensions! Attendance at tutorials is low and both satisfaction with the module and pass rates are high. The tutors' view was that level of student/tutor interaction on the pilot was very typical of a usual M140 presentation with students generally tending not to contact their tutors very much.

Impact

In relation to original aims

1. The pilot has established that a substantial number of students are keen to take part in an opportunity to start M140 on a more flexible basis prior to the October module start. Students have identified the benefits in terms of reduction in stress, better time management and a better understanding of how study at the OU is organised.
2. Student responses to the questionnaire were clearly showing how much they valued the tutors and the tutorials support and yet uptake of the facility offered by tutors seemed low. This may simply be that it was important for the student to KNOW the tutor was there if needed but that actually the materials were well within the understanding of the majority of the students.
3. Neither students nor tutors feel that there are strong benefits for most students of having the same tutor on the early start programme as they do on the main presentation.
4. Student retention has improved by 2-3 percentage points between registration and module start. Around 30-40 more students passed M140 than we would have expected compared with registration numbers in 2015 and 2016. It is anticipated that student satisfaction will also have improved but it is unlikely that will be identifiable within the annual University student satisfaction survey (SEAM).
4. The cost involved was for 40 DL days and programme manager time to set up web site and Chair/ project lead to develop and administer the programme. In 18J the faculty will fund 20 DL days and the administration of the programme will be simplified to 5 days. This is off set against a potential retention in 18J of at least 30 students. Thus the programme represents a cost effective way of increasing retention.

5. The explanatory factor to be added to the predictive model is not “take part” but more critically being “offered a place and not taking up the place”. This is acting as a proxy for lack of engagement at an early stage with study.

Additionally

6. Following discussions with AL’s, colleagues in assessment, and the Board of studies it was agreed that we would introduce an element of flexible submission and feedback for TMAs. This meant that students could be offered the opportunity to submit the final two TMAs early and hence receive limited feedback before submitting the EMA in March if they wished.

7. A discussion with WELS has taken place re adapting the idea to their context.

8. In the light of current talk about flexibility of starts for students the project has provided some hard evidence of demand, organisational and assessment issues associated with nonstandard starts

List of deliverables

1. Frequently Asked Question document (**Annex 3**)
2. Responses to the three questionnaires
3. Contributions about the flexible early start at [“Using data to increase learning gains and teaching excellence”](#). Jan 2018 OU HEFCE open event
4. Example in STEM bridging/ transitions workshop- “Making Data work for you “ OU event Nov 2017,
5. Talk at eSTEem meeting in April 2018
6. Talk at HEA meeting in June 2018
7. Paper for Open Learning

Figures and tables

Figure 1: Activities for Flexible / Early Start Programme

Figure 2: Data for 2016J M140 students registering early compared to those who registered later.

Figure 3: Percentage Data for 2017J M140 students taking part in the flexible/ early start program and those who did not

Figure 4: Retention on M140 compared to previous years

Figure 5: Retention on M140 by whether a student was offered a place on the early/flexible start programme and if so if they accepted a place

Table 1: Numbers taking up the opportunity for an early start

Table 2: Q1 “To help us understand what you were hoping for from the Early Start Programme please click on as many of the reasons below that apply “

Table 3: Student “with hindsight” responses to change questions

References

Carol Calvert (2014) "**Developing a model and applications for probabilities of student success: a case study of predictive analytics**" Open learning Vol 29, No2, 160-173.

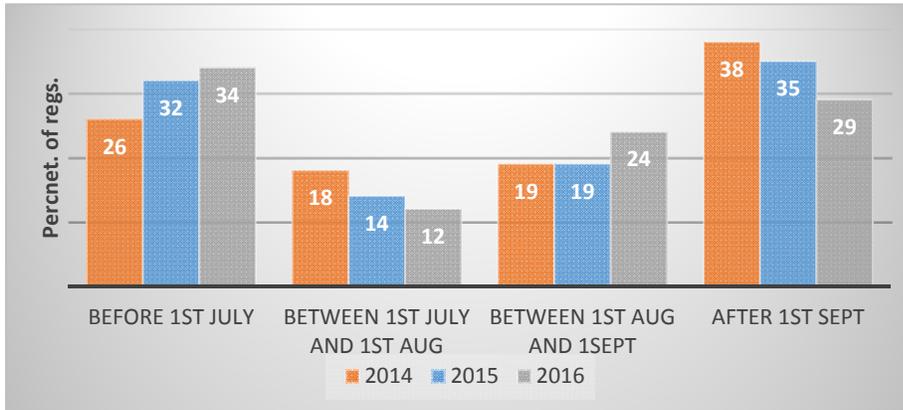
Carol Calvert et al (2017)“Succeeding against the odds” Succeeding Against the Odds. eSTeEM Final Report <https://intranet9.open.ac.uk/collaboration/Scholarship-Exchange/Wiki/Document.aspx?DocumentID=2075>

Annex 1

Pre Pilot analysis

An initial analysis of enrolment data for October in 2014, 2015 and 2016 M140 presentations was undertaken. From Figure 6 it can be seen that consistently around a third of enrolments had taken place by the 1st July and around 45% of enrolments had taken place by the 1st August of the appropriate year. This led to an initial assessment that there might be a pool of around 300 students to draw upon by 1st July and, with an arbitrary predicted take up rate of 20%, that would potential give us around 60 students to take part in the pilot. In the event we had over 200 students enrolled – see table 1.

Figure 6: The percentage M140 students at “PA/registered status” by period of registration.



Annex 2: Questionnaires

Questionnaire 1- in website questionnaire tools

1 To help us understand what you were hoping for from the *Early start* programme please click on as many of the reasons below that apply.

Response	Average	Total
It seemed a way to start gently	 15%	12
I am studying more than one module in October and it seemed a good way to ease the load in October	 25%	20
I have time over the summer and I wanted to use it for study	 30%	24
I wanted to get ahead	 22%	18
It seemed a good way to get used to returning to study	 8%	6
Total	 100%	80/34

2 It will help us to plan future programmes if you can tell us what you've already chosen to do from the activities on offer. Please click on all that apply.

Response	Average	Total
I have contacted my tutor - just to say hello	 15%	18
I have contacted by tutor with specific questions	 6%	7
I have got Minitab working	 23%	28
I have looked at the forum threads	 20%	24
I have worked through parts of the Units	 22%	27
I have looked at the screencasts	 12%	15
I have not got started yet	 2%	3
Total	 100%	122/34

3 Do you think you will have any more time to study the M140 materials before official module start on 7th October?

Response	Average	Total
Yes	 97%	32
No	 3%	1
Total	 97%	33/34

4 Would you recommend to a student on the next presentation of M140 that they take an *Early start* option if one is offered?

Response	Average	Total
Definitely yes	 74%	25
Probably yes	 12%	4
Can't say as depends too much on their circumstances	 6%	2
Probably not	 6%	2
Definitely not	 3%	1
Total	 100%	34/34

5 Anything to add - in less than 50 characters?

Thank you for completing and remember the fun stuff at
<https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/subpage/view.php?id=4360>

Questionnaire 2- In website questionnaire tools

1 To help us understand what you were hoping for from the Early Start Programme please click on as many of the reasons below that apply

Response	Average	Total
It seemed a way to start gently.	 20%	25
I am studying more than one module in October and it seemed a good way to ease the load in October.	 23%	29
I had time over the summer and I wanted to use it to study.	 23%	29
I wanted to get ahead.	 26%	33
It seemed a good way to get used to returning to study.	 9%	12
Total	 100%	128/52

2 To help us plan any future programmes could you tell us what you have chosen to do from the activities on offer. Please click on as many that apply.

Response	Average	Total
I have contacted my tutor- just to say hello.	 14%	32
I have contacted my tutor with specific questions.	 8%	18
I have got Minitab working.	 20%	44
I have looked at the forum threads.	 17%	38
I have worked through parts of the Units.	 22%	48
I have looked at the screencasts.	 18%	40
I have not got started yet.	 0%	1
Total	 100%	221/52

3 Would you recommend to a student on the next October presentation of M140 that they take an Early Start option if one is offered?

Response	Average	Total
Definitely Yes.	 75%	40
Probably Yes.	 8%	4
Can't say as it depends too much on their circumstances	 17%	9
Total	 100%	53/52

4 If there is just one thing we should change if we run an Early Start Programme again what would it be?

5 What is the one thing you think we should definitely NOT change if we run an Early Start Programme again?

Response

6 Do you feel that you are more confident about your M140 and other study as a result of your experience on the M140 Early Start Programme?

Response	Average	Total
Yes	 90%	45
No	 4%	2
Does not apply	 6%	3
Total	 96%	50/52

7 Do you feel you know what to expect from M140 as a result of the Early Start programme ?

Response	Average	Total
Yes	 96%	49
No	 2%	1
Does nto apply	 2%	1
Total	 98%	51/52

8 Anything else you would like to add? (upto 2500 words)

Questionnaire 3- JISC tool questionnaire

Q1: With the benefit of hindsight if there is just one thing we should change when we run the next Early Start Programme again what would it be?

Q2: With the benefit of hindsight what is the one thing you think we should definitely NOT change?

Q3: Do you feel that you are more confident about your M140 and other study as a result of your experience on the M140 Early Start Programme?

Q4: You may have had the same flexible start tutor allocated to you over the summer as you have now and who was allocated at the main module start in October. We are wondering if you feel it makes a difference if you have the same tutor or not. So could you say if you had the same tutor or not and if you feel it matters?

Table 5: Student responses, “with hindsight”, of the importance of having the same tutor on the early start and main presentation

Student responded they had	Matters having the same tutor	Does not matter
Same tutor	6	6
Different tutor	6	9
Unknown	3	12

Annex 3: FAQ

1. **Do I have to do anything else to take part?** - No: responding to the initial email means we will place you in a tutor group and I will get more details to you in around two weeks
2. **Is there really no cost to me?** - There is really no cost. We ran this as programme as a pilot last year and it was a real success with students and tutors. It gives you a chance to start at your own pace and see what study on M140 really entails. We have also found that a greater proportion of students who took up the opportunity of this early start have done well on M140.
3. **I am on holiday/ busy in July can I start later say in August?**- yes of course you can
4. **Can I go slowly?** – Yes the pace you want to work at in the early start programme is totally up to you.
5. **What about my student loan as it is not in place yet?** – This is not at all connected with your student loan. You have been offered this opportunity because you have got as far as you can in the University enrolment process for M140. We are willing to just take on good faith you intend to get your loan sorted. If for any reason you find you cannot, or indeed you change your mind and decide M140 is not for you, that is still fine. There is no cost to you and your loan does not need to be in place if you are using one. The early start programme site closes down in mid-September anyway and we'd just hope you had enjoyed what you had studied and you'll come back at some stage to study with us!
6. **I have assessment banked and so can I still take part?** – Yes and it will be a case of discussing with your tutor what you feel would help you the most
7. **Do I have to get any software?** No: You use software called Minitab on M140. We're arranged for you to be able to download the software and a licence file that will automatically expire at the end of October. Before it expires you will have been given access to the main M140 October start site and you will just have to download a new licence- takes about 2 minutes.
8. **Do I need to get anything?** – M140 like many OU modules requires you to have a **PC running WINDOWS**. If you have a tablet or a MAC you are not going to be able to run MINITAB. Some Mac users have a "fix" and do manage but other Mac users simply buy a cheap second hand PC that they use for running software. Our use of Minitab is not space hungry. There is advice about what you need for M140 and we've put it on the website we have built for you.
9. **Do I need a word processor?** - Absolutely not for the early start programme and many students hand write their assignments for M140, scan them, and then submit them electronically. Other students simply post their assignments. If you do want to word process you are welcome to and as an OU registered student you can have a student version of Microsoft Office 365 for free.
10. **Can I submit TMAs early?** – There is a practice TMA on the website that your tutor will mark for you. Last year students did ask about early submission of TMAs and we did pilot it. However, in reality, only a handful of students actually did so and we are looking at arranging it for just TMA01 this year. We'll let you know when we have more details. So the final assessment for M140- there is no exam- will be due as usual at around 31st May 2019.
11. **How will you communicate with me?** – When I email you I will start my emails "M140: Carol here..." so you know it is not spam and I will use the email address you supplied to the University. When you tutor communicate with you they will probably email you first and arrange to give you a phone call – so it is important make sure we have the right contact details for you. When you have access to the website you will be able to see we also use forums and online rooms – for you to talk to students and to the four tutors and myself running this programme.
12. **Can I change my mind?** - Yes of course you can. If you decide initially this is not for you and then change your mind just email me. Similarly if you decide, once you start, the early start programme is not for you just let your tutor know.