Online module forums: Espoused, actual and improved

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What I am intending to do:

The aim is to see if T313/T317 forums are currently optimised for student learning/satisfaction by looking at forum responses from both students and ALs e.g. if questions are inappropriate to forum, answered too quickly by motivated ALs preventing any scaffolded learning, never completely answered etc.

The Research Questions to be answered are:
- Do the forum expectations/requirements depend on topic (i.e. design/environment/engineering?
- Do the forum expectations/requirements depend on level (i.e. 2/3/4 or points i.e. 30 or 60)
- What would help foster a learning community along a qualification pathway?

More detailed aspects to look at include
- Could we design our forums better - Are students participating in the appropriate forums i.e. are they discussing in the discussion forums, asking questions about TMAs in the TMA forums etc or are they jumping in on what they perceive to be an 'active' forum?
- What percentage of messages from students are about errors in module material or related to tutorials (where it is, what can they attend, where are the slides, Adobe Connect not working etc)
- Could we organise our forums better - Do students respond positively to multiple tutor participation and/or should we have Tutor Group Forums?

The investigation could be extended to T213 and T217, T452 which would allow comparison between them if time permits or in a subsequent project.

How I am going to do it:

- Quantitative analysis of forum messages using statistics and Microsoft Excel (an possibly analytics available from OU?)
- Qualitative thematic analysis using Microsoft Excel with Macros (Possible Qualitative analysis with NVIVO)
- AL focus groups (online)
- State of the art review of forum design and performance from external published literature and internal OU publications and triangulation with analysis of collected primary data

What am I expecting to find/achieve/develop at the end of it:

- Identification of current forum benefits and disadvantages
- Recommendations for future module forum design/usage
- Improved guidelines for forum moderation
- Baselines from which to develop qualification pathway forums

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