PROPOSAL FOR A PILOT STUDY FOR THE DELIVERY METHODS RESEARCH

The CEC is asked to:-

i) approve the pilot study outlined in the appendix.

ii) note the date for the Student Research Project Panel’s (S R P P) meeting for approving research applications.

1. Background

1.1 The perceived shift to online/onscreen delivery of modules has been a matter for concern since the initial CEC discussion on the topic in January 2013. The Module Delivery research has been conceived as a means to better understand the factors that influence students’ learning experience with both online/onscreen and print content, and to give a voice to concerns that students may raise about delivery methods.

1.2 This pilot study proposes to gather a broad spectrum of student opinion on the topic of module delivery, with a special focus on aspects of the online/onscreen delivery of modules. A sustained analysis of common themes identified from these responses will be used to inform the design of future research on the topic.

2. Pilot Study: Aims and Objectives

2.1 Aim: The pilot study aims to systematically gather and analyse students’ perceptions of how module delivery may affect their learning experience, together with the factors that influence students’ engagement with different delivery methods. The identification of both the limitations and the benefits of predominantly print and predominantly online/onscreen module delivery will help to identify the themes that can be explored effectively in future stages of the research.
2.2 **Objectives:** The pilot study is designed to explore the following areas of concern.

2.2.1 **Accessibility:** Identification of potential barriers to engaging with different delivery methods:
- Access to, and ownership of, digital devices and students’ preference for using them for online/onscreen study
- Factors that pose as barriers to engaging with both print and online/onscreen materials, such as costs, internet connectivity, and access to the OU’s Print on Demand service.

2.2.2 **Effectiveness:** Exploration of students’ opinion on the effectiveness of different delivery methods:
- Students’ perceptions of the interactivity embedded in online/onscreen study, and whether current module design makes effective use of this
- Students’ thoughts on the unique features of both print and online/onscreen materials, and whether the features of one format are difficult to replicate, enhanced or are lost when changed to the other.

2.2.3 **Learning Experience:** Exploration of how different delivery methods impact students’ learning experience:
- Student perceptions of what ‘Mixed Methods’ and/or ‘Blended Learning’ entail
- Student expectations in terms of ‘value for money’, or the balance of the cost of the module and the availability of printed material
- Any other issues that students tend to associate with online delivery, such as face-to-face contact with their tutors.

3. **Proposed Methodology**

3.1 A survey will be conducted with both closed and open questions. The study aims not only to identify general trends in student preferences, but also to invite respondents’ opinions on a range of factors tied to module delivery. The analysis of these responses will identify key themes that can be explored in greater depth in future stages of the research.

3.2 A sample of students will be provided by the Student Research Project Panel (S R P P), who will then run the survey using Qualtrics. The sample will be based on demographic representation, focusing on key variables such as qualifications or Q students, their socio-economic and employment status, level of study and faculty (including Open programmes). Respondents will also have the opportunity to declare any disabilities.

3.3 A draft copy of the survey questionnaire is attached. The present draft is in the Word format as a prototype; the survey, after CEC approval, will be launched with Qualtrics.
3.4 While the survey is ongoing, student opinion will also be gauged through informal channels such as social media platforms and OUSA’s student forums. These channels will be open to all students who wish to participate, and will help in identifying issues that crop up frequently in discussions on the topic of module delivery.

3.5 Timescale: The survey will run throughout August 2015, and the findings report will be prepared by the end of September. A few key dates pertaining to the S R P P’s approval of research applications are:

3.5.1 Thursday 23 July 2015 is when the S R P P meet to approve research applications. The cut-off date for submitting applications for this meeting is Thursday 16 July. However, early submission of applications is advised, and aiming for Friday 10 July will give the S R P P a head start on the sampling process.

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