

Using information to support student learning



This document tells you about important developments in the use of information The Open University holds about its students. You should take time to read it and understand how that information is used to support students throughout their studies.

Introduction

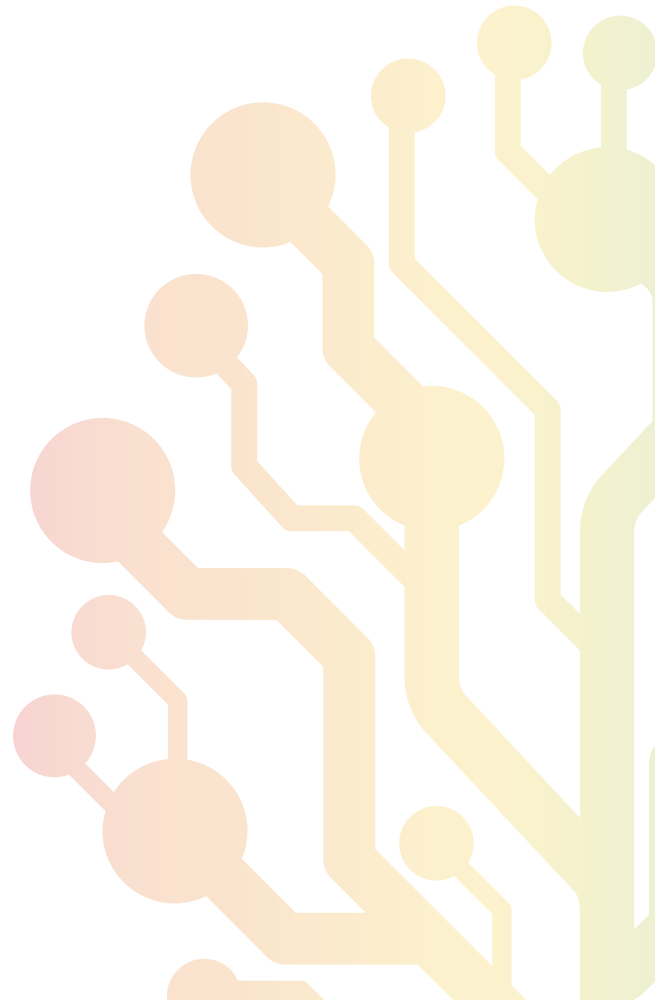
The Open University, like other higher education institutions, has for many years collected and used data to support students and help them to succeed. **More recently, the University has expanded its approach to include learning analytics – analysing data about student characteristics and study behaviours to help maximise student potential.**

What are the benefits of using information in this way?

The University places great value on supporting its students to succeed. Learning analytics can help inform how modules are taught and assessed, and identify points on the study path where individuals or groups may need additional support. For example, modules may be redesigned to take account of topics seen to cause particular issues of understanding; feedback systems developed to provide greater clarity to students in moving forward; and students contacted if an important assignment deadline is missed to check that all is well and to offer appropriate information, advice and guidance. The approach aims to recognise students as real, diverse people and acknowledges that **responsibility for achievement is, more than ever, shared between the University and its students.**

What kind of data is collected?

The University collects ‘characteristics’ information about students at registration and with subsequent student updates; and derives ‘behaviours’ information from how students engage with the University through their study. **The University will not use all of the information collected for learning analytics purposes; for example, use of information about your religion and sexual orientation is restricted under the Data Protection Act 1998.**



Is personal information secure and safe?

The University must adhere to existing data protection principles, respect privacy and use personal information sensitively. **Data will only be used for learning analytics where there is likely to be an expected benefit to students' learning.** Any organisation working with student information on behalf of the University is bound by data protection legislation and strict contracts. Tutors have access to their students' data in order to provide appropriate support. The University also passes data to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) as part of its **regulatory** reporting duties. Information Security policies exist which outline how the University seeks to maintain the security of its systems and the information held in them.

What choices do students have?

Currently the University's approach to the use of learning analytics is one of 'informed consent'. **This means the University must make students aware of the uses to which their personal data may be used for learning analytics, and students effectively give their permission for their data to be used in this way at the point of registration.** Consultation is underway to determine other consent options which may become available in future.

What if I have other questions?

You can ask a question or record your views by accessing the following URL:

www3.open.ac.uk/forms/analytics-ethics

If you need more information about the safety and security of information about you, see:

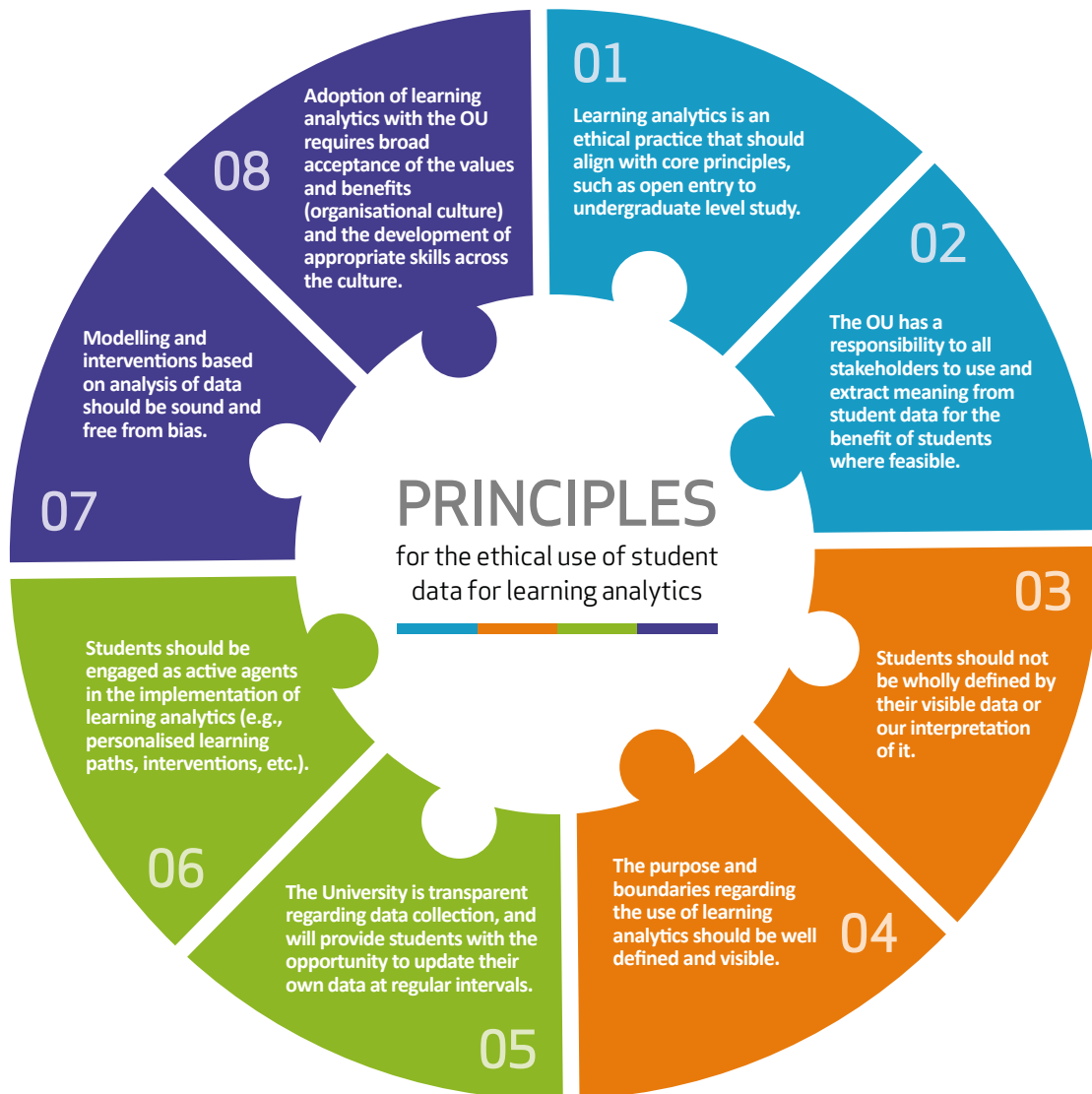
- Ethical use of Student Data for Learning Analytics

<http://www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents/ethical-use-student-data-learning-analytics-policy>

- Data Protection

<http://www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents/data-protection>

The Open University policy which sets out how student data is used in an ethical way to support student learning is based on eight principles:



Principles 01-02

Principles 1 and 2 aim to reflect key tenets that the University should adopt, a responsible approach to using learning analytics to enhance the chances of student success. At the same time, the University has a commitment to proactively support particular cohorts in line with broader strategic values and the approach taken should complement that.

Principle 03-04

Principles 3 and 4 make clearer that students, as real and diverse individuals, rather than data or information, drive appropriate student support. Predictive analytics reflect what has happened in the past, not the future. It is accepted that there will always be individuals whose behaviours do not follow the typical pattern. So, we should guard against stereotyping. We should be clear why we engage with learning analytics, who has access to data, and what data is included or excluded.

Principles 05-06

Principles 5 and 6 reflect the shared responsibility of both the student and the University for student learning. Data may not be reliable, nor reflect a student's current status, if it is not up to date. Students must have opportunities to check and update their personal data at clearly defined intervals. As well as this, students should be actively involved in helping the University to design and shape interventions that will support them. We can achieve this by more proactively engaging with them as we develop our approach to learning analytics.

Principles 07-08

The final principles which support the policy relate to the need to ensure that any interpretation or manipulation of data to extract meaning is based on sound technique which is subject to expert peer review. The policy addresses this by aiming to use the most appropriate models and by ensuring that members of staff using the data or information are best placed to do so.