Response to Access student consultation on Learning Online – April 2018

Summary
This is a response to the consultation on learning online which took place between 13th and 27th April 2018 on the Access Board of Studies Student Consultative Forum. The summary of student feedback is at https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=19503.

The Access module team was keen to provide better support for students and to improve the study experience when learning online. In order to do so, the team wanted to understand how students felt about studying online, when and where they studied, how much access they had to computers/the internet, what they enjoyed or found challenging about studying online and if they had enough support and guidance when engaging with the online learning environment.

The forum was moderated by Rebecca Pugh (Access Manager). The feedback has been considered by the Access Curriculum Team, the module chairs and the Access Managers and Senior Managers.

As part of the mid-life review process, changes to the modules have been implemented with effect from the October 2018 presentation. These changes have been informed by the feedback received from students via this consultative forum.

Full response

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<th>You said</th>
<th>OU response</th>
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<td>93% of students stated that they had experience of using a computer and felt confident. However, the Access module team wanted to ensure that students felt confident using it for study.</td>
<td>Some changes have been made to the Access modules from 18J. Block 1 has been maintained as entirely offline, however students can choose to be online from the start. We have strengthened the support for this in week 1 and have also introduced a “How to learn online” section in week 9 when students will transition to entirely online learning. Online learning skills are also embedded throughout the module.</td>
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<td>“My confidence in navigating my way around the internet bothered me and I felt like I was unsure of what I was doing. When it came to downloading anything I pretty much found myself in a panic. After studying with the OU, the Access Course really boosted my confidence and I found the internet and computing guides really useful.”</td>
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<td>“...the use of computers brings the bad as well as the good. I find moving backwards and forwards something of a bind which the written word does not pose.”</td>
<td>From 18J Block 1 will be entirely in print and blocks 2&amp;3 will be entirely online. This will eliminate the issues around moving backwards and forwards between the book and the screen.</td>
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<td>“I find it far harder to annotate and when writing a TMA it is harder to move backwards and forwards and find the info I am looking for.”</td>
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58% of students stated that they printed off the online sections of materials. Reasons for this included finding it easier to annotate printed material, being unable to look at a screen for long periods of time, being able to refer back to things more easily, and having everything in one place.

“I prefer a good old textbook that I can highlight, make notes in the margin and ‘doodle’ over. I find myself printing the online units so I have a hard copy of what I have learned. My other issue with this is, once the course is over we won’t have this material to refer back to.”

“I’m currently working through my first entirely online unit. What I haven’t liked about this is when I entered my answers to the activities, I was disappointed to discover that it didn’t remember them for the next time I logged in. I didn’t see the point of not allowing a student to save the answers permanently.”

In the online blocks the learning has been designed specifically for the online environment with a high level of interactivity and minimal amounts of reading from the screen. It enables learning in ways that are not possible in print.

Where there are large sections of reading (e.g. the history section of Y031) a separate resource book is provided.

In Block 1, we have included lots of information about different ways of note-taking, including hardcopy if this is student preference. We have also included the facility to take notes online and save/print these in hardcopy.

46% of students expressed concern about the lack of interaction on the Tutor Group Forum by both students and tutors.

“There has been no interaction in my tutor forum at all. There is 1 post … where a student introduced themselves. They [the tutor] haven’t tried to engage students in the forum.”

“My Tutor has done his best to encourage Students to participate with little [if any] success.”

“I can’t really comment about tutor interaction because nobody (including my tutor) uses the tutor forum.”

“I feel that more input would be helpful on a tutorial forum such as useful resources/discussions. Rather than on the main forum.”

From 18J we have made the use of a Tutor Group Forum (TGF) compulsory on all Access modules.

We have been more specific in the module materials about when the TGF should be used, with particular activities directing students to post in the TGF. Tutors will also be directed to respond to these posts.

In our staff development for tutors this year, we plan to offer some training to develop their skills in using TGFs effectively.

31% of students mentioned issues with Facebook groups, stating that they found them overwhelming and were concerned by the lack of a moderator.

“People generally get away with what they want on Facebook. I do not like the platform, have never used it and I am hoping never to.”

The student forums provided by the Open University are the mechanism that we provide for students to engage with each other. These are moderated by Open University staff to ensure that behaviour of students is appropriate and courteous and that accurate information is provided. Whilst we understand the need for some students to have their own
"I joined one of the facebook groups and quickly came off it no benefit at all to me"

"Not only does the language sometimes leave something to be desired but at times personal abuse gets out of hand."

space in which they can feel uninhibited, any Facebook groups set up by students are outside the remit of Open University staff. We cannot affect what happens on other platforms and students must therefore make their own choice whether to use them.

92% of students stated that nothing would prevent them from studying online. However, 25% also said that it was not their preference.

"If the study were entirely online, I wouldn't like it and maybe would choose not to do it. That's not only a comfort choice either. I see it as value for money. These courses are expensive and I think I want a bit more than a virtual experience to justify what I'm shelling out here."

The move to online learning is not to reduce production costs. It enables us to deliver different ways of learning and a more interactive experience for the student.

38% of students stated that they did not watch the DVD provided with the course materials. Several students suggested that the OU should offer all resources in as wide a range of media as possible, to meet the needs of all students. Two students suggested asking students what format they would like their resources in and provide them with only that.

The module team want to give students options to allow them to access the module materials in the most convenient way for them. From 18I, we will no longer send DVDs to students with the course materials. Students will have the facility to watch online via the module website, or scan QR codes in the hardcopy course books to watch on a mobile device. Students can also request a DVD to be sent to them, if this is their preference.

Date: 19th October 2018