STUDENT CONSULTATIVE MEETINGS 2015

RESPONSE TO ISSUES RAISED
INTRODUCTION

I was delighted to join some of you in Bristol earlier this year and enjoyed hearing about your Open University studies. It was one of the first meetings I attended as the new Vice-Chancellor and it reinforced for me the need to put students at the centre of everything we do here at the OU.

It was great to hear your views on issues that are important to all of us across the University – how your tuition is delivered, how your experience of online/onscreen learning can be improved and how you can be more involved in designing the University’s curriculum.

You shared some excellent insights and I am pleased to be able to tell you how we are acting on your feedback. In this document you can read about the ways group tuition is becoming more responsive to your needs; how we are improving guidance about online/onscreen learning and our intention to create more opportunities for students to be involved in creating our modules.

I would like to thank all of you who took part in the student consultation meetings. Your feedback and participation is really important to us; it helps us make better decisions and improve our University’s policies and operations to improve our service to you. But there is still more work to do in acting on your feedback and many more areas in which we would like to hear your views. The student consultative process will continue to create opportunities where you can share your experiences and ideas and I hope you will continue to tell us how we can do better.

Best wishes,

Peter Horrocks
Vice-Chancellor

HELLO EVERYONE

Face-to-face student consultative meetings took place in the 10 English regions, Ireland and Scotland between 18 April and 27 June 2015.

Notes from all these meetings, attended by more than 250 students in total, and feedback forms submitted at the meetings or by individuals were summarised and passed to the relevant area of the University for a response. These responses are collated below.

Face-to-face consultative meetings are just one element of the OU student consultative process. For more information or to get involved in the online consultation forums please visit http://www.open.ac.uk/students/consultation/.
1. GROUP TUITION
   1.1 FACE-TO-FACE TUITION
   1.2 ONLINE TUITION
   1.3 FORUMS

2. ONLINE/ONSCREEN LEARNING

3. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN CURRICULUM DESIGN
TOPIC 1: GROUP TUITION
This consultation topic was been prioritised following consultation with students on Open University Students Association forums. Because the way the OU organises group tuition is changing, concerns about tutorial provision were placed in the context of implementing a new group tuition policy.

NEW GROUP TUITION POLICY
A new group tuition policy was agreed at The Open University Senate, the academic authority of the University, in October 2014. The policy covers synchronous group learning (tutorials, day schools, OU Live, phone conferences) and asynchronous (mainly use of forums but also wikis, blogs etc). A summary of this is as follows.

UNDERPINNING BELIEFS AND VALUES
• A student’s 1:1 educational relationship with their Tutor/Associate Lecturer (AL) is key.
• Many OU students benefit from learning in groups – we wish to make this opportunity more widely available.
• A diverse body of students needs choice of events to attend.
• Good practice in delivering group tuition abounds and needs to be identified and shared and there is a need for consistent good practice in delivery of group tuition.
• Synchronous and asynchronous activities both need clear educational purpose if we are asking very busy students to spend time on them.
• We want to involve students in developing the policy (as they were via the online consultative forum) and in implementing it (as they have been at the face-to-face meetings).

BASICS OF THE NEW POLICY
• Module teams will define the purposes of events/activities.
• Students will still be in tutor groups so will be allocated to one AL, as now.
• However, most group tuition will be delivered within clusters of tutor groups (6-8 tutor groups potentially crossing regional/national boundaries to enable delivery of events at different times and in different places).
• A student’s first point of contact for academic matters and assignments will remain their AL, and attendance at tuition events with a different AL will have no detrimental impact on assessment.
• Face to face (f2f) tuition is important in many modules, but this is not always accessible so there will always be at least one online alternative provided for f2f events. There are already a number of modules which don’t offer face to face tutorials because students are too thinly spread to expect sufficient attendance. This will not change.
• Schedules of events will be available ideally 3 months before module start.
• Students will sign up to events of their choice.
• ALs who deliver the event will record actual attendance.
IMPLEMENTATION

Final implementation is dependent on systems development. The current plan is:

- **May 2016 trial presentation**
- **October 2016 first major presentation using all new systems**
- **February 2017 presentation completes the roll-out.**

FEEDBACK FROM MEETINGS

The student consultative meetings generated a huge amount of interesting and useful feedback and we are very grateful to all those who took part.

We were pleased that many of the issues that came up repeatedly are ones that the new policy is designed to address. For example you said you would like more information about the purpose, content and benefits of individual tutorials. This will be delivered by the new policy.

Location and timings of tutorials were key factors in your ability to attend. Under the new policy, you will have much more notice of tutorials and the ability to sign up for the most convenient in your tutor group ‘cluster’.

Other issues we may not necessarily be able to follow up straight away but we will ensure these are passed on to the module teams who design the group tuition for particular modules, and the Associate Lecturers (ALs) who deliver those tutorials.

More detailed responses follow.
Clear information in advance about the purpose, content and benefits of each tutorial would be extremely welcome.

The implementation of the new group tuition policy is expected to deliver this.

There needs to be a range of tutorial options e.g. midweek and evenings, online and face-to-face. Choice is welcome.

The implementation of the new group tuition policy is expected to deliver this.

More face-to-face tutorials would be welcome.

Face-to-face tutorials will be delivered whenever the University can see that there will be sufficient demand to optimise benefit to students’ learning. However face-to-face tutorials cannot be run when the attendance is expected to be very low. The new policy aims to make the benefits of tutorial attendance and the purposes of tutorials much clearer to students and we are hopeful that this will help improve attendance.

Tutorial attendance should be compulsory/offered with an incentive to attend/part of student contract (providing an online version offered).

There are a few tutorials which are compulsory, on a very small number of modules. Some modules and/or qualifications may choose to experiment with increased numbers of compulsory tutorials. The University policy aims to make the benefits of tutorial attendance much clearer to students so that they can make an informed choice to attend or not.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOU SAID:</th>
<th>THE OU RESPONDS:</th>
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<tr>
<td>More general face-to-face events would be welcome e.g. induction, course choice, social events. Induction in particular could include introductions to others in the tutor group and an explanation of how tutorials work which would encourage attendance.</td>
<td>The module teams (who write and maintain the modules) have been asked to consider the use of all tutorials and to be clear about their purpose. This can include induction and course choice if they wish; these might be particularly relevant on core level 1 modules which attract a high proportion of new students. There will be more information in the induction materials to explain tutorials and encourage students to attend.</td>
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<tr>
<td>There is a lack of consistency between the content and delivery style of different tutorial groups across the module and between modules. Quality of tutorials is variable, although generally high.</td>
<td>The implementation of the new group tuition policy is expected to improve consistent quality as ALs working in groups are more likely to be discussing practice and how they approach particular topics, face-to-face or online.</td>
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<td>Tutorials were sometimes too large or too small. In the main, it would be helpful if more students attended. The value of attending tutorials should be stressed from the outset and those not attending should be specifically chased up.</td>
<td>The implementation of the new group tuition policy will mean that a description for each tutorial will be published to students three months before module start. It is hoped that this will encourage student attendance. Students choosing not to attend are unlikely to be chased up just on the basis of this decision; however not attending might be part of a pattern of non-engagement and in that case the overall pattern might suggest that the University should follow up with the student to see whether there was more which could be done to enable the student to make progress on the module.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engagement with tutors before the event as to what you particularly wanted covered was welcome.</td>
<td>We will feed this back for inclusion in the good practice guides currently being developed for ALs. This would be within the published description and purpose of the module, as mentioned above.</td>
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It would be useful to know in advance of registering for a module, what the tutorial provision was likely to be, including what bandwidth would be required for participating in online tuition.

The desire for more information prior to registration falls outside the scope of the group tuition policy changes but we are following this up separately.

You value the 1:1 relationship between tutor and student and would not want this lost as a result of the new policy.

The relationship is highly valued by ALs as well as students. The policy covers only teaching in groups, and will not undermine the allocation of student to tutor or the 1:1 relationship that is the established pattern in most OU teaching.

Confidence is a barrier to participation particularly in OU Live tutorials and forums.

It is hoped that over time and with more practice students will gain confidence using the online learning media and that more information at the start of the module might help to overcome this barrier.

The specialisms and expertise of tutors should be brought to the fore in tutorials and having the option of attending different tutorials would play to this strength.

We hope so.

Individual circumstances tend to influence whether students prefer face-to-face or online tuition.

This is why we have tried to be as flexible as possible by offering a choice whenever possible.
Timetabling needs to take into account students studying more than one module if it is a common combination.  

THE OU RESPONDS:  
Module teams and qualification teams are working together to allow for common combinations of modules. However, it is hoped that there will be more options for attending tutorials with the introduction of the new policy.

YOU SAID:  
English as an Additional Language students require more support at tutorials.  

THE OU RESPONDS:  
This can be the case; a range of other student needs and issues can also have an impact on the support students need at tutorials. Tutors will have access to the additional requirements of students attending tutorials in advance of the tutorial. Some students benefit from more support being delivered outside of group tutorials, when their specific support needs can be addressed on an individual basis.

YOU SAID:  
The step up to level 2 is difficult as a change of academic expectations coincides with reduction in tutorial support.  

THE OU RESPONDS:  
This will be passed on to module teams to consider as they redesign modules.

YOU SAID:  
Telephone tutorials are useful.  

THE OU RESPONDS:  
Telephone tutorials remain an option within the new policy.

YOU SAID:  
You would like to Skype your tutor.  

THE OU RESPONDS:  
This may become an option in future; for the present OU Live has greater functionality and remains the University’s preferred system for delivering online tutorials.

YOU SAID:  
There should be greater consistency in information and rescheduling following cancelled tutorials.  

THE OU RESPONDS:  
The implementation of the new group tuition policy is expected to deliver this.
YOU SAID: There should be specific sessions for students struggling with particular issues.

THE OU RESPONDS: The group tuition policy allows module teams to design specific sessions for students.

YOU SAID: Booking was welcome but you would like this to be as flexible as possible in terms of being able to book as late as possible and not being penalised for non-attendance if you have booked but can’t make it at the last minute. A cap on numbers may disadvantage those not able to book far enough in advance.

THE OU RESPONDS: It is hoped that students will go and book as soon as they have registered on the module. The plan is to be flexible about booking, although there will be a cut-off date so that ALs can plan their sessions.

There will be no penalty for non-attendance if a student has booked (we recognise that ‘life happens’, sometimes at very short notice); however students need to be aware that they may be taking the place of another student by booking into a tutorial. It is hoped that students will cancel their booking as soon as they can if they realise they are unable to attend a tutorial.

YOU SAID: You were concerned that the tutor delivering on the day may not be the tutor advertised.

THE OU RESPONDS: There will always be that possibility – ‘life happens’ to tutors as well.

YOU SAID: You hoped that the new policy didn’t mean that face-to-face tuition would end up being further away.

THE OU RESPONDS: Face-to-face tutorials do move from year to year and any individual student may have to travel further; on the other hand there may be some times when tutorials are more local than at present. There will always be an alternative online tutorial.

YOU SAID: Mechanisms would be needed for special requirements to be taken into account on a cluster basis rather than just by a specific tutor/tutor group.

THE OU RESPONDS: Tutors delivering tutorials will be able to see the additional requirements of students signed up for the tutorial and so they will be able to take this into consideration when planning and delivering the tutorial. However students with special requirements will be particularly encouraged to sign up as early as possible – some adjustments take time to put in place, particularly when the tutorial is face-to-face.
1.1 FACE-TO-FACE TUITION

**YOU SAID:**

Location was a major factor affecting your attendance at tutorials and you would like face-to-face tutorials closer to home.

**THE OU Responds:**

Under the new policy, some face-to-face tuition may be closer; some may be further away; face-to-face tutorials will be delivered whenever the University can see that there will be sufficient demand to optimise benefit to students’ learning. It cannot deliver a face-to-face tutorial where the attendance is expected to be very low and additional online delivery of the tutorial would be expected to enable many more students to engage with the content and purpose of the tutorial.

**YOU SAID:**

You would welcome earlier publication of tutorial dates to enable you to plan attendance.

**THE OU Responds:**

The implementation of the new group tuition policy is expected to mean that tutorial schedules are published three months before module start.

**YOU SAID:**

The duration of tutorial events should be long enough to make it worthwhile travelling while taking into account students’ other commitments. Generally more day schools/large seminars would be welcome.

**THE OU Responds:**

Module teams are designing the group tuition strategy for their modules and are considering all options from the student perspective. There is a link between the distance one feels it’s worth travelling and the duration of the tutorial. This is already and will continue to be taken into account as much as possible in planning face-to-face events.

**YOU SAID:**

The timing of tutorials was a significant factor in attendance e.g. weekend/evening.

**THE OU Responds:**

The group tuition policy makes allowances for students to be able to attend tutorials from all around the world, meaning that students from different time zones need to be accommodated. It is hoped that the clustering of group tuition will allow individual students more choice about when to attend, wherever they live.
You said:

Students may not to attend tutorials if they felt too far behind or didn’t understand the topic.

The OU responds:

That’s a shame – often these are the students who would benefit the most from attending. It is hoped that the published information about tutorials might encourage more students to attend.

You said:

The opportunity to meet other students and feel part of the University community was a driver for attending tutorials.

The OU responds:

Yes and we hope it will continue to encourage students to attend. The opportunity for building this community feeling, in line with the aims of our Learning and Teaching Vision and Plan, is one of the drivers for the new Group Tuition policy.

You said:

It would be good if notes/handouts/slides were consistently available (and clear) to students who couldn’t attend the tutorial.

The OU responds:

The group tuition policy does not address this aspect of tutorials and faculties and modules vary in their practice. It is hoped that more students will be able to attend tutorials and engage in the activities which explore any additional written content. The academic evidence shows that this engagement and dialogue is the element of group tuition that makes the biggest difference to student success.

You said:

The quality of venue e.g. parking/facilities/comfort affects attendance at tutorials.

The OU responds:

Student feedback is critical in helping the University to improve the quality of the venues used for face-to-face tutorials.

You said:

Your perception of your tutor was a factor in attending your tutorials.

The OU responds:

The Group Tuition policy is not concerned primarily with quality assurance of tutors’ work, but it will ensure that tutors are given more support and guidance in the planning of group tuition and so will contribute towards greater consistency. Tutors will also be working together more in clusters and will therefore have more opportunity to share good ideas about tutorials on the module.
**YOU SAID:**
Family responsibilities were a factor in your ability to attend tutorials.

**THE OU RESPONDS:**
It is hoped that more choice about when to attend and more warning of when tutorials are happening might give students more time to work around their family responsibilities to attend tutorials if they want to.

**YOU SAID:**
Health was a factor in tutorial attendance.

**THE OU RESPONDS:**
It is hoped that online provision of tutorials and more choice about when to attend will help those whose health problems make it difficult to attend face-to-face events.

**YOU SAID:**
You attend tutorials for reassurance that your studies are going ok.

**THE OU RESPONDS:**
Yes and we hope this will continue to encourage students to attend.

**YOU SAID:**
Topics, particularly at day schools, were not necessarily relevant.

**THE OU RESPONDS:**
The policy asks module teams to identify the purposes of tutorials and day schools so it is hoped that this will happen less often.

**YOU SAID:**
Day schools should include other members of the module team but students would also like their tutor to be present.

**THE OU RESPONDS:**
There will be a range of staff at day schools; it will not be possible to guarantee that a students’ own tutor will be present at any particular day school a student chooses to attend. However those nearest the student’s home are most likely to be staffed by their own tutor. Module team members may choose to attend day schools and this feedback will be passed on to module teams.

**YOU SAID:**
It was good to include study skills in day schools/tutorials.

**THE OU RESPONDS:**
Module teams are currently designing their group tuition strategies and this may include study skills within a day school. ALs may include study skills if it is clear that the group of students who have chosen to attend would benefit.
The purposes of tutorials will be clear on the booking system so students will be able to choose which tutorials they attend.

Scheduling tutorials will be carefully undertaken to take into account TMA deadlines as well as bank holidays and venue closures.

We are not able to allocate tutors on this basis but the group tuition policy will allow for greater student choice of tutorials.

The group tuition policy will mean that tutorials are published to students three months ahead of module start and the way of signing up will be made very clear.

It is always hoped that students attending tutorials will be able to ask questions and join in small group work. This feedback will be passed on to the team preparing guidance for ALs.
YOU SAID:  
*There should be greater use made of social media e.g. tweet-along tutorials.*

THE OU RESPONDS:  
*It is hoped that much more innovation in tutorial provision will be a consequence of the introduction of the group tuition policy.*

YOU SAID:  
*Material should be sent out in advance.*

THE OU RESPONDS:  
*Material may be sent out in advance of a tutorial if appropriate. This feedback will be passed on to the team preparing guidance for ALs.*
1.2 ONLINE TUITION

YOU SAID:
OU Live could be better used to its full potential, including use of video and breakout rooms, with posting questions to make the tutorial more interactive. ALs should be better trained in the use of OU Live both technically and as a teaching tool.

THE OU RESPONDS:
Yes this is generally the aim of these online tutorials. ALs do undertake training in both the technical and pedagogic sides of OU Live as a normal part of an AL’s professional development; however we all get better at things as we do them more and tutoring in this way is no different. It is hoped that increased use of OU Live will lead to everyone developing more skills and confidence.

YOU SAID:
Students should be specifically trained to enable them to be more confident and ensure they had the right equipment (possibly an introductory tutorial about OU Live). Other ideas included a tips and tricks area and providing all new students with a one-page how-to guide.

THE OU RESPONDS:
There is information in the Computing Guide for students on the use of OU Live. However this will be passed on to those considering this aspect of the group tuition project as we may be able to do more. As above, it is hoped that increased use of OU Live will lead to everyone developing more skills and confidence.

YOU SAID:
Certain OU Live sessions would be better delivered as a lecture as there is little interactivity and some are quite large. More online lectures would be welcome but it should be clear that these are lectures rather than tutorials.

THE OU RESPONDS:
Under the new group tuition policy, module teams will describe the tutorial, hence be able to differentiate between tutorials, lectures and podcasts.
YOU SAID:  
All tutorials should be recorded for viewing at a later date, although there was recognition that recording could be a barrier to student participation. 
A clear policy on this would be helpful. It was suggested that at least one tutorial from a cluster be recorded and at least one not recorded. 
Recordings should be available to download and access offline.

THE OU RESPONDS:  
The technical capability currently exists to record OU Live sessions and make them available for download. The decision to make use of this functionality is made by faculties and module teams on a module-by-module basis and there are protocols and guidance in place for tutors. 
Recording of online tutorials is not currently part of the group tuition policy and there are pros and cons. For example, we know some students appreciate being able to watch the tutorial if they haven’t been able to attend or even if they have, to be able to recap on issues for example for revision. On the other hand, viewing a recording is not the same as interacting with a live event and can lead to less effort being made to attend the actual event; less willingness of students to contribute to the event because of being recorded; and the sense that the recording can give of there being ‘more stuff’ to engage with on the module so increasing the sense of overload on the module. As these are finely balanced the current approach will continue for the time being but may well be reviewed in the future.

YOU SAID:  
The technology was unreliable. OU Live’s tendency to ‘crash’ was problematic.

THE OU RESPONDS:  
There has been a recent survey to identify the reliability of OU Live. It is felt to be improving and more work is being done on this.

We routinely follow up any unresolved issues with Blackboard, the supplier of OU Live, to identify any outages to the service and also with individual users to understand whether any non-Blackboard influences might have caused the problems. However this often does not conclusively resolve the original problem. Recent issues raised with Blackboard have not revealed any evidence for systematic performance issues or service outage.

IT hold fortnightly service reviews with Blackboard to progress any outstanding issues and explore feature enhancements to improve the experience. IT are currently pushing Blackboard hard to provide enhanced system diagnostics.

It is possible that at peak times (between 8 and 10 pm in the UK) there is considerable demand on broadband, which can interfere with general connection capability – this situation can be exacerbated by using OU Live over WiFi. In situations where connectivity is an issue, the advice in the Computing Guide is ‘If possible, use a wired internet connection’ and also ensure other users in the house aren’t downloading large files. The Computing Guide contains a section on checking your connection.

As well as networking issues, individuals are sometimes running software on their machines that is tying up the resource required by Blackboard Collaborate. Therefore we approach each issue on a case by case basis when reported to the Student Computing Helpdesk.

IT will continue to meet Blackboard regularly to ensure issues are progressed. There is a new connectivity checker tool in beta (user testing phase) for use with Chrome which, if suitable, IT will be able to roll out to students more widely. We will continue to review the Computing Guide and information around connectivity on a regular basis.
YOU SAID:
Students own access to technology was a factor in attendance e.g. their access to an adequate internet connection or using hardware that was insufficiently supported e.g. Macs.

THE OU RESPONDS:
This is understandable and some work is being done to try to improve information to students in advance of the module about what technology is required.

With regard to OU Live, the Mac Launcher was released months before the Windows Launcher due to the known issues with Macs and Java. The Computing Guide contains a section on troubleshooting known Mac differences. In addition, the main Computing Guide has numerous references to Mac. As and when new information comes to light this guidance is updated.

From a support perspective Mac and Windows machines are treated in the same way and both are tested on site. It is not always possible to have the latest Operating System releases before our users, which can delay responses.

We will continue to update the guidance as soon as any new information is available. If specific issues can be highlighted (e.g. what specific Mac hardware) we are happy to look into them further.

YOU SAID:
Some of you would prefer a smaller group as in an online tutorial interaction was more difficult.

THE OU RESPONDS:
There will be limits on online group sizes and the University needs to do some work to give advice on what the ideal group sizes are online. It does depend on what the purpose is of the event, use of breakout rooms etc.

YOU SAID:
It would be good to have informal OU Live events, for example, immediately following a tutorial.

THE OU RESPONDS:
It is hoped that the OU Live rooms will be accessible to students between tutorials, perhaps for peer networking and support.

YOU SAID:
Greater visibility of students and tutors would be welcome, particularly as lack of visual clues makes interaction more difficult.

THE OU RESPONDS:
It is hoped that, as technology improves, the use of video will become a more realistic option.
YOU SAID:
It works well to have two tutors with one on the white board and someone else (potentially another tutor) resolving technical issues and moderating questions.

THE OU RESPONDS:
This is an example of good practice that will be passed on to the team preparing guidance for ALs.

YOU SAID:
Ad hoc tutorials focused on specific issues are sometimes useful but not always consistent.

THE OU RESPONDS:
Under the new group tuition policy, module teams will describe the tutorial which will give students more choice about whether a particular tutorial will be useful to them or not.

YOU SAID:
It can be useful when groups of students work together using phone/online meetings.

THE OU RESPONDS:
The University has always been very positive about groups of students working and learning together whenever possible.

YOU SAID:
If you have been at a PC all day you do not necessarily want to spend the evening at a PC.

THE OU RESPONDS:
It is hoped that more choice of times for tutorials will help this.

YOU SAID:
Library online tutorials were welcome (including recordings).

THE OU RESPONDS:
Yes we are keen to extend the provision of this type of online tutorial which is not linked to the module.

YOU SAID:
Online tutorials are an important way for international students to feel part of the student community.

THE OU RESPONDS:
Yes this is an important consideration and the importance of including international students specifically is highlighted in the group tuition policy.
Lack of forum activity was problematic. Having an energetic and proactive tutor was important. Cluster forums would be welcome as Tutor Group Forums were sometimes too small to maintain activity.

Other students can be off-putting in your engagement with forums. There should be better guidance for students about the use of forums including ‘netiquette’ (possibly offering a tutorial on this).

Discussions tend to migrate from OU forums to social media for several different reasons and means students join in the discussion where it is taking place – not always on OU forums.

There are too many forums available.

It is hoped that greater clarity about what forums are for, as well as some forums open to larger groups than tutor groups, will encourage activity and participation.

There are netiquette guidelines in the Computing Guide and students who are not adhering to them should be reminded of them. If you feel uncertain of how to do this, refer the student to your tutor so that they can remind them.

Yes of course; nobody ever stopped students talking to each other on or off campus and nobody should ever want to.

It is hoped that the new policy will streamline the use of forums within a module as module teams think carefully about the purpose of the forums.
There is an issue of moderation with a balance to be struck between what was seen as over-moderation (particularly in relation to assessment) and under-moderation, with no staff involvement at all. Staff may require better guidance in using the forums.

This will be passed on to the project team preparing guidance for ALs.

It would be useful to have an app for forums.

This will be passed on to relevant technical teams.

You would like more 1:1 support rather than having to post for personal conversations.

The group tuition policy does not alter the important relationship between student and tutor.
1.3. Forums

YOU SAID:

Forums were not as easy to navigate and use for discussion as they could be.

THE OU RESPONDS:

The navigation and ease of use of the forums is recognised as an area of our learning systems that requires some further evaluation and improvement. Direct user feedback has highlighted particular user needs and issues over the past few years. Where possible, new functionality has been added to the forums to address these as part of our ongoing programme of continuous improvement. As forums are the most widely used tool in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and now have many features, it is no longer possible to address some specific requests relating to the structuring of forum threads (e.g. indenting messages or setting preferences for users to order the threads) solely through additional functionality.

Formal expert usability testing of the forum is routinely carried out by researchers in the OU’s Institute of Educational Technology – this last took place in December 2014 and feedback has been prioritised and added to our technical development roadmap where feasible. Some of the findings show that although some specific improvements are possible, in other user testing with students it is notable that many are happy with the forums as they currently are.

The user experience of the University’s learning systems underwent full and thorough evaluation in mid-2015 as part of the Online Student Experience Programme. The review identified improvements to the general design and user interface that are in the pipeline for future releases over the next 12 months (we generally have four significant VLE updates each year). This work will not address specific feedback about forums or other tools but will deliver a new user interface that will form the basis for improvements to forums and other tools in the future. The forum is essential across teaching, learning and social aspects of the modules and qualifications and is the key communication tool for all module websites – we will continue to invest in improvements.

Usability of the forums, for all users across all devices will be evaluated in the updated system to identify key improvements that will enable easier use and readability without downgrading the experience for users who are currently seen to be happy with the functionality. As part of the student experience update we will be carrying out detailed analysis of the tools used, including forums, to identify features and functionality that are frequently used or overlooked. This is the first stage in the user experience discovery analysis that is required before any further testing or consultation with users is scheduled. Our stakeholders for the forum include students, tutors, moderators and other staff and to meet all requirements effectively will require an extended process.

YOU SAID:

Some forums are very busy and it is hard to know where to start.

THE OU RESPONDS:

Yes they can appear daunting – maybe best to dip in and out and join in when there’s a conversation where you have something to say or a question to ask?

YOU SAID:

Forums can be too formal – the distinction between formal and informal is unclear.

THE OU RESPONDS:

The purpose of forums will be made clearer in future – some modules may be quite formal but others may be much more about socialising and feeling part of the University.
The forums are not accessible to students with particular additional requirements.

The University works hard to make all its provision as accessible as possible. As part of the development process for any new tool or new functionality within the OU learning systems, tools are not only expert tested for accessibility and usability (again, by colleagues in the OU’s Institute of Educational Technology), but also tested by students. The forum has been developed and enhanced over many years and throughout this time, the iterative process of developing, testing and refining the tool has taken place. Recommendations to improve accessibility and usability of this tool have been analysed and prioritised and, where possible, implemented as part of the development process.

Forums can be daunting when other students are further ahead.

Don’t be daunted! There will be other students at exactly the same stage as you.

Collaborative working, with marks available, was not popular.

There are a number of different ways that module teams have introduced student collaborative working for assessment; some ways are much more successful than others.

Practice exam questions and guidance on assessment was welcome.

This will be passed onto module teams currently developing their group tuition strategies.

Interactive starter activities are helpful.

This will be passed onto module teams currently developing their group tuition strategies.

OUSA module forums are good.

These serve a really great purpose!
THE OU RESPONDS:

A new feature within forums to rate posts (‘like’ etc.) is being piloted before it is fully released to everybody. This means that responses from end users can be collated and used within the development process to improve its usability and accessibility. It is hoped that from March 2016 this will be available for full rollout.

Functionality to ‘flag’ posts within the forum is already available to users therefore the new feature to rate posts will not duplicate the functionality of flagging posts that already exists.

THE OU RESPONDS:

Modules can include this as an option. Some modules do this and some students like it.

YOU SAID:

‘Like’ buttons would be useful as would a ‘flag’ so that you can find a post again.

YOU SAID:

There should be a formal incentive e.g. marks available for forum participation.

YOU SAID:

Presence indicator with instant messaging facility would be useful.

THE OU RESPONDS:

There is a basic chat feature, without a presence indicator, within the current VLE toolset – the decision to use this lies with the module team. It may be that this decision is influenced by resource availability for individual modules, so moderators aren’t available for both forum and chat environments, which would be a risk to effective student support.

A more advanced chat tool is under consideration as part of the long-term Learning Systems Roadmap, but there are no immediate plans for its development within the next 12 months, based on competing priorities and resourcing constraints.

OUSA are working closely with the University on a student community-building communication tool currently in the planning and research phase, which may help address some of the points raised in this discussion.
2. ONLINE-ONSCREEN LEARNING

This consultation topic was prioritised following consultation with students on OUSA forums who expressed concern about an increasing amount of OU study being online.

We asked for your views about how online/onscreen study could be improved in order to feed into a research project that would produce guidance for the development of future modules.

We are aware that this consultation did not ask about the University’s overall policy on learning materials although we received a lot of feedback about your preferences during the meetings. We are therefore planning a further online consultation with the University Students Consultative Forum about the University’s direction of travel more broadly.

You gave us a lot of really great feedback, for which we are very grateful. Many of the suggestions will take some time to work their way through module teams and the way that modules are presented so changes may not be obvious immediately but all the feedback has been passed on to the relevant parts of the University.

More detailed responses are below:

GENERAL POINTS ABOUT ONLINE/ONSCREEN LEARNING

YOU SAID:

You often need to study without internet access e.g. while travelling or in areas with limited broadband, particularly in rural areas.

THE OU RESPONDS:

Online modules often do have alternative versions that can be studied offline – interactive ebooks (which includes most of the interactivity and can be read using an iPAD), ebooks which can be read on other tablets, Kindle ebooks and pdfs. Clearer guidance on which items have to be studied online, which would help the students who have periods without internet to plan their study, is being trialled.

YOU SAID:

It is easier to annotate print than on screen.
It is difficult to study online without the right level of IT skills, hardware and software.

THE OU RESPONDS:

There is now guidance on studying online on StudentHome. This is very comprehensive, starting from choosing computers and ISPs. It does cover annotating online material and making audio notes but also points out that making notes on paper can be a good idea, especially as you are required to write by hand for exams.
Module materials should be available for more than three years after module-end.

YOU SAID:

THE OU RESPONDS:

Currently students have three years of read-only access to their VLE websites after presentation – this is based on the associated costs of maintenance and support. After this period, website access is automatically closed to students. Recent requests to extend this from three to six years are under investigation by technical teams.

While recognising the benefits that this extension would bring, not least enhancing the perceived value for money to students, the factors influencing the decision to extend are not trivial. The key risks relate to long term planning issues, which are exacerbated by the inherent unpredictability of long range changes in technology. The OU is currently running the largest known single instance Moodle-based VLE in the world, so there is finite risk that as this continues to grow we may reach a size that pushes the capabilities beyond its limits, which could start to impact on system performance. The desired access extension may have long term implications to the VLE infrastructure and architecture requirements, data management, maintenance, ability for system recovery, and ease of any potential future platform migration; these factors make accurate costing and risk analysis challenging.

In parallel with the technical cost/benefit analysis, the final decision will need to be based on usage of the current three year read-only provision period – for example, if we review the current provision and see that relatively few students choose to access their module websites beyond the live presentation, we have a less compelling case to extend access.

It is also worth noting that, over the last 12-18 months we have invested significantly in developing our multi-format content production systems, with the aim of being able to provide students with module material in a range of flexible online/offline study options via a number of different output formats (e.g. web, print, PDF, ePub eBooks, Mobi for Kindle, Microsoft Word for screen readers, etc.). We’ve also recently released a batch file export tool on module websites, so students can select their format of choice and download offline versions to keep after modules finish. At present, not every module is able to offer every format, but students should increasingly be seeing more options for downloading their content in various formats for personal archiving.

Regarding the request to extend module website access, the current analysis will continue and the relevant teams are looking to make a decision on technical and financial feasibility by early January 2016, for review by appropriate governance groups.

You wanted to continue to see the availability of some printed materials and you were concerned about the cost and environmental impact of printing being passed to students.

YOU SAID:

THE OU RESPONDS:

The University’s direction of travel with regard to learning materials was not the topic of this consultation but this feedback will be used to inform future consultation with students on this issue and has been fed back to policy-makers.
There are health and safety implications arising from needing to spend many hours at a screen (potentially when having worked at a screen all day). There are particular concerns about working onscreen for students with additional requirements.

The University provides advice for students to avoid health problems and for students with additional requirements studying online. Students who have worked all day at a screen and do not want to spend all their free time also doing so would benefit from the provision of details as to when it is necessary to study online. It will be recommended that module teams provide this.

Modules requiring a lot of reading were not suited to online study.

Not all modules are or will be 100% online so books will still be available where these are most appropriate pedagogically. New online modules are being designed to take into account that reading long sections of text online is slower and less efficient than reading on paper. Hence sections are shorter and where possible interactive items are embedded.

Onscreen/Online should be differentiated and defined as sometimes it is the internet connection that is crucial.

The bulk of the material in ‘online’ modules can be studied offline with the e-book version. As above, it will be recommended that modules provide clear information as to which activities have to be studied online.
The amount of internet capacity required for the module should be available before registration with e.g. an accessible diagnostic for students to check they have the IT capability to proceed.

YOU SAID: The amount of internet capacity required for the module should be available before registration with e.g. an accessible diagnostic for students to check they have the IT capability to proceed.

THE OU RESPONDS: Each module complies with a particular computing specification, available for review before registration, which is designed to provide the minimum requirements necessary to successfully complete the module. Currently, the basic requirement is for a desktop or laptop computer which, depending on the module, can be:

1. Windows Only
2. Windows or Mac
3. Windows, Mac or Linux

Additionally, the module will require:

a. Use of standard VLE
b. Use of standard VLE tools and additional downloaded software
c. Use of standard VLE tools and additional software delivered to the student on fixed media (e.g. CD/DVD)

Examples of computing requirements for typical modules can be seen here:
http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/modules/mu123#study-materials
http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/modules/tu100#study-materials

The decision as to which computing specification category the module fits into (e.g. 1a, 2b, etc.) is taken before module development takes place. Therefore, providing an estimate of the amount of downloadable material would be a challenging exercise.

An additional classification could be considered that provided ‘low’, ‘medium’ or ‘high’ ratings for the amount of downloadable material with appropriate size bands. The standard VLE tools would set the baseline for the ‘low’ rating. However, as stated above this information is not generally known until well into the module development phase.

We currently recommend a minimum connection speed of 1Mb/s as part of the general computing requirements. Module teams should be mindful of this figure when selecting material. This recommended figure could be increased but this would exclude a small number of current students.

For use of OU Live, the Computing Guide states ‘The size of the download for the Launcher is roughly 45 MB – depending on your internet speed, this can take up to ten minutes. The installation for Windows can take up to 300MB disk space’. In addition there is more information in the hardware requirements section of the Computing Guide.

YOU SAID: Content should be in Plain English.

THE OU RESPONDS: This is something authors are urged to do however the module is delivered.
THE OU RESPONDS:

Good idea. We will need to investigate how this could be done, including talking to the OU Students Association.

THE OU RESPONDS:

A study of level 2 Science online modules has acquired such information and passed it on to students on the second presentation. We are looking into spreading this more widely, although we have to be careful about student confidentiality.

THE OU RESPONDS:

This is already the case.
QUESTION 1: Where is the best place for the University to provide information that a module is delivered entirely online and what is the best phrase to use to indicate this?

YOU SAID:

It should be clearer which modules require exclusively online/onscreen study, and what is meant by that for example:

- Qualification descriptions should say ‘In one or more modules, study is onscreen only’.
- There should be a prominent indication on relevant webpages if a module was delivered entirely online. Suggestions included making the information large, bold, in a different colour, at the top of the page, including ‘online only’ in the module title and including a special icon.
- There should be more consistency in what is meant by online/onscreen and a link to a glossary or key fact box of what ‘online only’ means (perhaps with a hover box), including how many activities can’t be printed and how IT confident/literate you need to be.
- What is not included should be spelled out e.g. no printed materials, no face-to-face tutorials, nothing in the post. But if an ‘online only’ module did have the option of face-to-face tutorials this should also be highlighted. Information about what alternative formats are provided should be included.
- A letter/email should be generated to students who have signed up for online only modules explaining what this means.
- How much online study is required should be reinforced in any conversation the OU has with an enquirer/student choosing their next module.
- There could be a short video ‘what it’s like to study this module’.

THE OU Responds:

The OU is now allowing module teams to give the information that there are no books. For example S217 states ‘The module is presented in 25 units (plus a maths revision unit) that are delivered entirely via your computer - there are no printed books.’

Chairs of science online modules are also including information that books are not used and the alternative formats available in module guides. Advice based on this experience and your feedback will be passed on to module teams for online modules OU-wide.

Some other great ideas were suggested so we are exploring organising a further consultation with students about what information you would like to see about a module before you sign up.

These points will be considered as part of that process.
QUESTION 2: Which interactive activities do you think do or would aid your study of an online text?

QUESTION 3: What additional tools would you find useful for online/onscreen study?

QUESTION 4: Are certain activities more suited to particular subject areas?

YOU SAID:
You welcomed a variety of activities. Specific answers depended on learning style and subject area. The activities mentioned most often as valuable were interactive quizzes.

THE OU RESPONDS:
We are glad to hear this as in designing online modules we aim to include a variety of interactive activities.

YOU SAID:
You would like online activities to be given timings so it was clear how long each one should take. Time for getting used to new technology should be built into the module. Sometimes it took longer to download software and get it working than to do a particular activity.

THE OU RESPONDS:
Timings should be given for activities we expect to take longer than about ten minutes. The suggestion about allowing time to get used to new technology is a good one and we will pass this on to module teams.
QUESTION 5: Which alternative formats should be provided?

You wanted access to a wide choice of alternative formats depending on your learning style and circumstances.

Preferably a paper version of module materials should be available, or if not, an easily printable version in pdf or Word format. This should include a description of any interactive or AV material, not just the text so you can choose to engage with them or not at an appropriate point.

THE OU RESPONDS:

The following alternative formats are provided: pdf, e-book, interactive e-book, kindle e-book, Word optimised for screen readers. The interactive e-book will only run on iPads but does include many of the activities.

It is possible to include video transcripts in the ‘print as one page’ option. In the pdf version, activities are indicated by a placeholder. The feedback about having descriptions of the activity will be passed on to the relevant part of the University.

QUESTION 6: Which would you use and why?

Print on demand should be available more widely, at less cost, and provide a better product.

THE OU RESPONDS:

Print on Demand (POD) was introduced following student feedback (OUSA Conference 2013) asking for a cost-effective way to obtain printed copies of selected online pages. It is an optional service, intended to be used alongside the module website rather than replace it. The website is the primary study format and contains additional resources and activities which can never be effectively replicated through POD.

POD is becoming more widely available – from start of the October 2015 presentation there are 47 modules offering POD, twice as many as October 2014. We are careful to only offer POD where the material is suitable; it will never be practical for all modules due to levels and types of interactivity and other content.

The OU charges the student only the cost of producing the item; we do not make any profit from providing the service. The premise for the service is that it is cheaper for the student than desktop printing at home when taking into account the cost of toner and paper (according to a Which? survey). Costs are continually being reviewed. For example, the Science Faculty are now offering print on demand at lower cost for all its 30 and 60 point online modules.

The POD product is supplied to the student as a pack of printed loose-leaf pages drilled ready for the student to use in a ring folder. Loose-leaf was chosen as the format as it is the cheapest form of production. Other formats could be offered but they would cost more. It is available in monochrome and, if the material is suitable, also in colour and the student is given the option of ordering either. The POD material is combined into suitably cost effective items or ‘bundles’; in most cases there is the option for the student to buy individual items or all the items at a discounted rate.

Care is taken to make sure what is offered is sensible and cost effective for students to purchase. It will always be limited in its availability and we will always have in mind that students are paying for the service. We won’t offer POD unless it is relevant and cost efficient for a particular module.

QUESTION 7: Which alternative formats do you think should be a priority for the University to provide?

The OU RESPONDS:

You wanted access to a wide choice of alternative formats depending on your learning style and circumstances.

Preferably a paper version of module materials should be available, or if not, an easily printable version in pdf or Word format. This should include a description of any interactive or AV material, not just the text so you can choose to engage with them or not at an appropriate point.

THE OU RESPONDS:

The following alternative formats are provided: pdf, e-book, interactive e-book, kindle e-book, Word optimised for screen readers. The interactive e-book will only run on iPads but does include many of the activities.

It is possible to include video transcripts in the ‘print as one page’ option. In the pdf version, activities are indicated by a placeholder. The feedback about having descriptions of the activity will be passed on to the relevant part of the University.
YOU SAID: Transcripts are important for video/audio.

THE OU RESPONDS: Module teams are required to provide transcripts for video and audio sequences and transcripts of videos (and formerly of TV programmes) have been standard provision for decades. New videos are now required to have closed captions (subtitles) as well.

YOU SAID: Better use should be made of OU Anywhere and use should be more consistent across modules.

THE OU RESPONDS: OU Anywhere (OUA) was introduced with the specific purpose of providing students with mobile electronic access to OU materials that had originally been delivered to them only in physical form (i.e. print or CD/DVD). However, it was evident from feedback (e.g. App Store reviews, Helpdesk calls and forum comments) that some students regarded OUA as only offering a partial solution, and that many expected and wanted the app to contain all their module content in one place, on one mobile device, regardless of whether it was originally provided physically or electronically.

We recently introduced some technical changes to the delivery systems that support the app which make it easier to provide both physical and digital-only content, but implementation is dependent on the budget and maintenance schedule for each module and the availability of resource in our production teams to add the additional files required – and we believe this may account for the apparent inconsistencies across modules that you report. (See also relevant note above about increasing provision of online/offline formats.) Whilst this may appear to reflect a lack of urgency on our part, it should be borne in mind that OUA was only ever meant to offer a stopgap solution to help move a lot of physical learning material to a digital format. Moreover, this content being largely converted print books often focused on assimilative elements rather than reflecting the pedagogic richness that is now increasingly designed into modules.

The more sustainable solution for the long term is based on the principle of responsive design of our VLE, which will allow full module websites to adjust their size, layout and functionality according to the device on which they are displayed. This will hopefully negate the need for students to access a separate system to receive mobile and offline versions of their digital module materials. Design and production of new responsive VLE is in progress as part of our work to improve the online student experience, with piloting planned for some presentations in October 2016, and full rollout to all students in February 2017.

YOU SAID: More materials, including videos, should be available to download and take offline to access at another point, possibly via OU anywhere.

THE OU RESPONDS: Videos and audios are available to download from the websites of online modules.
2. Online/Onscreen learning

You would like more audio books.

Printed study texts may also be available in the DAISY Talking Book (DTB) audio format, and if you ask for this service you'll automatically get access to them when your module starts. But for many modules these have to be read by people as screen readers can struggle with, for example, scientific notation.

Reading a complete module is a lengthy job and depends on suitable volunteer readers, so although we hope to have more of these, it may be some time before they appear.

OU software does not necessarily work well on the devices students have, particularly Apple.

Students should notify module teams of particular software packages that do not work on particular devices so that IT can be consulted.

The OU aims to support a broad range of student devices. However, given the breadth of devices that students have, we need to be pragmatic with regards to the level of testing applied to different platforms. The technical requirements for each module indicate which desktop operating systems are suitable (Windows/Mac/Linux).

For mobile devices we strive to provide as much functionality as possible – although we cannot guarantee that there won't be some minor layout problems.

We try to highlight known limitations within the systems and the Computing Guide. Supporting third-party and legacy software is a particular challenge on mobile devices. Increased security on platforms can also affect software behaviours, particularly on mobile devices. We review our testing priorities on an annual basis to reflect information on student device usage.
For this consultation topic we asked you whether and how you would like to be involved in designing the University’s curriculum.

WE ARE TAKING A ‘STUDENTS FIRST’ APPROACH

The Student Charter, developed jointly by the University and the OU Students Association, sets out how the University will work with students to create learning partnerships. These principles set the frame of our engagement with each other:

- We treat each other with dignity and respect
- We aim to inspire and enable learning
- We share responsibility for learning
- We work together to secure the University’s mission and to promote the University’s values

In January 2015 Senate approved a new aspiration for the University’s curriculum:

- To be the world’s leading distance learning university offering a captivating and relevant curriculum that enables students to achieve success in their study and to enrich their lives

Accompanying the aspiration are nine curriculum principles. One of those principles is:

- Our curriculum is developed in collaboration with prospective students, students, their tutors and support teams, nations offices, employers, partners and other stakeholders

Since the conclusion of the 2015 consultative meetings the University has been thinking carefully about its strategic plan for the next few years. In doing this exercise we are considering what a ‘students first’ approach means. Therefore the feedback received is timely and raises many useful areas of challenge for us to take into account as we prepare to set our strategic direction. Thank you to all the students who engaged with this consultation.

Three core themes arose from the consultation meetings:

- Student participation in curriculum design and review
- Student feedback being taken into account
- Student employability being a factor in the design of curriculum

We hope the response below addresses the challenges raised. Any feedback or queries please contact Curriculum-Programme@open.ac.uk.
STUDENT PARTICIPATION

YOU SAID:
You would like to be involved in discussions about the content of modules and qualifications, size of modules, presentation of content, tutorial support, assessment, marking, pacing and start dates.

THE OU RESPONDS:
The University welcomes student engagement on all these issues and there is a long history of student representation on institutional level bodies that decide policy governing all aspects of academic provision e.g. curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment.

All 20 Programme Committees, concerned with development and review of modules and qualifications, have included a student representation category on their membership since 2011.

Unfortunately OUSA have been unable to appoint students onto around half of Programme Committees annually due to insufficient volunteers.

OUSA and Programme staff will be working together to raise the profile of student membership on Programme Committees amongst students.

If you would like to know more about these influential roles see: http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/get-involved/volunteer.

YOU SAID:
Some of you would like to be involved in module teams.

THE OU RESPONDS:
The University believes that student participation is more appropriate in other areas than at the module level for a number of reasons:

- The process of creating modules can be very intense. We do not think the level of involvement required would be feasible for a student.
- All modules fit within a qualification and qualifications sit within a programme. It is therefore much more appropriate to have student representation at a programme level where strategic decisions are made about individual modules and qualifications in relation to a whole portfolio than at a micro module level. This allows the student visibility over the whole rather than detail of the curriculum.
- Developmental testing of new curriculum is an area we welcome students (see overleaf).
You would like to be involved as critical readers and in developmental testing of new material.

**Note:**

**Critical reading allows students to give feedback on the style and difficulty of the text to the academic authors.**

**Developmental Testing is when a group of students work as if studying the module and provide feedback to the academic authors.**

**THE OU RESPONDS:**

Students do have the opportunity to be involved in developmental testing and as critical readers and practice varies between faculties.

The OU’s Student Research Project Panel (SRPP) carefully selects volunteers from the University’s database to ensure willing students are not overloaded and to give a wide range of students the opportunity to take part including disabled students. Students who have registered they don’t want to take part in research are not contacted.

The process is carefully monitored and anonymised student feedback is integrated, as appropriate, into the curriculum and learning design.

We are exploring ways of increasing student involvement in these activities based on your feedback.
There should be greater use and awareness of student feedback as a method of engagement in curriculum design.

It should be clearer that the SEaM survey would influence curriculum design.

The SEaM survey (Student Experience on a Module) is a major part of the University’s quality assurance process. Students are requested to complete questions on both the module and tutor experience. Aggregated data is then provided directly to the teams involved in designing the curriculum. This is to enable continuous improvement and quality assurance and has been in effect for a number of years.

One of the areas of challenge from students’ feedback, is in relation to analysing the qualitative data that students provide in the surveys. Often there is a lot of rich and useful information in the comments provided by students on the SEaM surveys. Therefore, as a result of feedback received the University is taking action to develop tools and an overall methodology to analyse qualitative data at scale and find new ways to meaningfully feed it back into the faculties and the teams that create curriculum at a module level.

We want to reassure you that the SEaM survey is influencing curriculum design. To this end there is a new area of StudentHome that has been set up so students can see how their feedback is used at a programme level (programmes comprise a number of qualifications). The new area allows students to read the commentaries that Programme Directors have produced in response to student feedback. The commentaries will form part of their annual quality reports, where they reflect on the feedback they’ve received from students and comment on how they have responded to that feedback: http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/communications/feedback-response.

Students said that there should be increased opportunities for giving immediate feedback on module content, which could be used to shape the curriculum in the future. For example, students could be asked at the end of each chapter/assignment for any views on what they have just studied.

The University has developed over the years a student reviews section which is accessible for every module on the OU website. A student review can be written by any student during or after the study of a module and is an opportunity to comment on any aspect of the module. The feedback is available not just to other students but also to the module team who regularly review the module design.

In light of the feedback received the University is aware that modifications will need to be made to the student reviews website. Therefore work has started to consider what changes are needed to make it more user friendly and also what processes need to be in place to ensure that feedback from this area is considered as part of curriculum design.

For each module the most recent survey results from SEaM are posted at the end of the student reviews along with a faculty response as to how they will take the feedback on board.
STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY

YOU SAID:
There should be direct contact with employers to ensure content is relevant to their requirements.

THE OU RESPONDS:
We agree.
The University takes employability very seriously. In June 2011 The Senate approved the Student Employability Policy and soon after that an Employability Policy Statement was published which outlines how the University explicitly addresses and supports student employability including through curriculum design.
The University has a Careers Advisory Service (CAS) which links with champions in each faculty to ensure that the needs and expectations of employers are appropriately embedded in individual disciplines. Across the University work is underway to embed the employability skills in the curriculum to respond to the needs of employers.

One example of this is in the Faculty of Business and Law where strong links have been forged with industry, and these are maintained through professional body partnerships, alumni relations and their Executive Education programmes. Both their undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum adopt a practice based learning methodology which means that activities, assignments and projects are undertaken in work scenarios that may require exposure to broader settings than the student might typically experience. The benefit to students is that it increases industry input into the student experience in a more personalised and relevant way.

In addition to this the University is encouraging greater peer learning as many OU students and tutors are experienced practitioners in a variety of work places. Collaborative-working exercises enable our students to share reflections from their different workplaces to highlight relevant issues in the curriculum.

In relation to curriculum design, faculties carry out market research/intelligence to ensure that they have taken into account the skills that employers are looking for in the particular subject. For example, the Maths, Computing and Technology Faculty has consulted with both employers and students in relation to proposed curriculum developments in Electronic Engineering and Computing and IT.

We also know that some students study subjects for the skills they can apply or the knowledge they can gain rather than the pursuit of a career. For instance, not all law students want to qualify in the legal profession but are developing the legal skills to use in other jobs/professions. This is taken account of by faculties in their curriculum design.

Finally, the University has ensured that qualification descriptions in the Enquiry Portal for students, details the practical and/or professional skills that students will develop having studied the course. This is to ensure careers and employability relevance are communicated clearly so students can decide what is most appropriate to them.

CONCLUSION
Thank you again for all your contributions. As you can see, we are working hard to act on this feedback to improve the student experience and this will continue. Planning has begun for the 2016 face-to-face consultative meetings and there are also opportunities to be involved in online consultation. For more information visit the Student Consultation website. We hope you will continue to share your views.