University Students Consultative Forum: Consultation on Learning Now for the Future
7–25 July 2014

A summary of the consultation can be viewed as part of the complete record of the discussion on the Forum.

The response below outlines how the points made here influenced the proposals for a new Learning and Teaching vision and plan, Learning Now for the Future, which was discussed by the University’s Senate in October, and other ways in which points made will be addressed. The plan will be implemented from October 2015.

Response

The questions elicited a range of responses and our reaction to them has varied along with it:

1. How do you feel about being involved in co-curating your learning?

The feedback here had an impact on Learning Now for the Future where it talks about the student experience. The points about the need to be progressive from Level 1 to Level 3 in terms of how external resources are used were well made. The issues about the value of flexibility in module choice have been picked up both in Learning Now for the Future and also so by the Curriculum Fit for the Future project.

2. What are your views on the OU providing a spectrum of learning opportunities from free open resources through to full fee, fully supported qualifications?

Student feedback here is also reflected in Learning Now for the Future and the University is serious about its social mission and offering educational opportunities to all. Work is underway with OpenLearn and Futurelearn to develop ‘tasters’ to help current and future students make informed choices. The other issues around assessment-free or examination-only options are interesting and being discussed and we note the student interest in such options but these are not currently in the plans.

3. What would be the benefits/disadvantages to students if all the materials were freely available at no cost online?

This was a rich discussion that brought out some complex issues. The balance between the advantages and disadvantages is quite delicate but we expect to be able to make more materials available freely over the coming years and the feedback here is helpful in showing us which types of materials would be most appreciated.

4. How important do you see digital literacy skills and employability skills?

The need for these skills to be integrated in a meaningful and authentic manner was well received. We noted the dislike of self-reflection and, at times, group work activity and agree that these need to be used only where the purpose and value is clear. The idea of freely available non-accredited resources so that some of these skills can be addressed outside of modules was interesting and Futurelearn are currently developing a set of ‘badged’ open courses that may well deliver some of what is needed.

5. How important is it to you to develop capabilities that will enable you to learn, understand and contribute to a complex society?
The feedback here was used in the development of the sections on pedagogies and on communities. The issue of the reduction in 10 and 30 credit modules is being picked up by the Curriculum Fit for the Future project but Learning Now for the Future does stress the importance of being able to function flexibly across academic disciplines. The community building section focuses on enabling more informal conversations between student and staff around issues of mutual interest that may go across and beyond module boundaries.

6. When we say that we would like our students to feel part of their chosen academic community and engage in meaningful interactions (staff, peers and the organisation) how could we improve or deliver that for you?

Very helpful feedback here that informed the sections about community and pedagogies. With fewer opportunities to meet face-to-face it is really important to find a variety of ways in which staff and students can interact. The points about forum use were also well made and well taken and we are exploring ways to provide more opportunities for informal chat within the OU environments.

7. What kind of technologies would you like us to use to engage students for social, peer-to-peer and assessment approaches?

The feedback here was used in the section of the paper on use of technologies and the key messages were about reliability, consistency and using a technology for a clear purpose.

8. How important is it that we address real-world problems and support you in developing global citizenship skills which can be transferable from local to global contexts?

The feedback was that these skills will be differently applicable in different qualifications and that that needs recognising. As with much of the feedback, there seemed to be agreement that where real-world problems were relevant and helpful then addressing them is very welcome but they should not be addressed as a requirement. This point is well taken.

9. How can we build on the strengths of our vast communities in partnership for collaborative and imaginative problem solving within a culturally diverse and digital society?

The feedback here was considered in the section of the paper on communities but also on student experience and, in particular, the issue of a well structured induction for new students is being actively developed under the Learning Now for the Future work.

10. Are you interested in cross-disciplinary curriculum that addresses global challenges such as how we can live more sustainably?

Feedback here was useful in helping us think about how some of the broader challenges of society, whilst not being directly relevant to all qualifications, can be addressed through open resources.

11. Are there any new developments in learning and teaching that you would like to see or any currently developments that you'd like to see more of?

Feedback about help with pathway or module choice was particularly useful. One of the important challenges for the University that was raised here was about providing more flexibility and choice around a number of issues. The balance between choice
and coherence is a major aspect of the work of the Curriculum Fit for the Future project.

12. Is there anything else we should consider?

The feedback here was variable but was considered as the paper was finalised. Independent learning and increased opportunities to use materials outside of the core module materials are being addressed in an increasing number of modules; and module teams are exploring models that allow students more choice in how they interact with materials and assessment.

Can we also take this opportunity to thank all the students who contributed to such a lively and thoughtful discussion.