

Project Title: Achieving student centred facilitation in online synchronous tutorials

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Executive Summary

The advent of digital capabilities in synchronous communication technologies has enabled the STEM faculty to move much of its tutorial provision from a face-to-face setting online. Direct observation in Level 2 Life and Health Sciences modules, of around 70 hours of online tuition has revealed that the ethos of student centred facilitation, which previously characterised most OU face to face tutorial provision has now largely been lost. Despite the affordances of interactive tools within the platform used for tuition (Adobe Connect), staff delivering synchronous online tuition have largely adopted a didactic approach with a focus on 'content to cover'. Interviews with staff in this study reveal significant frustration that students are not more active participants within tutorials and describe how their best efforts to foster staff to student and student-to-student interactions frequently meet with failure. Student satisfaction with tuition experiences, however, is high with most students surveyed describing tutorials as highly valuable to their learning. In addition, data analytics reveal that many students make significant use of recordings of synchronous tutorials and frequently, by choice, rarely attend sessions live. Student surveys and in-depth interviews with students and staff reveal a lack of shared understanding of the role of tutorial provision within our distance-learning context. In this report we outline a number of different approaches to synchronous tuition that may support a more effective student learning in a variety of distance learning contexts. Our aim is to foster a better match between student and staff expectations, ensuring that students more fully understand the value of a student centred approach to tuition and that staff are supported to provide this effectively.

Aims and scope of the project

Within the last 10 years, the advent of digital capabilities in synchronous communication technologies has enabled the STEM faculty to move much of its tutorial provision online. In Life and Health sciences all tutorials now take place in online rooms ((formally an OU version of Blackboard Collaborate, more recently, Adobe Connect). These sessions are led by a team of Associate Lecturers (ALs or tutors), some not personally known to the students. Attendance at tutorials is not mandatory.

On moving tuition online there was an initial expectation that student attendance would improve since the barriers to attendance were reduced (travel, transport costs, caring duties). This has proved not to be the case with many students citing difficulties including other commitments clashing with scheduling, simply not having sufficient time to attend or not fully valuing the learning experience they provide. Tutorials are routinely recorded.

Within the Open University supported open learning model, tutorials have long served to provide opportunities for active learning with student peers, guided by ALs. With the affordance of a variety of interactive tools within the online room, it was assumed, that it would be possible to deliver online sessions that featured active learning and the favoured constructivist approach to shared knowledge creation and understanding. Training for ALs sought to encourage skill development around the use of the interactive tools offered in the online room, including the tutor and student use of the microphone and a chat box, break out rooms for group work, an interactive whiteboard with drawing tools, a quiz tool and a polling tool to answer questions as a group.

By the inception of this study, in late 2016, online tuition was well established as the sole mode of tuition delivery in Life and Health Science modules and ALs had had time to develop skill within the online environment. In addition, module teams, in an attempt to support ALs move to online tuition frequently made provision of a variety of tuition guidance and pre-prepared material, foreshadowing the introduction of the Group Tuition policy in 2016J.

At this time it was therefore prudent to investigate and explore, very comprehensively, what ALs and students actually did in online tutorials. Our aim was to discover if this reality matched expectations of the traditional OU student centred style of tutorial delivery, whether current provision satisfies our students and to explore ALs perceptions of their role as facilitators of learning.

Specific goals of the project

Develop a meaningful system for evaluating AL/student activity within online tutorials
Future production of staff development material to assist tutors break down barriers to participation in synchronous tuition thereby improving student participation and therefore learning
Offer future opportunities for tutor reflection on practice

Contribution to implementation of more effective tutorial practices within group tuition model
Opportunity to provide greater job satisfaction for ALs.
Opportunity to disseminate our findings across the STEM faculty/University wide for online tuition.

Activities

Our study consisted of three phases to observe current practice connected to tutorial provision in Level 2, Life and Health Sciences modules. Phase 1 developed a method of evaluating, in detail, the delivery style/content and approach of online tuition in these modules. Phase 2 surveyed a number of students studying a target set of Life and Health Science modules for views on their experiences of online, synchronous tutorials. Phase 3 focussed on semi-structured interviews conducted with a small sample of students studying the target modules and their Associate Lecturers.

Phase 1

Recordings of OU live tutorials across four level 2, Life and Health Science modules were observed using a tutorial checklist (Appendix 1). The tutorial checklist contained a blend of semi-quantitative criteria for scoring, and qualitative free text comment boxes. The checklist was devised to assess the presentation style of the tutor, the pedagogic content of the tutorial and the OU Live tools used by the tutor to promote interactivity and student engagement within the tutorial. The checklist was tested in a pilot phase with all researchers scoring the same 5 tutorial recordings to ensure the checklist covered all relevant aspects required and the researchers were scoring the criteria in a consistent manner.

A total of 74 tutorial recordings were scored using the checklist across the four modules; S294 (n=20 observations), S295 (n=16 observations), SXHL288 (n=18 observations) and SK277 (n=20 observations).

The semi-quantitative data was analysed in Excel.

It should be noted that permission to watch recordings was given by all participating ALs and the observation reports were anonymised and no data from this project was used as in AL performance management.

Phase 2

Students on all four target modules were invited to participate in an online survey. The survey consisted of a combination of closed questions, with responses graded on a Likert scale where appropriate. To provide an opportunity for students to elaborate upon their responses to the closed questions, a number of open questions were included and these were analysed using NVIVO. All closed questions are included in the Appendix 2.

Phase 3

Of the 29 students responding to the survey, 3 individuals were followed up with a semi-structured interview. Subsequently a further two students were identified (who had undertaken one or more of our target modules) and were interviewed.

The interviews (Appendix 3) sought to further explore students' perceptions and attitudes towards the synchronous, online tuition they had received. Our interview sample consisted of 2 women and 3 men, with one of the women based overseas in a different time zone.

In addition, 6 Associate Lecturers (5 women and 1 man) drawn from cohort of ALs tutoring the level 2 modules under examination, were interviewed (Appendix 4) with an analogous set of interview questions.

All interviews were transcribed and together with the text from the open-ended questions within the survey were coded in NVivo 11.

Changes to original project plan

Emphasis on observing the effects of recording tutorials was reduced during the study as a result of initial tutorial observations when other, more significant factors were seen to be in play.

In a workshop on tuition (2017 eSTeEeM conference) we gathered feedback for around 50 central and regional academics on their views on the purposes and expectations of tuition in the OU.

We experienced difficulty in recruiting sufficient students to interview from our target presentations, we subsequently contacted students via the Student Research panel who had studied our target modules to increase our number of student interviews.

Based on our initial observations and survey/interview data we decided to interview ALs to gain their perspective.

The university change to Adobe Connect in 2017J resulted in the loss of all recordings of prior tutorials.

Findings

Phase 1

The data for 74 tutorials from 4 Level 2 Life and Health science modules are presented in Figure 1 with green to represent positive observer perceptions and pink representing negative observer perceptions of these style elements.

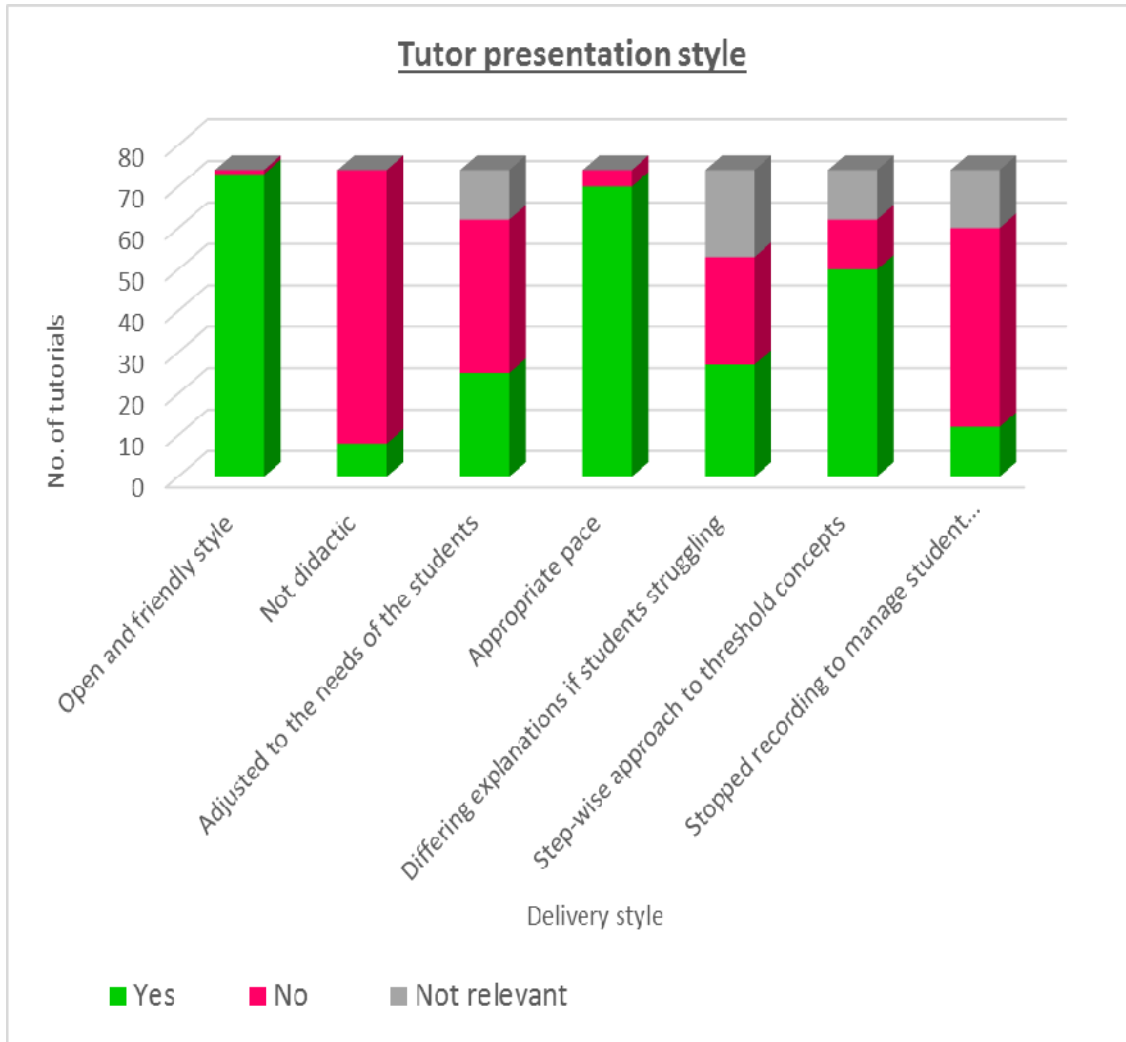


Figure 1 Graph illustrating proportions of tutorials observed with specified features of tutor presentation style

We saw consistently that tutors were open and friendly in tone and language and paced materials at a level we considered appropriate to the students' abilities. In general tutors used a stepwise approach, starting with fundamental concepts and then expanding with examples and building up to consolidation and explaining more complicated concepts.

However, we observed that tutorials were often didactic in nature, often with little student input or questioning. Adjustments to the needs of students present in the live tutorial were infrequently observed, but this does not take into account any adjustments made prior to the recording through private discussions between students and tutors.

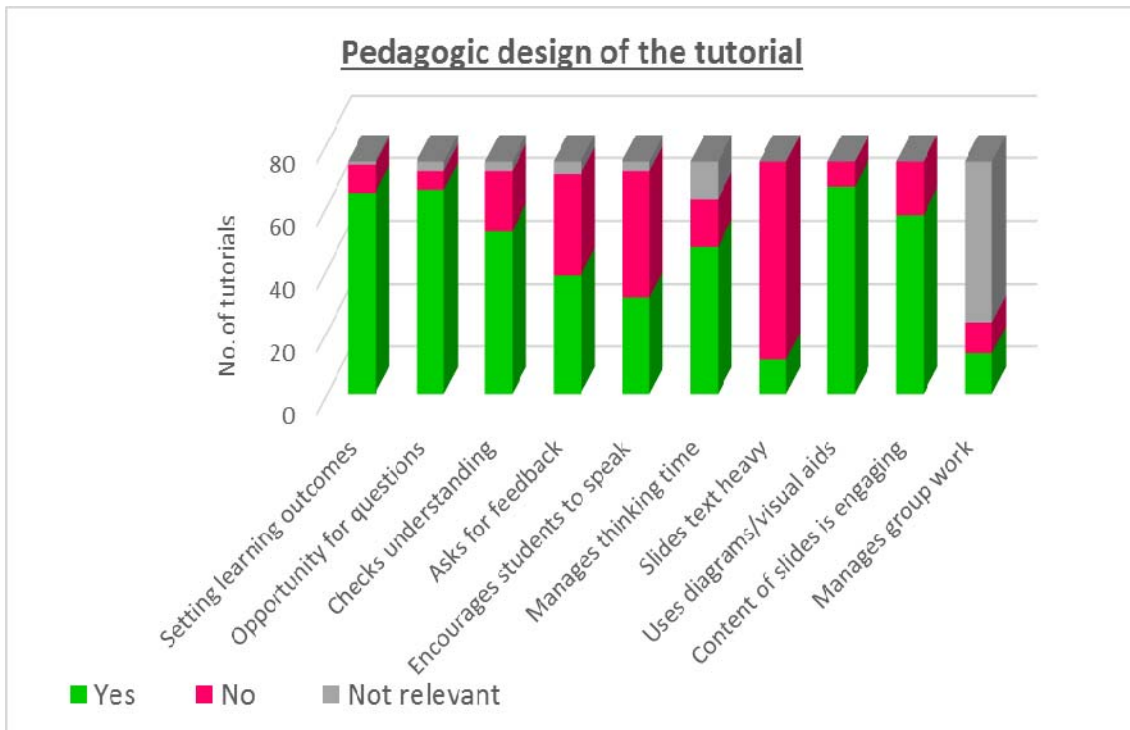


Figure 2 Graph illustrating proportions of tutorials observed with specified design elements

We observed (Figure 2) that in the vast majority of tutorials (80 %) the learning outcomes were clearly defined at the start of the tutorial. Tutors emphasized and invited questions either during the tutorial or with a defined question time at the end of an informal presentation. Feedback and checking of understanding through the chat box, use of emoticons and polling were frequent. In general we found the content appropriate, including diagrams, photographs, charts and other visual aids, but with a heavy reliance on text. There were only a limited number of group work opportunities (minimum of 1 occurrence in 12.5 % of observed tutorials) and management of these activities was varied, for example in prompting students, checking tools worked and indicating time to do activity.

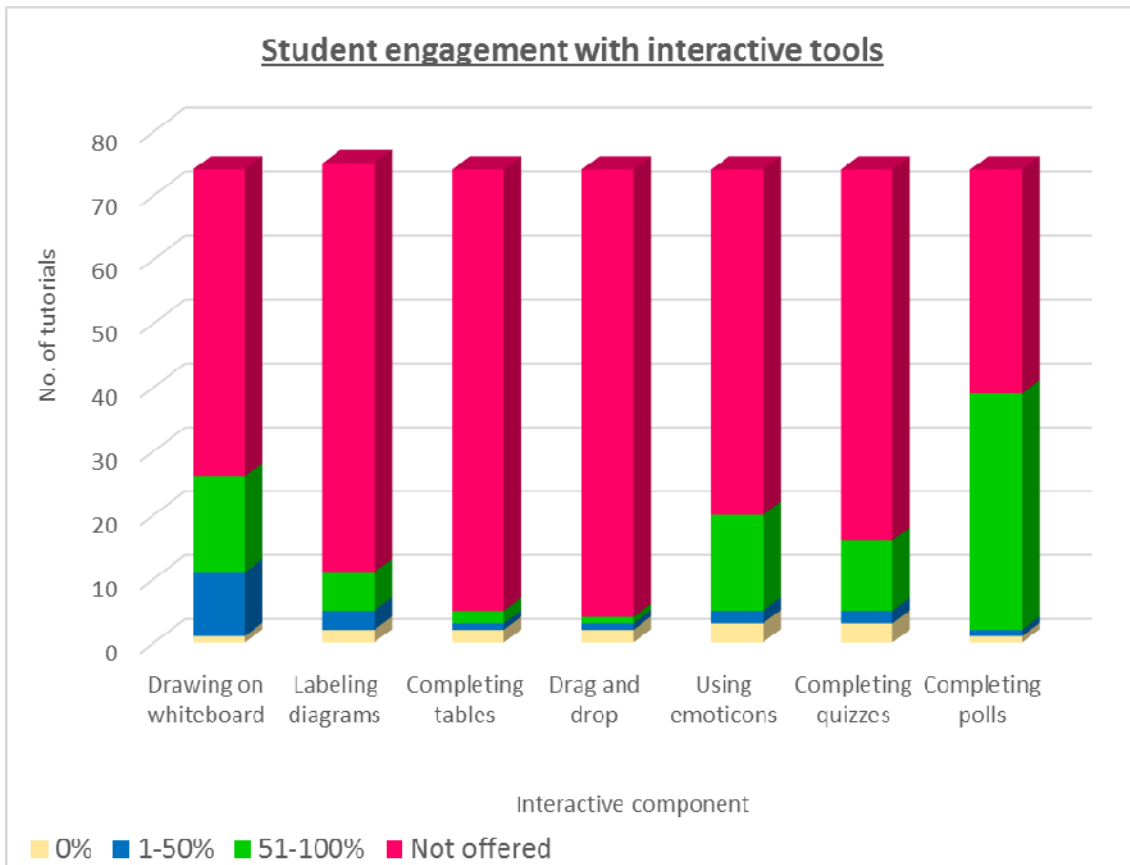


Figure 3 Graph illustrating proportions of tutorials observed with estimated student participation with a variety of interactive tools

In all tutorials a wide range of interactive tools were available but infrequently offered (Figure 3). When offered the majority (51 -100%) of students engaged, as indicated by the green bars. In particular students used interactive tools that offered anonymity such as polling and drawing on the whiteboard.

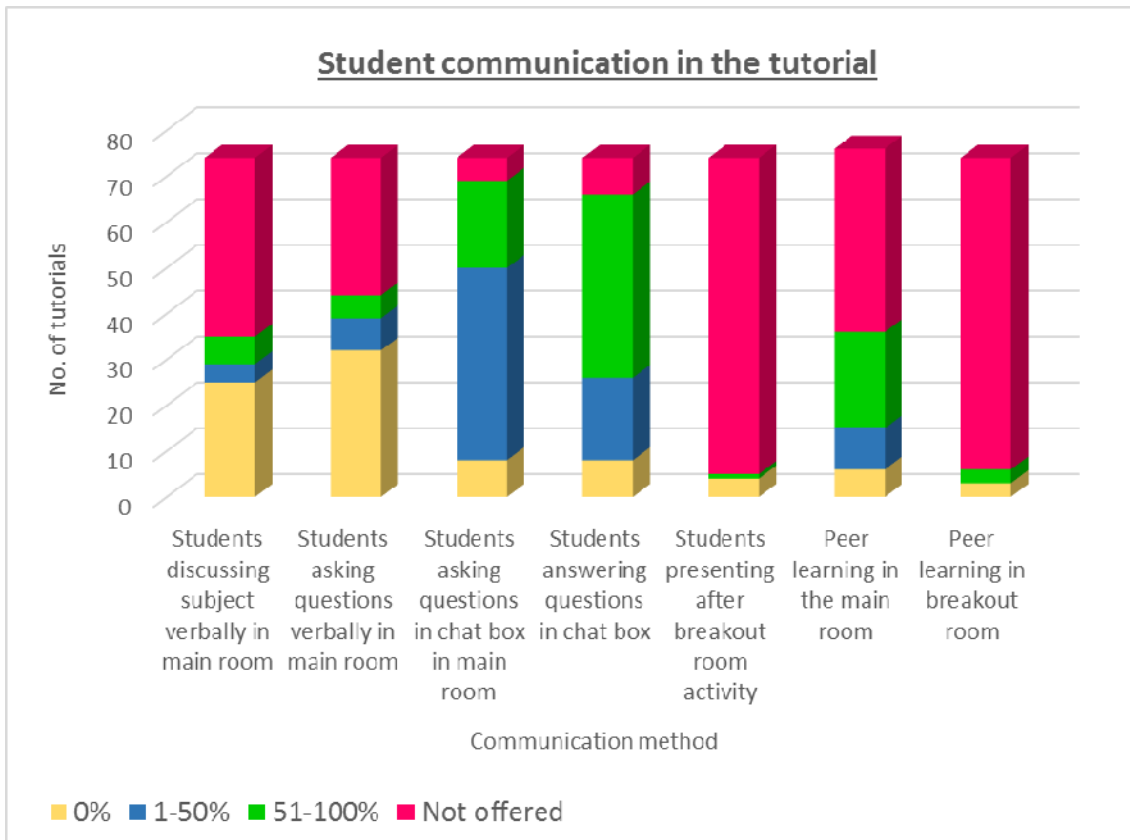


Figure 4 Graph illustrating the number of tutorials where the indicated proportion of students were involved in the named types of communication

Figure 4 shows that In 72% of tutorials, where the opportunity to ask questions verbally was offered, no student actually spoke. Furthermore when the opportunity to ask questions in the chat box was offered only 28 % of tutorials [19 out of 69] had the majority of the students attending asking a question. 61% of tutorials observed had at least one question from a student in the chat box. When tutors posed questions and students were offered the chance to answer in the chat box, the majority of students, 61 % responded. In the vast majority of tutorials observed the opportunity for student presentation and peer discussion was not offered in either the main room or in breakout rooms (columns 5, 6 and 7)

Phase 2

Student survey data is shown grouped by theme as follows.

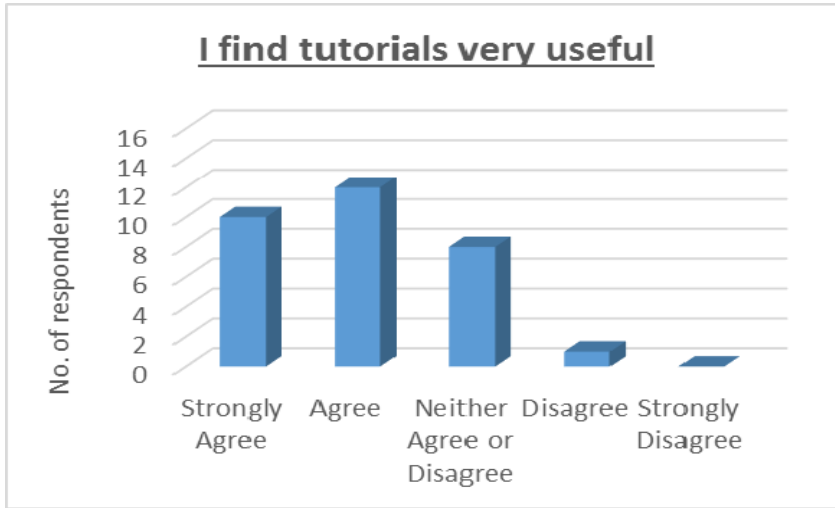


Figure 5 Student responses to the statement 'I find tutorials very useful'

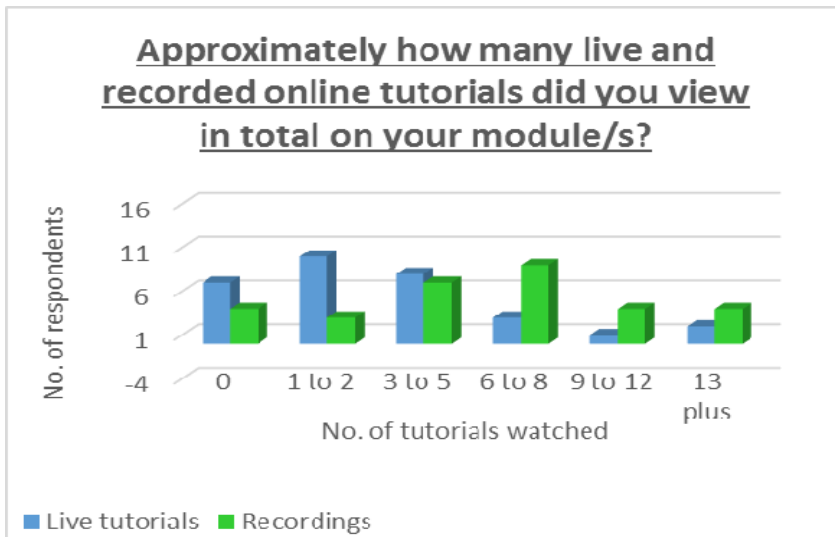


Figure 6 Students responses regarding the number of tutorials attended live or via the recording.

Figure 6 shows that students surveyed, in general find tutorials useful. Figure 2 shows the number of students attending live and recorded tutorials, it is important to note that different modules offer differing amounts of tuition and some students are taking more than one module. From our findings a majority of students attended at least one tutorial and at least three recorded tutorials.

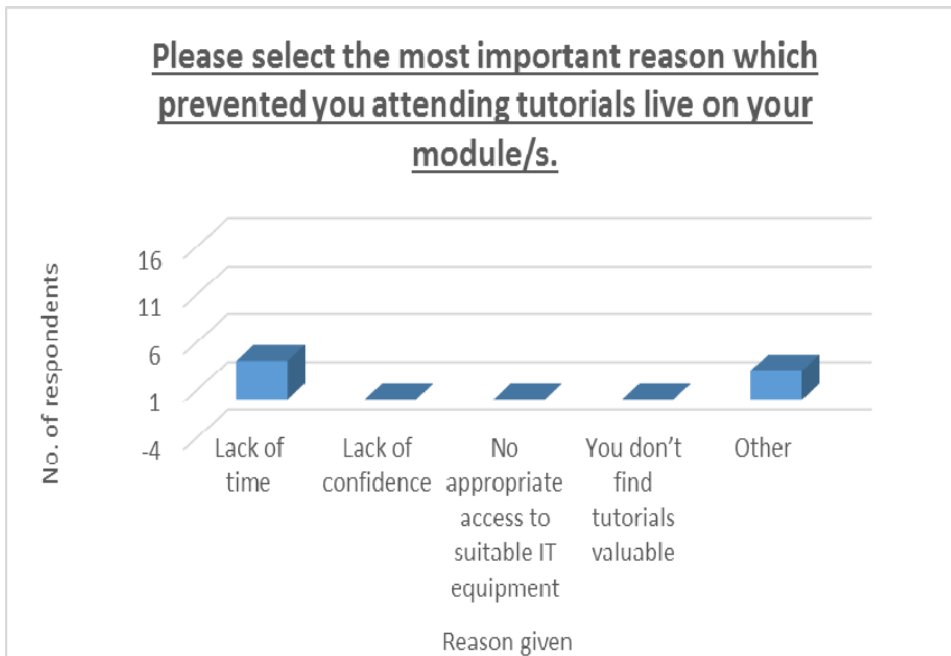


Figure 7 Student responses regarding reasons for nonattendance at live tutorials.

Students report lack of time as the principal reason for not attending live tuition (Figure 7). Others also mentioned IT issues or scheduling difficulties as reasons for non-attendance.

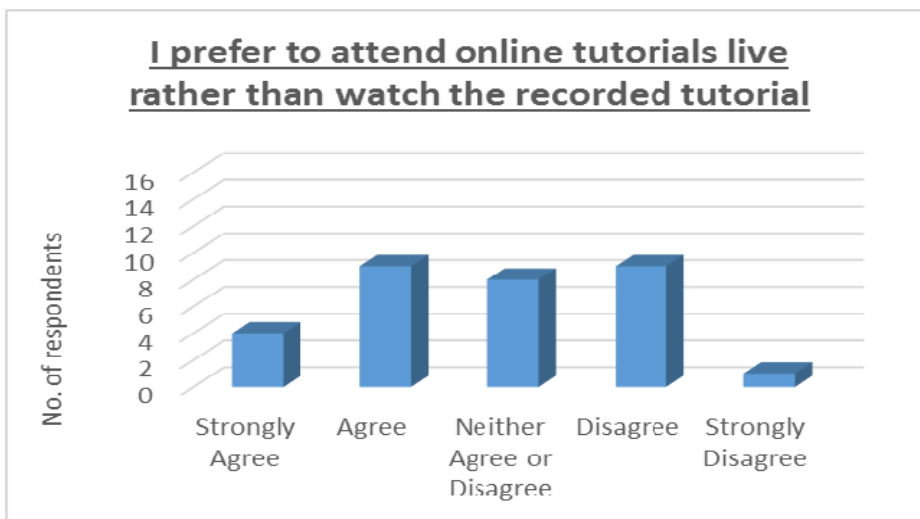


Figure 8 Student perceptions of the value of recordings

Figure 8 shows students' preferences around attendance at live sessions compared to recorded tutorials. No clear pattern emerges here suggesting individual preferences are the main factor governing attendance.

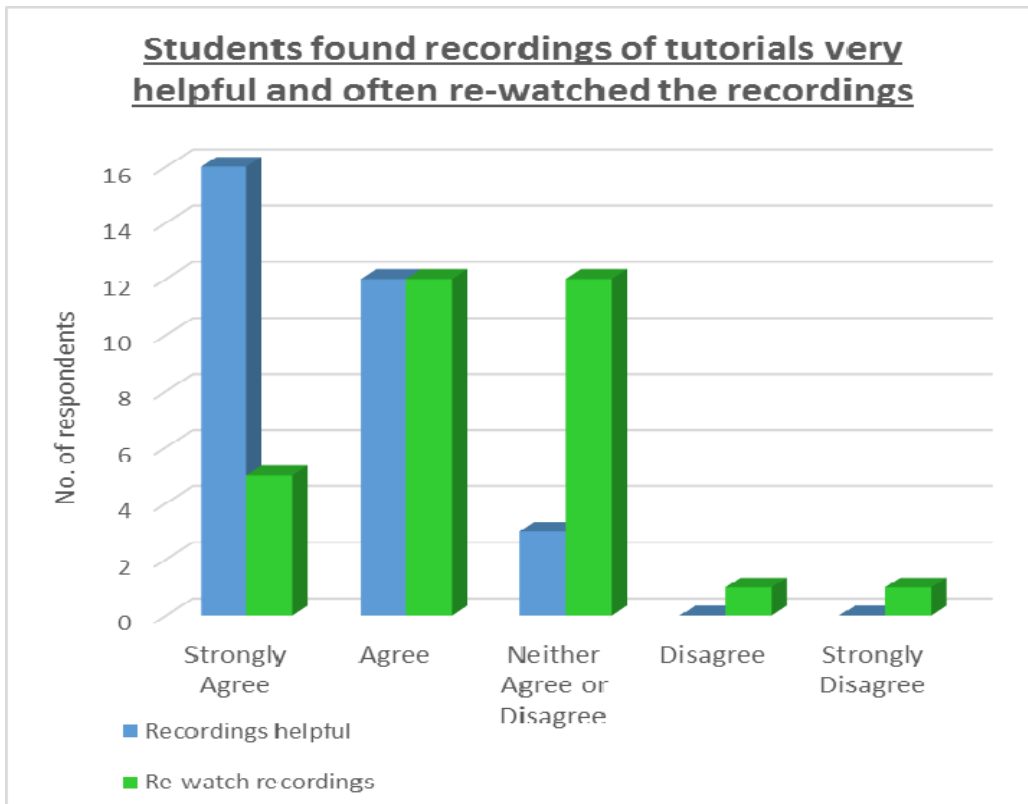


Figure 9 Student views on the value of recordings

Figure 9 shows that a large majority of students surveyed value recordings of tutorials and it is common for students to watch some recordings more than once.

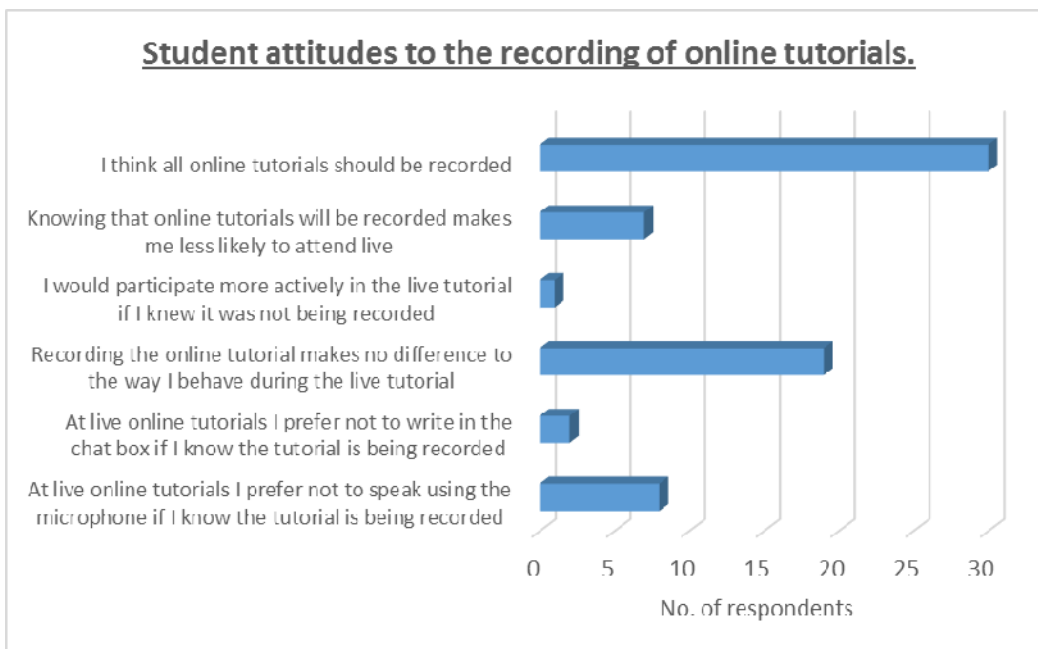


Figure 10 Student attitudes to the recording of tutorials

Attitudes to recording tutorials are shown in Figure 10. the majority of students do not generally feel that they alter their behaviour in a tutorial which is recorded and the consensus is that all tuition should be recorded. There is however evidence that some students' live attendance is affected by the action of recording the session and that students are reluctant to speak using the microphone.

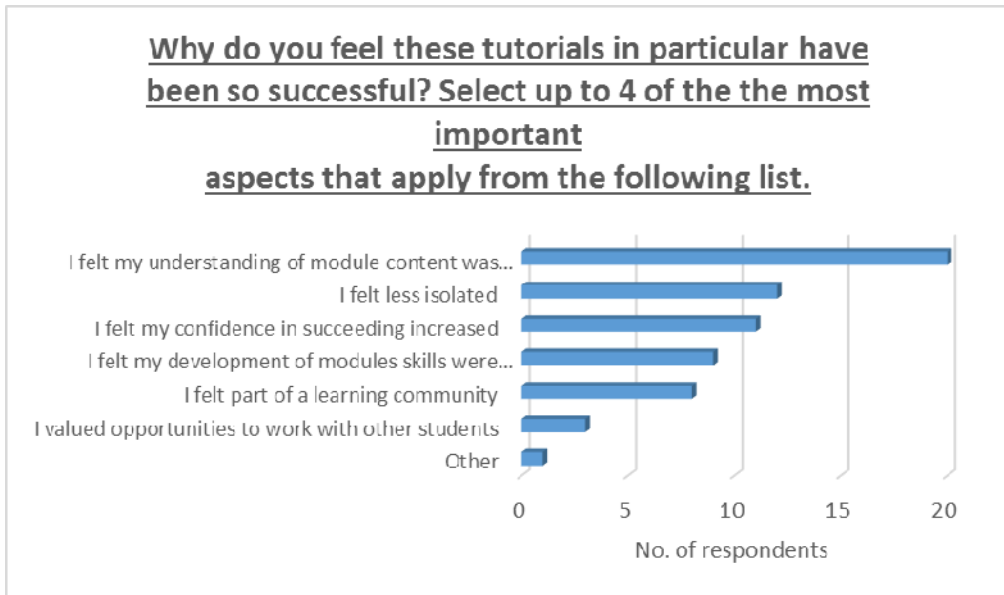


Figure 11 Students responses regarding their perceptions of successful tutorials

When commenting on successful tutorial experiences (Figure 11), students rate improvement in understanding and reduction in isolation as the most significant benefits. Conversely students did not rate highly the opportunity to work with other students.

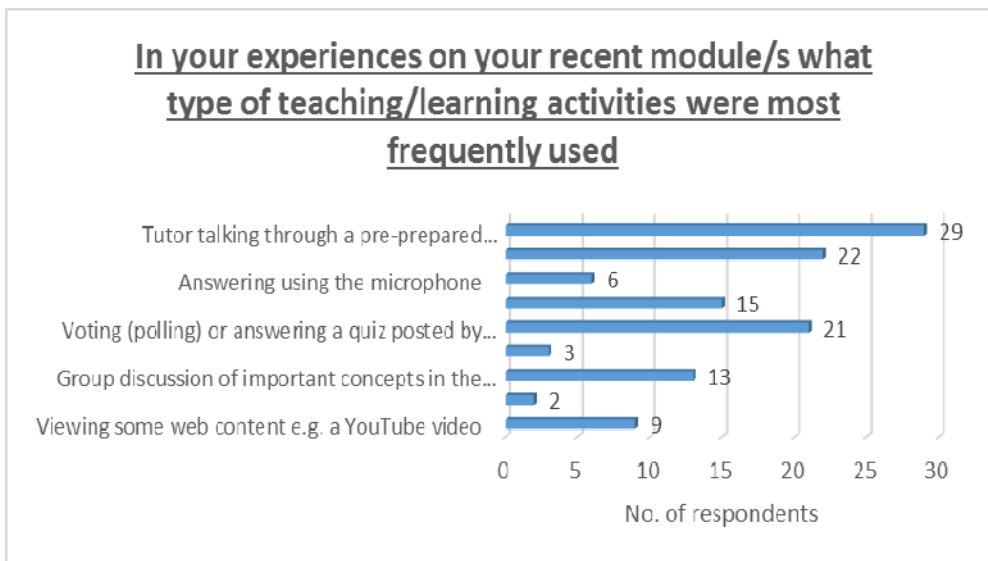


Figure 12 Student Responses regarding the most frequently used teaching approaches in tutorials

Students report that they most frequently experienced a didactic presentation of module content (Figure 12) in their tutorials. Frequent interactions were via the chat box or engaging in a tutor led poll. Conversely group work and group discussion were infrequent occurrences. Few students experienced tutorials where students speak using the microphone.

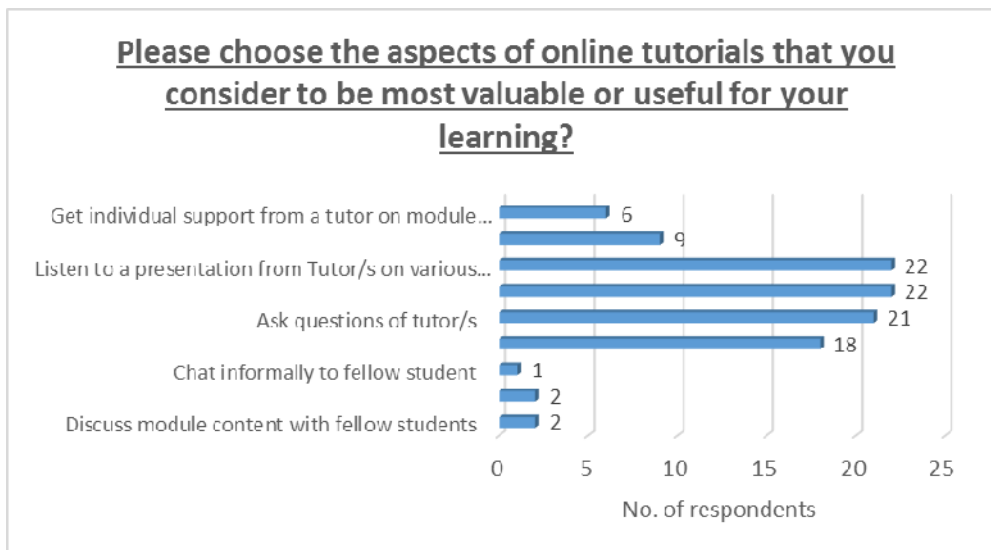


Figure 13 Students responses regarding their perceptions of valuable aspects of online tutorials

Figure 13 shows that students value listening to a tutor led presentation and the opportunity to ask questions of their tutor. Discussion and activities with other students are not highly valued.

Phase 3

The open ended survey data and the semi-structured interviews provided a wealth of data from students and ALs. Appendix 5 gives a fuller account of the qualitative data obtained in this Phase of the project.

Most students surveyed or interviewed were very clear on the value of recording tutorials, for reasons of convenience but also to supplement revision and examination preparation. Interestingly some students paid only the scantest attention to recordings,

'I jumped to sections which were most relevant which I was most unsure about and I would stop and start, just listening to the sections which were more necessary',

while others took great pains to watch the recording in real time, working through any questions posed by the tutor,

'New information will stick in the memory better than when you are really interacting rather than just watching'.

ALs however felt very strongly that the act of recording a tutorial negatively impacts on students' willingness to engage actively in the tutorial, particularly manifest in a reluctance to use the microphone to speak,

'they will be chatting away quite nicely and then as soon as we start recording everything goes into the chatbox'.

For the students interviewed this change in student behaviour within the tutorial was not seen as an important consideration perhaps given that the value of the recording to the students outweighed any negative effects experienced during the session.

The student view of interactivity within an online tutorial presented some interesting contrasts with that of ALs. The students reported that the tutorials they attended had been quite interactive and mentioned their tutors using polling questions and encouraged them to ask and answer questions via the chat box but several did refer to their sessions as 'lectures', for example,

'There are sections of it which are interactive but it does feel more like this is a lecture, you need to pay serious attention and take notes.'

Other students commented that the interaction could be stilted and one way, for example,

'I didn't get involved.....The tutor would try really hard on every module, you know, to put a tick or draw a line on screen, or something like that. Hardly anyone would do it'.

Tutors felt they were doing as much as they could, within the online environment, to make sessions more interactive but they were aware of limited success and felt under pressure (potentially by module team provided tutorial guidance) , albeit reluctantly, to deliver a content focussed session, perhaps feeling that this is what was expected and valued by the students, for example,

'I think students want to sit back and be taught and learn by listening without realising that they need to be interacting and thinking'.

All students questioned were aware that hearing students' voices within a tutorial was a rare occurrence and several commented that they had experienced use of breakout rooms but only very rarely, for example,

'The chat freezes in breakout rooms, I really don't like them'.

Tutors expressed similarly misgivings about use of breakout rooms, expressing frustration that students do not value group work and therefore will not engage in breakout rooms. They also expressed views around poor student attendance, stressing that low attendance make planning meaningful group work doubly difficult. Students, too were concerned about attendance, for example,

'Tutorials were only 3 or 4 people attended were thin and undynamic (sic)'.

Interestingly some student voices were asking for more student centred tutorials. However comments such as,

'I would prefer tutorials to be a discussion between myself, the tutor and other students about current parts of the module'' .

were rare, with most students valuing a good presentation of module content above any other consideration.

Conclusions

It is apparent from this detailed examination of the tutorials in Life and Health Sciences (Level 2) that the student centred approach to synchronous tutorial events has been somewhat diminished by the move to offer all tuition online. Online tutorials, regardless of scale in terms of number of student participants, are largely didactic events concentrating on the individual, the non –reflective and the transmission of information (Conole et al, 2014). This contrasts starkly with the view of ALs surveyed here and in other studies (Walsh and Gallen, 2017), suggesting that they would prefer students to be much more active as learners within tutorials and that interactive sessions would be of greater benefit to their students. Interestingly, however, as with other studies in this area of the curriculum (Haresnape, 2013), student satisfaction with tutorial provision is high. This may suggest a mismatch between the expectations of the institution, its ALs and its students on the purposes of synchronous tuition and the learning benefits participation may bring.

This study has shown that, for the most part, online tutorials can be characterised as interactive lectures, with a limited use of the largely anonymous tools within the online room (polling and quizzing). There is a real focus in sessions on 'coverage' with ALs (often at the direction of module teams) striving to transmit information in well digested chunks on every aspect of the module content and the assessment, often distracted by the need to provide a coherent recording of the session. This, despite the fact, that the student is already in possession of expensively and expertly crafted distance-learning materials covering the same topics.

Communication in tutorials is most likely to be via the chat box allowing students to answer and ask questions and only in a very few cases is there even any assumption (from tutors or students) that students will speak. Opportunities for group work are rare; potentially a function of the size of the tutorial -too poorly attended in a tutor group setting, too many attending in a cluster/module wide tutorial. In addition, perceived and real student reluctance is a factor here, with tutors fearful of 'forcing' students to participate in the online setting. Indeed our

study illustrates a clear relationship between what our students suggest they value from tuition (a clear presentation of module content) with the type of tutorial they are ultimately delivered by their tutor –this suggest that student behaviour is ultimately driving the tutors’ teaching style. An additional pressure on tutors here may be their perceptions of module team requirements and expectations. On moving tuition online, module teams felt the need to provide help and guidance for ALs in terms of provision of tutorial pre-prepared material and in doing so may have ‘deprofessionalised’ ALs, undermining their confidence to deliver the type of tuition they feel meets student needs.

Should we be worried that most of our students are, for the large part passive consumers of tutorials? Smith and Smith (2014) argue that sometimes passivity is of value and that there are aspects of learning where such an approach is entirely appropriate. Their studies of student engagement with online tutorials in OU social science modules concluded that students could be defined as either ‘passive engagers’ or ‘active engagers’. The term ‘engager’ used here, since with respect to tutorial attendance, students have to choose to engage in the first place but then can subsequently adopt an active or a passive demeanour. Passivity has negative connotations in this context, suggesting disinterest or a lack of commitment from the student which may imply a lesser learning experience, however it could be argued that passive engagers learn vicariously yet effectively through observation of their more active peers. Indeed the concept of the invisible online learner is not new (Beaudoin, 2002) and the effective invisibility or otherwise of students in all aspects of the online environment is, in our experience, not automatically correlated with poor module performance.

Our survey responses suggested a heavy reliance on recorded tutorials amongst our cohort and our student interviews illustrated that, even in terms of watching recordings, students behaviour fell into passive and active mode with some students merely gutting the recording for vital content while others worked through in real time. It may be that these contrasting approaches to recordings and students preferences for the aspects of tutorials they value may be related to the well characterised (Biggs, 2003) deep/surface approach to study. Prosser and Trigwell (1999) argue that students who take a surface approach prefer highly tutor regulated environments with delivery of information as the main activity. In contrast students taking a deep approach prefer student centred methods. Our findings chime with Herman’s view (2014) that the surface learner perceives the tutorial as little more than an interactive lecture, paying scant attention to input from fellow students and is very much preoccupied with expert tutor ‘coverage’ of material. In contrast students taking a deep approach view the tutorial as a space to apply knowledge, interact with peers and view the tutor as a facilitator (the view that most ALs share).

It seems likely that our online learning environment exacerbates these well reported differences between student learning behaviours. In face to face settings, ALs have the benefit of social interaction and peer pressure to encourage student interaction, indeed the tutor-student dynamic may allow tutors to drive active student participation in a way which cannot be easily achieved within our currently structured online environment.

Our study has also shown that some students, in some circumstances, are actively seeking less didactic tutorials, with greater opportunities to participate, discuss and check their understanding and that even students who profess to like ‘lecture type’ tutorials can also recognise the value of good interactive sessions when they happen – even if only rarely, usually with their own personal tutor. It is possible that in provision of tutorial support, the university has a difficult balancing act; trying to reconcile the educators’ view of what constitutes best practice in this distance learning setting, with students’ differing yet variable perceptions of the purpose of tutorials and the affordances of the relatively restrictive online tuition environment.

Given these different characteristics of our learners and the difficulty for our ALs in driving active participation in online tutorials it seems essential we should plan and design learning experiences for our students which feature a variety of approaches and meet a variety of learning needs. It is worth recognising that Conole et al’s (2004) three types of learning (individual –social, active-passive and information-experience) can be facilitated by different online technologies.

Impact

Our detailed focus on the realities of tutorial provision in this area of our curriculum therefore suggests a modified approach to tutorial provision using a greater variety of approaches/techniques that may better serve the variety of expectations of our students.

The design of future module tutorial strategies may encompass the following without the intention that all students will use all types of provision.

- A greater variety of types of well signposted, small group tutorials, clearly defined in terms of expectations of active student participation, including drop in support, clinic, problem solving, skills focused sessions, assessment focused sessions.
- Provision of large scale, high production value (potentially previously recorded) 'lectures' providing the additional 'voice' which explains key module concepts and gives the coverage many students crave.
- Provision of genuinely large-scale synchronous events, which add value to the student experience such as live debates or lab casts.
- Creative use of forum spaces to provide places for follow up asynchronous or synchronous discussion of online 'lectures' or other synchronous but large scale events.
- Complete integration of the tutorial provision within the online module materials - from the module planning stage onwards.
- Opportunities for student collaborative tasks which emphasise the importance and value of student to student interaction.
- Opportunities for peer to peer 'tutor less' synchronous meetings.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Tutorial checklist

Question #1

1

Response is required

*

Module

S294 S295 SK277 SXHL288

Question #2

2

Response is required

*

Type of tutorial

Tutor-group Cluster Module-wide Library-led

Question #3

3

Response is required

*

Timing of tutorial

Start First third Middle Last third EMA/exam

Question #4

4

Response is required

*

Date of tutorial

Use the day/month/year format, e.g. for March 14th, 1945: **14/3/1945**

Question #5

5

Date of tutorial visit

Use the day/month/year format, e.g. for March 14th, 1945: **14/3/1945**

Question #6

6

Response is required

*

Maximum number of students attending

Question #8

8

Length of the tutorial

Question #9

9

Response is required



Primary purpose of the tutorial

Module content TMA preparation EMA/exam preparation Skills development

Question #10

10

Response is required



Was the session recorded or live?

Recorded Live

Question #11

11

Response is required



Tutor presentation style

1 - Yes

2 - No

3 - Not relevant

		1	2	3
Introductions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Open and friendly style	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Engaging/encouraging tone of voice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Positive demeanour	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Didactic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Webcam used or picture of the tutor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Adjusted to the needs of the students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Appropriate pace	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Differing explanations if students struggling	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Step-wise approach to threshold concepts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Accessibility adjustments made	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Stopped recording to manage student engagement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Question #12

12

Response is required



Comments on presentation style

Question #13

13

Response is required



Content of the tutorial

1 - Yes

2 - No

3 - Not relevant

		1	2	3
Setting the scene/learning outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunity for questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Checks understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asks for feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourages students to speak	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uses pointer and graphic tools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uses audio and video, e.g. youtube	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sending/sharing documents and slides	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tutor effectively manages thinking time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slides are inappropriately text heavy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slides include diagrams/visual aids	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Content of slides is engaging	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tutor advises on technical issues - tutorial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tutor advises on technical issues - module	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manages group work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Signposts follow-up work/tutorials/TMAs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question #14

14

Response is required



Comments on tutorial content

Question #15

15

Response is required



Proportion of students engaging with interactive activity

1 - 0

2 - 1- 25%

3 - 26-50%

4 - 51-75%

5 - 76 - 100%

6 - not offered

		1	2	3	4	5	6
Students discussing subject verbally in main room	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students asking questions verbally in main room	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Students asking questions in chat box in main room	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Students answering questions in chat box							
Students presenting after breakout room activity							
Peer learning in the main room							
Peer learning in breakout room							
Drawing on whiteboard							
Labeling diagrams							
Completing tables							
Completing maths equations							
Drag and drop							
Using emoticons							
Completing quizzes							
Completing polls							

Question #16

16

Response is required



Comments on interactivity within the module

Question #17

17

Response is required



Other interactivity used throughout the session

1 - Yes

2 - No

		1	2
Break-out rooms		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Application sharing - showing website		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Application sharing - using excel		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Webtours, e.g., module website		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Video, e.g., youtube videos		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question #18

18

Response is required



Comments on other interactive components used.

Appendix 2 Student survey (closed questions)

Which of the following Life and Health Science modules did you study starting in October 2016? Please select any that apply.

Approximately how many live online tutorials did you attend in total on your module/s?

If you did not attend any online tutorials, please select the most important reason which prevented you attending tutorials on your module/s.

If you studied more than one module in 2016 and attended at least one live online tutorial, please select from the list below a statement which describes your general pattern of attendance at live online tutorials

Approximately how many recorded online tutorials did you view in total on your module/s?

If you did not view any recorded online tutorials, please select the most important reason which prevented you viewings recordings on your module/s

If you have attended at least one tutorial or viewed at least one recording please indicate your level of agreement with the following aspects of tutorial provision.

I prefer to attend online tutorials live rather than watch the recorded tutorial (1)

I find the recordings of tutorials very helpful (2)

I often intend to watch recordings of tutorials but rarely get around to it (3)

I often find it helpful to watch recordings of online tutorials I have already attended (4)

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following aspects of tutorial provision.

I find tutorials led by my own tutor very useful (1)

I find cluster or module wide tutorials very useful (2)

On balance I prefer to attend/view tutorials led by my own tutor (3)

I like a mix of different type of online tutorials including Tutor group tutorials cluster/module wide tutorials (4)

In your experiences on your recent module/s what type of teaching/learning activities were most frequently used in online tutorials? Select any that apply.

Please choose the aspects of online tutorials that you consider to be most valuable or useful for your learning?

Please indicate how important you feel the following aspects of online tuition are to you when you attend a live tutorial.

- How important is it that you have the opportunity to speak (using a microphone) in online tutorials? (1)
- How important is it that you are invited to participate in student group based activities during the online tutorial? (2)
- How important is that you are given a pre-prepared presentation of module content in the tutorial? (3)
- How important is it for you be invited to participate in the tutorial by answering questions in the chat box (4)
- How important is that you are able to ask questions in the chat box during the online tutorial? (5)
- How important is it that you are able to participate in the tutorial by interacting with content on the whiteboard, for example by writing or answering a quiz question? (6)

Appendix 3

STUDENT SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW (TO BE COMPLETED AT THE END OF ONLINE SURVEY PROCESS)

Introduce yourself and where you are calling from (OU). Check that it is convenient to speak.

Thank you for indicating on the Life/Health module tutorial survey form that you would answer some more questions via this arranged telephone meeting. I'm going to ask you about 8 questions about your experiences of online tutorials on your Level 2 Life/Health module from 2016, we don't envisage this taking more than about 30 minutes. I am going to record the interview, so that we can transcribe the responses for our analyses. We might quote some of your responses, but we will not identify you in any publications or feedback to the module teams or tutors. We will delete all recordings we make by June 2018. Are you happy for me to record the interview and begin?

If yes, thank and proceed. If no, explain more about what you are doing and ask again. Do not proceed without permission (terminate interview).

Semi-structured interviews: Outline

Background information on module experience and OU background

Previous study of other OU modules/current study of other OU modules

Background information on attitude to tutorials

attendance at tutorials in general
use made of recorded tutorials
reasons for attendance/non-attendance at tutorials
importance attached to attendance at tutorials
view of tutorials in terms of being useful/enjoyable

Q1 Which elements of tutorials are perceived to be of value to learners?

What did you find most valuable about the online tutorials you attend live?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding any/some of these points:

tutor presentations – lecture style
lots of opportunity for student interaction –answering, asking questions, writing whiteboard, quizzes, solving problems
opportunities to work with other students
opportunities to ask questions (out loud or by text)
opportunity to chat (out loud or by text) with other students about the module material/study in general
Student group activities - including use of breakout rooms for discussions
Skills development focussed activities
Students speaking using microphones
Connecting with your own tutor (perhaps use of photo/webcam)

Q2 Which elements of tutorials are perceived to be of little value to learners?

What did you find less valuable about tutorials you attend live?

Any of prompts suggested in Q1 may be useful here.

Q3 Perceptions around the number of learners present in live tutorials?

How do you feel about live tutorials with large numbers of students e.g. cluster or module wide events attending compared to those with fewer students for example in your tutor group tutors?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

own tutor group tutorials with relative small number students vr cluster/MW tutorials
inhibition to speak, answer questions or participate in activities
feeling part of a group of learners

Q4 How recording of the tutorial may affect student behaviour during the tutorial?

Do you behave /participate differently in the live tutorial if you know it is being recorded? Do you think it affects the behaviour of others?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

how aware are you during the tutorial that it is being recorded?
inhibition to speak
inhibition to text
inhibition to ask or answer questions
no difference in behaviour as I don't participate anyway

Q5 How do Health/Life Sciences students make use of recorded tutorials?

Describe what you normally do when you access a recorded tutorial?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

whether the recording was of a tutorial they did attend live
length of time spent

skipping sections
listening to sections more than once
note taking
answering questions (answering questions in your head, whispering answers, answering out loud
ignoring group work sections or sections where students are working together on an activity (if present)
following up with tutor/forum after watching a recording

Q6 To what extent does the experience of viewing a recording differ from actual participation?

How does the experience of viewing the recording compare to live attendance (or how do you imagine it may differ?)

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

which experience is more valuable for learning in your view
is the combination of attending and viewing helpful – e.g. for revision purposes

Q7 Positive experiences of tutorial experience?

Describe the best/most memorable experience you have ever had in a live or recorded tutorial?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

helpful TMA coverage
helpful exam prep
amusing tutor or experience
bonding with other students
helpful tutor presentation
enjoyable group work experience

Q8 Views on the flipped classroom approach?

How would you feel if students were expected to be much more active participants in tutorials?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

students contributing to discussion with each other and their tutor,
working on shared activities and feeding back to the group
specific preparatory work for the tutorial
follow up work after the tutorial

Appendix 4

ASSOCIATE LECTURER SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Introduce yourself and where you are calling from (OU). Check that it is convenient to speak.

Thank you for indicating on the Life/Health module tutorial survey form that you would answer some more questions via this arranged telephone meeting. I'm going to ask you about 8 questions about your experiences of delivering online tutorials on your Level 2 Life/Health module from 2016, we don't envisage this taking more than about 30 minutes. I am going to record the interview, so that we can transcribe the responses for our analyses. We might quote some of your responses, but we will not identify you in any publications or feedback to the module teams or tutors. We will delete all recordings we make by June 2018. Are you happy for me to record the interview and begin?

If yes, thank and proceed. If no, explain more about what you are doing and ask again. Do not proceed without permission (terminate interview).

Semi-structured interviews: Outline

Background information on module tutoring experience and OU background

previous tutoring of other OU modules/current study of other OU modules

Background information on attitude to tutorials

attitude to recording your tutorials

what do you feel are the contributing factors for attendance/non-attendance at tutorials

do you think it is important for students to attend tutorials

view of tutorials in terms of being useful/enjoyable for students

Q1 Which elements of tutorials do you feel are perceived to be of value to learners?

What did you think students find most valuable about the online tutorials you deliver?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding any/some of these points:

tutor presentations – lecture style

lots of opportunity for student interaction –answering, asking questions, writing whiteboard, quizzes, solving problems

opportunities to work with other students

opportunities to ask questions (out loud or by text)

opportunity to chat (out loud or by text) with other students about the module material/study in general

Student group activities - including use of breakout rooms for discussions

Skills development focussed activities

Students speaking using microphones

Connecting with your own tutor (perhaps use of photo/webcam)

Q2 Which elements of tutorials do you feel students perceive to be of little value?

What elements in live tutorials do you think students feel are less valuable?

Any of prompts suggested in Q1 may be useful here.

Q3 Perceptions around the number of learners present in live tutorials?

How do you feel about live tutorials with large numbers of students attending e.g. cluster or module wide events compared to those with fewer students for example in your tutor group?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

own tutor group tutorials with relative small number students vr cluster/MW tutorials

student inhibited to speak, answer questions or participate in activities

students feeling part of a group of learners

role of a second tutor on student behaviour in tutorial

scope to include/plan for group work or other interactivity

Q4 How recording of the tutorial may affect student behaviour during the tutorial?

Do you tutor differently in the live tutorial if you know it is being recorded? Do you think it affects the behaviour of your students?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

how aware do you think the students are during the tutorial that it is being recorded?

affects attendance

inhibits students speaking

inhibits students to text chatting

inhibition students asking or answering questions

does it have any effect on you as a tutor

Q5 How do Health/Life Sciences students make use of recorded tutorials?

What do you think students do when they access a recorded tutorial?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

whether the recording was of a tutorial they did attend live

length of time spent

skipping sections

listening to sections more than once

note taking

answering questions (answering questions in your head, whispering answers, answering out loud

Ignoring group work sections or sections where students are working together on an activity (if present)

following up with tutor/forum after watching a recording

Q6 To what extent does the experience of viewing a recording differ from actual participation?

How do you feel the experience of viewing the recording compares to live attendance (or how do you imagine it may differ?)

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

which experience is more valuable for student learning in your view

is the combination of attending and viewing helpful – e.g. for revision purposes

does the act of recording alter the way you run your tutorial in any way e.g. stopping and starting a recording

Q7 Positive experiences of tutorial experience?

Describe the best/most memorable experience you have ever had delivering a tutorial?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

helpful TMA coverage

helpful exam prep

amusing tutor or student experience

bonding with other students

helpful tutor presentation

enjoyable group work experience

Q8 Views on the flipped classroom approach?

How would you feel if students were **expected** to be much more active participants in tutorials?

If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding:

students contributing to discussion with each other and their tutor,

working on shared activities and feeding back to the group
specific preparatory work for the tutorial
follow up work after the tutorial

Appendix 5 Phase 3 Themes emerging from interviews/survey open ended question responses

Student and Associate Lecturer feedback is summarised below, initially with general attitudes to online tuition followed by coverage of views grouped by significant emerging themes.

Student attitudes to online synchronous tuition

Generally responses from students (survey and interviews) regarding the benefits of online tuition are very favourable. Tuition is valued and well regarded however on occasion several students compare online tuition unfavourably with previous experiences of face-to-face tuition, citing a preference for 'classroom interaction'. Types of online tutorial that were particularly highly regarded included those where the tutor focused on TMAs, revision and specific skills development. Many students cited the value of having a different 'voice' (in contrast to the other module materials) to explain key module concepts and the opportunity to 'meet' other students. Several students mentioned a preference for active learning in the tutorial, preferring to engage with concepts, ask and answer questions and take part in activities but this conflicted with some students' views which suggested that they preferred to listen to the tutor exclusively and focus on the content delivered. This dichotomy was confirmed by Associate lecturers whose efforts to incorporate interactivity in to their tutorials often met with limited success or minimal participation.

Attendance was often cited as a success-determining factor. One survey respondent commented that

'Tutor group tutorials were extremely poorly attended which made them a bit of a drudge really....',

conversely an interviewed student commented that very small tutorials were sometimes incredibly useful with practically 'one to one tuition'. Module wide tutorials are largely seen as beneficial but student feedback suggests that these are sometimes seen as a 'resource' with dissemination from the tutor to the students being the main focus. Students comment that recordings of these sessions are particularly useful for revision and indeed one survey respondent said,

'I found some of the slideshows* interesting but they are quicker to browse through on my own than watch a recording of the whole tutorial'.

*Slides of the tutor's tutorial presentation downloaded from the forum.

Despite feeling that tutorials were generally of benefit several survey respondents felt that there was too great an emphasis on summarising the module text,

'Some of the tutorials were just the tutor reading through screenshots of the materials-different materials would have held the tutees interest more'.

and interview responses suggested that sometimes the tutor had to deliver too much content in the time available, for example

.... because there only was an hour and the tutor had to get through so much because even with a 30 credit module, when a tutorial is covering a whole book, they have two or three hundred pages to get through and then talk about the assessment as well'.

When asked to describe any one of their most memorable or useful learning experience in online tutorial, students frequently cited examples of highly interactive and discursive sessions where the tutor has little prepared agenda and the students were allowed to set the agenda for discussion. Frequently these included students discussing topics or skills issues using microphones in tutor group settings with fewer students and often not recorded. A

common feature of these recollections was the feeling that the tutor and student group had gelled as a unit and this made for a very successful tutorial.

Students interviewees were asked specifically how they would feel if they were explicitly expected to prepare in advance for an online tutorial and come ready to participate/interact with their tutor/ fellow students (flipped lecture style). Responses to this were varied with one student commenting that

‘It would be a nightmare!’

to others taking a positive view and feeling that interaction with other students would be beneficial. One student stated that it might

‘make me feel more engaged in the tutorial and probably get a bit more out of it ‘

but that the unpredictability of attending tutorials would make this very difficult.

Associated Lecturers attitudes to online synchronous tuition

Despite generally positive sentiments regarding online tuition ALs reported significant dissatisfaction with student attendance and participation. They are frustrated that students do not consistently attend and that attendance wanes through the module. One AL expressed her frustration about the lack of information regarding the impact the tutorial was having on student learning

‘we have to steel ourselves to the fact that we can’t look around the room and see what kind of impression we are having on the students’ .

The reluctance of students to speak in the session using microphones was often mentioned as highly frustrating as was the difficulty in keeping up /responding to the text chat.

When asked to describe any one of their most memorable or satisfying tutoring experience in online tutorial ALs frequently cited tutorials or parts of tutorials which had been highly interactive with small groups of students they knew well.

AL interviewees were also asked specifically how they would feel if students were expected to prepare in advance for an online tutorial (flipped lecture style) and come ready to participate/interact with their tutor/ fellow students. Again feelings were mixed; some felt this would prove a barrier to attendance and would disadvantage students who might benefit from tutorials. Others thought it worth trying, with one expressing the opinion that tutorials are for consolidation of learning not for lecturing and that students must be active participants if learning in this context is to occur.

Views associated with recording tutorials

Associate Lecturers

The Associate Lecturers interviewed gave some useful insights into their reasoning/rationale around recording tutorials. They appreciated that many students were not free to attend sessions synchronously and understood the pressure many distance-learning students are under with work and family commitments. Some however acknowledged the act of recording as a potential deterrent in two respects. First some ALs expressed the feeling that some students made less effort to attend live, knowing there was a recording to fall back on. For example;

‘I always have a slight feeling that they can get a little bit lax when they know you are recording because it’s almost “oh well I can just listen to that at a later point”‘.

Second, several ALs, felt that the act of recording potentially disadvantaged students who were attending synchronously. Several ALs cited concerns that the act of recording led to students taking less active participants in the tutorials, potentially devaluing their learning experience.

This was particularly prevalent when very small numbers of students attended sessions live. One AL described how she would only record a session if at least 3 students attended live, the same AL and others described how they had experimented in only recording selected parts of the tutorial, usually omitting activity based or Q and A

sections of the session, so a recording was generated but elements of the live tutorial would be missing from it. Deploying the latter technique in the hope that students would see the added value in attending live while hoping to ensure that participating students would not feel over exposed and intimidated by the production of a permanent record of the tutorial. Indeed several ALs commented that recording did inhibit participation from some students in the tutorial. For example;

‘they will be chatting away quite nicely and then as soon as we start recording everything goes into the chatbox’ and

‘I do think, even with the chatbox, that is students know it is being recorded, it makes them more reluctant to give answers and ask questions in the chatbox for fear they are asking something silly or their answer is incorrect’.

but others felt that recording made little difference stressing that they found it very difficult to engender students’ active participation in any circumstances.

In contrast most AL respondents did not feel their own behaviour in the tutorial was affected by recording the tutorial. One AL did stress that she was very aware of the needs of students watching the recordings and she tried hard to make sure it the structure of the tutorial would be useful to these students. To some extent this AL felt this approach led to a compromise position where the needs of neither group of students were necessarily best served.

When asked about how they imagined students made use of recorded tutorials all the ALs respondents had some awareness of how many students were accessing recordings but several commented that they didn’t actually know what students did with them/how they were used. One AL commented that she suspected students paid only a scant of attention to recordings;

‘... and kind of have it on in the background and pay a bit of attention to it.’

with another specifically mentioning adopting a passive approach to working with recordings;

‘passively consuming it (the recording) rather than engaging and thinking.....’

Several ALs commented that they were aware that some students, who had attended the session live, also accessed and watched the recording. Revision and examination preparation was cited as a common reason for this behaviour and the ease with which the recording can be paused and restarted was cited as useful to check understanding of concepts.

Students

Student answers to the open-ended survey question around the issue of recording online tutorials reinforced the data obtained from the Likert scale questions. Many students cited valuing recordings for reasons relating to timing and convenience. Several mentioned using recordings later in the module for revision purposes and comments stating that all tutorials should be recorded were common. One student emphasised the value of recordings:

‘Please, please don’t stop recording tutorials. I find they have been ESSENTIAL (sic) and one of the most useful ways of studying and revising’.

Responses from student interviews again reinforced the students’ perceptions that recording of tutorials are very valuable. Several reported almost exclusively using recordings for convenience; others used them as an adjunct to attending live but all the students reported that they did not attend/watch recordings of, all the tutorials offered to them. One student based overseas (in a different time zone) cited use of the recordings as an essential part of her study but she chose to pay attention to her tutor’s own sessions especially where there was a focus on current assessment or examination preparation or specific skill development. Despite enthusiasm for the recordings this student did feel she was missing out in not being able to attend live and felt she would have liked to be an active participant.

Interesting contrasts emerged in terms of the ways in which students reported using the recordings. The overseas student and one other reported using a very focussed mentioned of interacting with recordings. They viewed the recording in full, attempting any questions or activities posed and then went over the recording in stages, moving back and forth, making notes and sometimes taking screen shots to ensure a good understanding of the material covered. Other student respondents took a more pragmatic approach, listening to the tutorial in the background

and only homing in when something of direct perceived relevance was touched on. These students tended to skip any questions or activities, for example.

'I jumped to sections which were most relevant which I was most unsure about and I would stop and start, just listening to the sections which were more necessary'

Interestingly when asked if this student preferred recordings or live tutorials, he responded that live tutorials were superior and that

'New information will stick in the memory better than when you are really interacting rather than just watching'.

In contrast to the AL view, for the student respondents the issues of participants behaving differently in recorded tutorials was not seen to be a significant problem or was dismissed because the value of the recording to the students outweighed any negative effects experienced during the session. One of the students who took a very thorough approach to interacting with recordings stated that recordings were more beneficial than the live sessions because

'I use them more. I can't always attend them (live) anyway because of my schedule so it's a case of I do use the recorded ones more than I do the live ones. I can reuse the recorded ones and look at them again'.

Views associated with 'interactivity' in tutorials

Associate Lecturers

Discussion of issues around student to student and student to tutor interaction within online tutorials were a significant feature of all the AL interviews conducted. In all cases ALs saw this as an important feature of tutorials and something they described putting a great deal of effort into trying to achieve.

Several ALs were convinced that the size of the tutorial in terms of participant numbers was a key issue for interactivity within tutorials, citing the difficulty of making a tutorial highly interactive with large numbers attending. Two ALs mentioned specifically that, of all the interactive tools available in the online classroom, only quizzes and polling really worked well with large numbers of participants. Opinion seemed to be that student discussion and participation in activities was more successful in small tutor group tutorials (<10 students). However several reported that low student turn out at tutorials made promoting interaction increasingly difficult even in tutor group tutorials, for example,

'Tutor group ones are so poorly attended, that there is not the ability really to get a lot of interaction going because only a proportion of them are going to be keen to speak up and be involved'.

Despite low attendance there was a general consensus that some students do like 'activities', meaning tutorial items such as collectively labelling an onscreen diagram or sequencing/grouping items in a list or answering a question, quiz or poll but also awareness that the activities may not engage all students. A frequent complaint by the AL respondents centred on student behaviour with regards interaction, several make comments such as

'I think students want to sit back and be taught..... and learn by listening without realising that they need to be interacting and thinking'.

One AL commented that she used to try and ensure that every attending student had actively participated at some point in the session but that it had become clear to her that some students don't really want to do this. Another commented that it was impossible to persuade some students to take part in anything in tutorials but commented that this situation had existed in face to face tutorials in the past and wasn't unique to online delivery.

Students

Several students mentioned the greater degree of interactivity they had experienced in face-to-face tutorials (Level 1 modules for these students, at this time, offered f2f tutorials) and expressed regret that, in their experience, the online setting did not provide the same style of tutorial they had previously experienced. One survey respondent remarked that

'Tutorials were only 3 or 4 people attended were thin and undynamic'.

Other students commented that tutorials they attended has been 'interactive' in their view, for example

... It was pretty interactive, it was not just him or her speaking completely, we did answer some questions and there was a bit of revision in that sense. Yes it was not completely like, we were sitting and listening to what he was saying.....'

and in general students seemed to like being posed questions via polling or answering via the chat box provided the technique wasn't overused,

'It needs to be a good mix of the teacher speaking asking questions, not where it is just questions all the way through'.

Although one student did comment that she was less confident in posting answers to questions in tutorials with lots of student participants, commenting,

'I am probably more reticent to write things though; I do feel less likely to interact as much because obviously there are more voices.'

The same student drew comparisons between large tutorials and lectures stating about module wide tutorials,

'There are sections of it which are interactive but it does feel more like 'this is a lecture, you need to pay serious attention and take notes.'

One student confessed he never joined in any type of activity when attending a live tutorial expressed sympathy for tutors trying hard to engage students in interactive activities,

'I didn't get involved.....The tutor would try really hard on every module, you know, to put a tick or draw a line on screen, or something like that. Hardly anyone would do it'.

Another student who mentioned issues relating to dyslexia causing problems for him in the tutorial space, expressed anxiety about answering questions, feeling fearful of embarrassing himself by making mistakes. He felt this held him back from fully interacting within the tutorial. Similarly a student answering the survey commented that she preferred answering polling questions in an anonymous way.

Views associated with communication in tutorials

Associate Lecturers

All AL respondents commented that the most widely utilized format of communication within the online tutorial was the chat box with students using to ask (and answer questions) of their tutor and other students. One AL thought informal traffic in the chat box was particularly useful to allow students to see that others were having difficulties with the module too and provided reassurance. Other ALs commented on the difficulty of keeping up with questioned posed in the chat box, especially in large number tutorial settings.

All ALs expressed the opinion that students, in their experience, only very rarely use their microphones to speak directly in the tutorial. ALs found this universally frustrating, while acknowledging that lack of confidence may be an underlying issue for some students. Several ALs described how they tried to encourage microphone use and they were often quite forceful about this, one tutor remarked that if she didn't push this then students reverted to chat box only use. Three ALs felt that the act of recording the session actively discouraged students from using the microphone.

Students

All student respondents were aware that student use of microphones within tutorials was rare and one mentioned the frustration he felt in not being able to share via discussion,

'everyone's accumulated wisdom',

something he felt face to face tutorials were particularly well suited for.

Interestingly the same student confessed that he would neither speak in online tutorials nor use the chat box and he felt the tutorial was really only an extension of the module materials – a resource to ‘gut ‘ for information and he did not see the value in interacting with his tutor or peers online because the quality of the communication possible was so poor in his view.

Other students including one survey respondent questioned the whole content and style of tutorial delivery, also actively seeking more discussion in saying that,

‘I would prefer tutorials to be a discussion between myself, the tutor and other students about current parts of the module’

Most student respondents valued the chat box and said they used it regularly to ask and answer questions as well as for general chat in the tutorial. One student described how he had met up with his student project group (SXHL288) and despite the group only using the chat box during the session; he felt that they had been able to have a useful discussion.

However some students commented that the chat box is not such a useful tool. One survey respondent stated,

‘The chat box is distracting and irritating to read while trying to listen to a tutor, that is why I prefer the recording so I can through it at my own pace without distractions.’

Views associated with use of ‘break out rooms’ in tutorials

Associate Lecturers

Views on the use of break out rooms were very mixed with ALs reporting variable results and experiences. The use of break out rooms for small group student activity is well described in the training materials for ALs and there was a feeling amongst the interviewed ALs that they should be using them frequently. and effectively. However in reality ALs expressed doubt,

‘I am not completely convinced about break out rooms to be totally honest’.

Some ALs worried that they were forcing students to interact against their wishes by confining them into a break out room. Others expressed concerns about the time it takes to distribute students into groups, explaining that if the tutorial is small they will run group work in the main room. The most often used explanation for the limited use of break out rooms by ALs was the number of attendees, most respondents felt that use of group work in very large module wide sessions was not appropriate and that tutor groups sessions were frequently too poorly attended to be able to divide students into groups.

A very clear consensus emerged amongst the Associate Lecturers that students do not value group work and that use of break out rooms is a step too far. One AL suggested that she would try to get discussions going by stealth in the main room and then retreat herself, leaving the students to tackle a piece of group work without them realising this was group work. The same AL did remark that when she had used break out rooms she had been surprised that previously reticent students started to use their microphones.

Students

Very few students mentioned the use of breakout rooms in tutorials at all. One survey respondent mentioned that chat freezes in breakout rooms and that she did not enjoy these types of activities. A student interview respondent however stated that she did find small group work useful and, although her first experience of ‘disappearing off to another room’ was scary, she wished break out rooms were used more frequently.

Figures and tables

Figure 1 Graph illustrating proportions of tutorials observed with specified features of tutor presentation style

Figure 2 Graph illustrating proportions of tutorials observed with specified design elements

Figure 3 Graph illustrating proportions of tutorials observed with estimated student participation with a variety of interactive tools

Figure 4 Graph illustrating the number of tutorials where the indicated proportion of students were involved in the named types of communication

Figure 5 Student views on the value of recordings

Figure 6 Student attitudes to the recording of tutorials

Figure 7 Students responses regarding their perceptions of successful tutorials

Figure 8 Student responses regarding the most frequently used teaching approaches in tutorials

Figure 9 Student views on the value of recordings

Figure 10 Student attitudes to the recording of tutorials

Figure 11 Students responses regarding their perceptions of successful tutorials

Figure 12 Student Responses regarding the most frequently used teaching approaches in tutorials

Figure 13 Students responses regarding their perceptions of valuable aspects of online