This paper presents a summary of OU Students Association Student Experience discussions from March and April 2019, which were held in live online sessions in Adobe Connect on the first of each month.

It is being presented to the Student Experience Committee in accordance with Term of Reference 4b) To monitor the effectiveness of, and make recommendations to the Education Committee as appropriate on quality, performance and effectiveness of services to students.

The Committee is asked to note the report.

Support for Studying

1. Students understand the importance of personal support. Examples shared included: very supportive husbands, children, parents, siblings and their peers. Some students are struggling with their studies as they do not have the support of family and friends, in some cases the opposite is the case where they have opposition against them studying.

2. What can students do in this scenario where can they find extra support during the length of the study when they haven’t got the support?

3. Some students are concerned about bothering the tutors or student support when it is general support that they need. There is no advice mentioned anywhere about finding support through others outside formalised support offered. This led to discussions around tutor group forum and module wide forums.

Tutor Group Forums

4. There was a mixed reaction around tutor group forums. Some students only see them as useful when they need to do collaboration work on the modules, but other students feel they should be used for discussing module material, asking questions and getting to know their cohort. This seemed to be the consensus that tutor group forums are not frequented enough by students. This could be due to different opinions on their use. Lack of tutor/student activity in tutor group forum has left students feeling they are not useful for general support and for building communities.

5. What initiative can the University create to encourage tutors and students to use and check the tutor group forum regularly?

Module wide forums (during the presentation they are studying e.g. 18J, 19D, 19J)

6. There was a strong desire for module wide forums to be kept open throughout the presentation of a module. Students find these very useful for general support and building...
communities when they have been open throughout the module year. When reaching level two and three modules, module wide forums are opened and closed within four to six weeks and then students are being redirected to the tutor group forum.

7 However, students say this has not increased activity in tutor group forums and has left them feeling quite isolated. Students that do not have support from family and friends have felt they would not have felt so isolated and alone if the module wide forums had stayed open.

8 Could module wide forums be left open to students to use to build community and offer general support across the module wide cohort; rather than direct students to tutor group forum only activity, which is reliant on student and tutor activity?

9 Students said they’ll be quite happy to use the module wide forums for general support and community, leaving the tutor group forum for work with their tutor group and tutor (including doing the collaboration activities). It could encourage students to talk with more confidence in the tutor group forum, because they feel comfortable already with each other because they recognise each other from the module wide forum.

Inconsistency from tutors around assignments, tutorials, day schools and feedback

10 Different scenarios were mentioned around differences in use of essay plans, report layouts, referencing, word count and concepts to be used in an assignment; these were within the same module and concerns around differences from module to module.

11 Although there is some information about how to layout and how to approach assignments, could there be general guidance for tutors and students with the approach to assignments so that everybody has been given the same information?

12 It was also mentioned it would be good if students could have a copy of the marking framework the tutor works from, so they know where they can gain or have lost marks in the significant areas of their assignment.

13 Students talked about the difference in assignment feedback given, some were not given any additional feedback on their mark’s assignment other than the PT3 form and others only had positive comments and no direction on where they had lost marks. Some students when asking for further feedback from the tutor would like to know where they have gone wrong and how they can improve their work, rather than just positive comments. Instead they have either not been answered or have been told ‘no one gets 100% on assignments’ rather than the extra feedback. Students feel the feedback also varies within a module as well as in different modules and appears to be dependent on the tutor you get. Students rely on the feedback from tutors to develop during a module through their assignment work and would like tutors to give consistent ‘amount’ of constructive (positive and negative) feedback across a module so they can improve their studies.

14 There is inconsistency of assignment advice given from different tutors within online tutorials and face-to-face tutorials and day schools; this is even more prevalent when they are hosted by a tutor that is not their own. When students check in with their own tutors or through feedback from the tutors on their assignment, they have been told that they have approached this work incorrectly (even though they did so on the instruction of the other tutor from a tutorial or day school they attended).
15 Students talked about good online tutorials and how useful they have been when attending or watching recordings when the tutor is presented well; however, many students are unhappy with online tutorials due to low quality presentations.

16 Students are not as confident when they are attending an online tutorial or face-to-face tutorial/day school when hosted by another tutor due to differing advice; is there a way these events can be more consistent across the module?

**Collaboration work on a module**

17 Some modules have a lot of collaboration work to do and the lack of participation from many students in the same tutor group is quite demotivating. It leaves just a few active students putting in the work, making it difficult for real interaction to happen as 'group work'; which is a real concern when this group work affects their assignment mark. Other students don’t see the point of collaboration work and go out of the way to avoid doing it, even when it costs them some marks.

18 Could the OU explain the importance and relevance of collaborative mark within a module, in a way that it will improve student involvement within a tutor group? e.g. E214 module participation in ‘OpenExchange’, a student had made the effort to get involved and other students hadn’t, it was difficult to comment on other threads when there were no other posts.

19 Some postgraduate students mentioned that group work wasn't mentioned in their module description and found out it was embedded in the module weekly work once the module started; they would not have chosen that module of they knew before it started. They are not enjoying studying it but do not want to waste the money they have paid for it.

**General concerns**

20 Students mentioned other negative experiences;

   a) Getting alternative formats material very late and constantly being behind in the module due to this
   b) Receiving assignment results back four weeks after submission (more than once)
   c) Finding referencing is different from module to module
   d) Disappointed there were no face-to-face tutorial option for access students

**Positive stories**

21 Students talked about positive experiences:

   a) Quality support from SST when needing to defer a module
   b) Good advice given when needing to change to a different pathway
   c) Tutors one-to-one sessions to students that are struggling
   d) Attended student consultation for the 1st time and found it a rewarding experience

**Suggestions**

22 Finding contact numbers could be easier (e.g. disabled student services)
23 Students don’t know how to apply for a milestone qualification (where is the information on the OU website)

24 Making clear that the access modules are not part of the pathway, it is a preparation module

25 Advocacy contact (so you can talk to someone within the OU who knows who you are and where you are on your student journey; so you can talk about anything that is affecting your studies), could be an alumni or OU staff member

RISK ASSESSMENT

26 N/A

EQUALITY IMPACT

27 An equality analysis was not required

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

28 N/A

COMMUNICATION

29 N/A

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