

OPEN & INCLUSIVE STUDENT VOICE

Event Summary and Findings: How COVID-19 Impacted Learning Experiences.

INTRODUCTION

As part of the Open and Inclusive Special Interest Group at the Open University, the team held the first online student voice event on the 20th January 2021. The event was intended to give students the opportunity to speak freely and openly about different topics, as put forward by both staff and students, and stimulate discussion around current and emerging issues regarding accessibility at the OU. The event was attended by over 40 participants which included staff and students from different disciplines and areas within the OU. The event included three interactive workshops where students and staff were able to share their own experiences, discussing challenges they face and areas of concern as well as positive experiences. The three workshops focussed on the following areas of interest:

- How COVID-19 impacted learning experiences
- Accessibility and disability
- Student engagement and student voice

HOW COVID-19 IMPACTED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Students explained the difficulties they experienced during the pandemic including trying to fit in study and looking after their family.

- Students in the group described that they were shielding, that had a huge impact on their wellbeing.
- Students missed interaction with staff and students on a face-to-face basis.
- Significant issues noted by students were; the cancellation of EMA's and the protocol for standardisation of marks and grades. Some felt this may have had a negative impact on their results and felt frustrated with this decision by the OU.
- Students explained that they had been told to defer as a go to option when asking for support, which for some, was less than satisfying and not the response they were hoping for.

Students discussed the nature of the everchanging environment, although it was frustrating at times, applauded the OU for its management of the situation in terms of communication. The online support pages were described as extremely useful and easily navigable. Overall, students expressed great satisfaction in student support including support put in place by the Student's Association, Tutor Support and the Ethics Committee.

SUMMARY

A successful inclusive approach, with the understanding that it is of paramount importance to nurture this community and develop further opportunities for such engagement, perhaps looking for links between nations and engaging the community through specific interests with the aim of continuing the discussions.