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Caring for law students' study skills needs

Part II¹

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Abstract

This is the second of two publications, explaining an action research project seeking to raise retention and pass rates on law modules at the Open University, using skills training in online classrooms. The first publication describes the design of the materials and the implementation of interventions within a tutor group context⁸, this publication explains how the research was implemented across two level 2 modules (courses) using the collaborative method of module presentation at the Open University.

The action research focused on threshold skills⁹, that is skills which students found challenging but which they needed to develop in order to be able to perform well and progress on the LLB. The skills training sessions aimed to raise standards across the spectrum of student ability¹⁰.

The motivation for the research, research methodology and values underlying the research are explained in Part I. This paper first explains the collaborative context in which modules are taught at the Open University and then goes on to explain how the action research was

¹ This paper won the Stan Marsh Prize for best paper at the Association of Law Teachers Annual Conference 2016.

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⁸ Part I is published in: Jessica Giles 'The Superfoods of Online Learning: Threshold concepts and Threshold Skills'. 2016 Journal of Commonwealth Law and Legal Education. Vol 11(1): 26-43.

⁹ This concept was introduced in Part I of this article.

¹⁰ Our thanks in particular go to other members of the module teams with whom we worked, in particular Ben Fitzpatrick, Senior Lecturer, York University (external examiner W201), Judith Bray, Professor of Law, University of Buckingham (external examiner W200), Trevor Tayleur, Kier Bamford and Sean Hutton, the University of Law, Elizabeth Mullet, Ian Graham, Jin Sekhon, Debra Hinds, Stacey Sefton, Dom Harrison, Stephanie Pywell, Claire Sumner, The Open University. Also the leadership team at the OU Law School, Paul Catley, Julian Webb and Jane Jones and the OU scholarship team lead by Dr Linda Price, supported by Roma Duggan. And, of course, to the groups of associate law lecturers who are the face of the Open University to 1000s of students studying at the OU. Our thanks also to Debra Hinds who kindly read and commented on the manuscript.

implemented. The results of the research are considered using both qualitative and quantitative data and this is followed by an analysis of the collaborative process using the collaborative model outlined by Vangen and Huxam¹¹. This is in order to assess whether the team working was having a positive impact on the action research project and module performance overall.

¹¹ S Vangen and C Huxham (2013) "Building and Using the Theory of Collaborative Advantage", in *Network Theory in the Public Sector: Building New Theoretical Frameworks*, eds R Keast M Mandell and R Agranoff, Taylor Francis, New York, pp 51-67. C Huxam and S Vangen (2005) *Managing to Collaborate The theory of collaborative advantage*. Routledge, Abingdon. Oxon.

Caring for law students' study skills needs

Part II

Introduction

After carrying out action research in a tutor group context and when it became apparent that there was a need to raise student satisfaction, retention and pass rates across level two modules on the Open University/University of Law LLB¹² it was decided to lift the action research project onto a module level and roll it out to a larger body of students for the 2014 and 2015 presentations.

I The Open University's collaborative model

In 2015, the Open University had around 8500 law students¹³ studying on its undergraduate and post graduate law modules. These students were taught and managed by Open University module teams. Each module team consists of a module chair (an academic), academic team members, a regional manager (academic (SEM)), a body of associate law lecturers, a qualification manager (also known as a curriculum manager) and curriculum support member, a program coordinator, a student support team (SST) member, and an Associate Lecturer Service Assistant. Each module was allocated an external examiner to review module materials and ensure the assessment and examination procedures were appropriate.

At the Open University a module is either in presentation (this means it is currently being taught) or in production (this means it is being authored ready for presentation). A module in presentation goes into teach out when it comes to the end of its academic life (usually after 8 years). There will be one final open presentation where any student can join the module followed by a closed presentation when only deferred or resit students can join the presentation.

To ensure the smooth running of the law modules and to provide the students with an optimum study experience and study journey the collaboration between the individuals in these roles on a module team needs to function effectively and efficiently.¹⁴ The effectiveness of this collaboration can positively affect not only

¹² The law modules on which the action research was run were part of the law degree run jointly by the OU and the University of Law. The OU/University of Law modules were running into teach out. 2015J would be the last closed presentation of W200 and the last open presentation of W201. This meant W200 was only taking resit or deferred students and it was the last time the module would run. W201 admitted any student. It was the penultimate time that the module would run.

¹³ As at March 2016

¹⁴ The module teams are fortunate to be supported at the OU by teaching and learning research projects run both across the faculties and within the Institute of Educational Technology. With

the student experience but also pass rates on a module. This collaboration is particularly important when it comes to implementing action research at a module level. This is because the impact and effect of the action taken as part of the research needs, as far as possible, to be anticipated and well implemented. In addition, the reflective element of the action research is maximized where members of the team are able to engage in it collectively.

Each module team member has a defined role, but these roles can and do on occasion overlap. The module chair and academic team members and chosen associate lecturers, are responsible for the academic content of the module. The academic team and SEM oversees the pedagogy of the module aligning it to student need. The SEM oversees the tutoring by the associate lecturers, ensuring effective and timely feedback is received by the students. SEMs also handle academic enquiries from students that ALs are unable to answer, referring to central academics where appropriate. The ALs carry out the tutoring and will have between 20 – 25 students in each tutor group they run for a given module. The module material and tutorial materials will be authored for the tutors by the module academic team members or chosen associate lecturers, there is some latitude for tutors to adapt tutorial material to suit the needs of their students from year to year. The ALs mark TMAs (tutor marked assignments) for their tutor group. There will generally be 5 or 6 TMAs in a 60-point module. The Module chair, central academic team members, regional managers and associate law lecturers are required to have a law degree and usually either a post graduate qualification in law or a professional qualification in law.

The qualification manager administers the module. The SST member deals with pastoral issues or questions concerning the student's study path, they also provide additional study support sessions. The program coordinator supports the module team and in particular the tutors and regional manager in their roles. The marking of exams and EMA (end of module assessments) is overseen by the module chair in collaboration with the SEM, the qualifications manager and a selection of tutors from the AL body.

Overlap occurs in various areas. For example, the design of materials is led by the academic team, but the regional managers and associate law lecturers will also be involved in checking these materials and authoring them. The forums, which are run on the module web pages, enable asynchronous contact between students, ALs and the module team. These are moderated by members of the module team or ALs. Members of the module team will also post to the tutor forum, a forum set up to enable tutors to interact with each other and with the module team.

dedicated research teams analyzing and researching teaching and learning it is possible to respond to current trends and implement new methods as they are developed. A module team therefore has considerable backing from the wider teaching and learning context within the Open University. This is optimized in the collaborative context when members of various faculties are able to work with each other and with IET in order to share resources on our Scholarship exchange, a central resource and dissemination and notification hub for research in teaching and learning.

Contributions are made by the module team according to their area of expertise.

These roles and the manner in which collaboration takes place in order to roll out tuition to the student body are set out in more detail below.

The Module Chair

OU module chairs are tasked with working with the module team to ensure the learning experience offered to the students by the module is coherent within the qualification(s) it belongs to. They are also responsible for the management of academic standards in the development and delivery of module assessment and, together with SEMs, the tuition strategy. The collaborative work between the SEMS, ALs and central teams on tuition strategy focuses on student engagement, retention and successful completion of the required module assessments for the award of module credit. The module chair provides academic leadership to contributing members of the module team and they have overall accountability for the delivery of module team outputs. The module chair also ensures that academic standards are maintained and University policies are implemented at module level, which includes working with the external examiner and responding to feedback; chairing the exam board in accordance with University processes; working with the academic conduct officer to resolve plagiarism issues; working with the qualifications manager and student support services to review analytics data; working with the module team to formulate interventions to improve student experience and learning, retention and pass rates. As part of an annual review process the module chair measures performance (both qualitative and quantitative data) against university norms and recommends enhancements. The role requires an awareness of the financial implications of proposed changes to a module and an ability to work within budgets.

The SEM (regional manager)

The regional teams manage the delivery of the Law Program and in 2015/2016 staff were based in hubs in Leeds, Manchester, Milton Keynes, Oxford and Edinburgh. Their role includes recruiting, inducting, managing and developing Associate Law Lecturers. They are also responsible for supporting a positive student experience by providing advice and support directly to distance learning students.

The SEMs engage with the academic team in developing tutorial materials, and student support strategies. They support students and tutors, in particular, around TMA submission time and in the period leading up to the exam.

Day to day tasks cover a broad spectrum of activity both online (contributing to forums), on the telephone (providing advice and assistance) and face to face (for

example travelling to venues to assess tutors), interfacing with the academic team, student support services, associate law lecturers and students.

The collaboration between the regional manager and module chair is necessarily a close one in order to ensure that the module team as a whole can: react to student queries as they arise; respond to and disseminate information about changes to the law or module mid-presentation; generally work together to ensure a smooth study journey which maximizes the students chance of succeeding on the module; and enables the tutors to perform to the best of their ability in delivering the module and in presenting the face of the OU to the student.

SEMs are members of the award board and involved in the end of module assessment processes.

The Associate Law Lecturers

The ALs are the face of the Open University to the student body and are the students first point of contact on academic module related issues. Each AL supports the learning and progress of the students in their tutor group throughout the module. They provide personalized support online, support forums, engage on the telephone and through feedback on TMAs. The AL role involves confidence building and skills training to enable open distance learners to cope with the rigours of academic study and to facilitate the transition to independent learning. ALs are required to cope with a diverse student body and a wide range of student abilities.

ALs are proactive in making initial contact with students at the start of the module and undertake the marking of TMAs in which it is usual as part of the feedback for ALs to offer further assistance if the student so requires. They also offer a bridge between the student and the SEM, program coordinator and student support teams since it is often the AL who is able to identify whether the students require additional assistance support or advice. Timely referral of a student and the manner in which their needs are then addressed by other members of the module team can make a real difference as to whether or not students are satisfied with their study journey and, for some it affects whether or not they stay with the module.

The ALs play a major role in the skills development of the students and can point them to the Open University study skills site which hosts generic study skills guides on assignment writing, critical reading, exam technique and other skills. TMAs have set learning outcomes, these are skills based, in addition to covering the knowledge and understanding required for the relevant module. The ALs will therefore focus in particular in tutorials on the skills development required for the up and coming TMA or exam.

The main area for identifying students' study skills needs is through correspondence tuition. This requires clear feedback placed in comment boxes on

a TMA and summarized in a cover sheet under specific learning outcomes. The feedback identifies what has been done well, where errors were made and where skills need improvement. ALs direct the students as to how arguments and analysis could have been better shown and how the law can be systematically applied to a factual scenario.

The qualification manager

The Qualification Manager (QM) (also named the curriculum manager) role is one of the key administrative support roles within the Open University faculties.

Teaching at a distance and at scale requires significant module production and delivery administration and one QM will ordinarily manage a group of three or four modules, often within one qualification. The QM provides project manager support to the academic teams in the delivery of new modules and is also the main conduit between the academic teams and the related support departments required to deliver the completed modules to students. These departments include registration services, assessment services and learner support services.

Module production is an ongoing process within the university. Module production is a process spanning over 18-24 months depending on the circumstances and the QM is involved right from the start alongside the academic team. ¹⁵

Once the module is live to students the QM manages a variety of 'presentation' tasks that include updating module websites, preparing annual assignment and examination updates, ensuring dates to submit assignments are correct and ensuring materials are sent or made available digitally at the right times.

The QM also organises the activities related to the student's end of module assessment or exam. These include a coordination meeting that ensures all of the markers are marking to an agreed standard using the specified guidelines, a standardisation meeting where a number of quality assurance activities take place as part of the process of awarding module results and the final award board meeting which is administered by the QM who records the final results and inputs them into a database ready for the examination department to extract.

¹⁵ Activities managed by the QM include setting up learning design workshops that ensure optimum online delivery of content, arranging and attending production meetings, scheduling production timetables and the recruitment of external critical readers, assessors and consultants.

Once production begins the QM liaises with the editorial teams and IT teams to ensure that the material is checked and that all the required images, videos, podcasts etc. are cleared and ready for online delivery. It is the QMs responsibility to ensure that deadlines are met and that the module delivers on time and on budget.

Finally the QM will be involved in the creation of the website (Virtual Learning Environment) that the material will be hosted on, setting up online forums for students and tutors and ensuring that tutors have access to all the learning and tutorial material they will need to deliver the module.

Modules are designed to have a lifespan of eight years initially with regular review periods throughout this lifespan where updates and alterations to materials or assessment can occur. The QM is involved in coordinating these reviews with the academic team and ensures that all feedback and management information is captured ready for evaluations and changes to be agreed, costed and administered.

The program coordinator

The program coordinator is the associate law lecturers' lifeline with the regional and central academic team since it is often the PC together with the regional manager who will respond to tutor questions and requests. The PC is also the eyes and ears of the faculty in that often they will observe first how a module is being received by tutors and students alike. They are the interface between the Faculty, Student Services and AL Services, providing analytical and systems skills to guarantee consistent cross-qualification and in-program processes. They expedite the successful delivery of tuition in accordance with module team requirements. The role incorporates operational activity and contribution to strategic initiatives. The PC together with the SEM will ensure additional support is provided where student support services are required in addition to AL support and proactive SST interventions. This will occur, for example, where a student requires an additional individual support session on study skills and their tutor is unavailable to provide this.

PCs manage the resolution of academic-related queries. Often the first point of contact for students, they ensure queries are triaged effectively to deliver timely responses and coordinate solutions across multiple stakeholders. PCs are able to target support to retain vulnerable students.

Key responsibilities include the implementation of Tutor Student Allocation (TSA) just before the start of a presentation, which draws on core analytical skills including forecasting AL requirements, analysing student numbers, allocating students in accordance with module requirements, timetabling, and the management of late registration and student reallocation. With over 1500 students on some modules this requires an ability to manage both data and people effectively! The PC is responsible for ensuring key stakeholders work collaboratively to meet deadlines in compliance with University policy and guidance.

PCs assist the SSTs with the design and delivery of tailored Model of Integrated Learner and Learning Support (MILLS) interventions to students to bolster student progression and retention, using data management skills to identifying target student groups. PCs monitor progression through qualifications and report retention and progression concerns to key stakeholders.

A key role is communication and knowledge sharing amongst key stakeholders, e.g. the Student Experience Team (SET) and Learner Support, and keeping others abreast of operational and strategic developments that may impact the student experience. Central to the role is the development and dissemination of best practice within the PC team, SET and other stakeholder groups.

PCs coordinate the monitoring of associate law lecturers and coordinate their training. They are key in minimizing student complaints and their AL and student interface means that they are ideally placed to feed into interventions or improvements which is part of the regular module review process undertaken by the module team.

PCs will work closely with qualification managers to ensure the smooth running of the module.

The student support team

All the above roles are classed by the OU as forming part of the wider student support team. In addition, student support services provide a group of staff with specialize knowledge of a particular curriculum or school to provide additional support to students. The additional SST for a particular module includes academics, educational advisors and, other University staff with subject specific experience. They complement and, augment the support students receive from their own tutors, the regional teams and central academic staff, providing learning and learner support relating to the module or qualification that a student is on. The teams facilitate retention and progression by providing continuity of support for students during their learning journey. Teams can be proactive, where for example a student fails to submit a TMA and respond to the tutor, the tutor can notify the SST and the SST will contact the student for a discussion, there is in addition data tools which assist SSTs in understanding how students are performing on a module. The data available through these tools inform the interventions, both individual, module and program wide that might need to be made. The aim is to provide students with an integrated curriculum and consistent study experience.

The SSTs provide students on the Open Program¹⁶ with members of staff who have an overview and concern for their qualification.

SSTs are able to feed into curriculum design and production and facilitate the sharing of information across organizational boundaries. They are, if you like, the glue that holds together the student study experience within the AL tutoring, the regional management of tutors and the academic input of the central academic teams.

¹⁶ Students studying for an Open Degree can mix and match their modules and can dip in and out of various faculties. The SSTs provide continuity for them as they move between the faculties.

The teams have a data interpreter who gathers information to plan universal interventions. This feeds into a framework (MILLS – Model of Integrated Learning and Learner support). This MILLS framework defines the type of interventions delivered to students, these interventions are tailored to students' specific needs on a module. For example, prior to the commencement of their first module students will receive emails welcoming them and inviting them to online inductions and skills training. Students who have not visited the module website between day 14 and 22/23 will be sent an email to check that they are still intending to engage with the module. Emails will also be sent to those students who fail to submit their TMAs and whose tutors have not logged an authorized extension. Students will be sent an email six months prior to their exam linking to module specific materials to assist them with the exam. The teams have the ability to send out module or qualification wide emails to students. These interventions are mapped onto the assessment and tutorial plan for the module for the module team and ALs to see.

In a distance learning context, the teams carry out a vital role not only in ensuring that they carry out their own specific roles but also in ensuring that they collaborate so that the distance of the distance learning experience is not allowed to isolate members of the team, and in particular the students. This creates a fine balance between forming independent learners and supporting distance study sufficiently so that students are able to complete their study goals. A key element of the process is ensuring that students' email in-boxes do not get overwhelmed with emails from various sources and departments.

Pulling it all together: the operation of the module team

Members of the module team are required to have a knowledge of the substantive material, the tutoring pattern and the assessment pattern on the module. They are also required to apply analytic skills to assess modules in presentation together with managerial and collaborative skills to work together and with other stakeholders in the university.

II Implementing action research at a module level

The motivation

Having identified a need to improve retention levels, pass rates and student performance at a tutor group level on level 2, it also became evident that a similar

need arose across level 2 on the OU/University of Law law degree¹⁷. It was therefore relevant to discover whether the results in raising student satisfaction and performance evident at tutor group level, could be replicated at module level in order that a wider body of students might benefit from the action research project.

Scoping and Implementing the Intervention

The teaching pattern on the modules

The teaching pattern on the modules was explained in Part I of this article. Teaching in the distance learning context meant that the student's main contact with the tutor was the detailed feedback they received on their TMAs, email and forum contact. Face to face tutorials were provided but only a core group of students attended these. Students could request additional tuition sessions of an hour's duration with their tutor if they had particular study needs. They could also call their tutors to discuss subject related questions. Tutors could choose to use online classrooms but, this was not compulsory and not all tutors chose to use this method of tutoring. Fewer tutors were using online rooms on W201 (public and criminal law) than on W200 (English legal systems and EU law). There were, in addition, some whole cohort (available to all students on a module) consolidate online classroom sessions. These consolidate sessions acted as revision sessions and took place after the students had completed their studies of particular units. The students were provided with a student café, a forum on the module web page. This was for subject related discussions. Students could, for example, discuss topical news items such as the issues surrounding a British bill of rights, or Brexit.

Module chair and module team member (academic) contact with students was not built into the tutoring pattern on level 2. The associate law lecturers were the face of the OU to the students. There was a practice of both the SEM, the curriculum manager and the module chair posting to the student café from time to time if a query arose from a student that fell within their area of expertise. The day-to-day moderation of the student café was undertaken by an associate law lecturer with expertise in online learning.

The module chair and module team members (academic) did not have any tutor contact built into the module presentation pattern, although some limited forum contact did occur between the academic members of the team and the tutors. The tutors could discuss tutoring and their students with the SEM and program coordinator. The tutor forum gave tutors an opportunity for interaction between themselves and to communicate with the module team. The regional teams

¹⁷ Level 2 consisted of two modules spanning four qualifying law degree subjects: W200, English legal systems and European Union law and W201, Constitutional and administrative law and criminal law

organized tutor training events online throughout the presentation.

The consolidate sessions (revision sessions) held in the online classrooms on the students web page, which were additional to the essential study skills material subject to the action research, were provided by associate law lecturers with expertise in the given area of law.

Scoping the intervention for W200 (English Legal System and EU Law) and W201 (Public and Criminal Law)

It became clear that reasons affecting student performance were far more complex than was evident from the tutor group research project. With an overview of the module, additional factors negatively affecting performance came into focus, such as the choice in 2014J of approximately 1/3rd of the students who studied two level two modules concurrently (full time) when the anticipate pattern at the time would be for students to study one module a year (part time). The double module study pattern placed an unanticipated high burden on students in the months running up to the exam.

The research question for the action research project remained the same as that for the part I study, namely was it possible to use skills training in online classrooms to raise pass rates and retention on level 2 modules?

To address this question the skills materials already authored for W200 were adapted and then rolled out across both W200 and W201 in the 2014J presentation. To this end a dedicated essential study skills online room and essential study skills forum was created on each of the module web pages. It was also necessary to design and run some tutor OU live sessions explaining how the materials could be used by tutors to tie in the skills training with feedback provided on TMAs.

The biggest success within the tutor group context had occurred when, having identified the weakest students within a single group, these students had been offered one to one telephone tuition after the first TMA resulting in at least a 10% increase in TMA grades for all but one of the students. Rolling out additional one to one tuition for over 1000 students across two modules (or even for the weakest of those students) would have been prohibitively expensive and therefore it was necessary to find a way of replicating this type of individual attention to study skills at a module level. It was therefore decided to run a series of live OU live sessions for resit students during the 2014J presentation. Each session was dedicated to specific threshold skills and students could sign up for these sessions. They took place over a period of two weeks. The sessions were run 6 months into the presentation and focused on skills to enhance TMA performance as well as revision skills. The dedication of the program coordinator in booking students into tutorials resulted in substantial numbers of students joining across both modules.

The live essential study skills tutorials worked in conjunction with the suite of 10 essential study skills sessions which were pre-recorded in an essential study skills online classroom based on the module web page and were available to tutors from 3 months into the presentation. The slides and the skills self-assessment check list were uploaded to the site. Some ALs referred students to the sessions (both prerecorded and live sessions) when they spotted study skills gap as they marked TMAs. Others designed online sessions around them to address the specific needs of their own students and provide one to one session in the online classrooms. The ALs were best placed to do this since they were aware of the needs of their own particular group of students. These sessions could be provided for individual students – where the need was greatest, or for a group of students who were having difficulty with particular study skills. Having prerecorded sessions and the use of an online room for the tutor to provide group or individual sessions was particularly helpful to the students. The skills sessions were therefore run by the module chair at a module level for all resit students and by individual tutors for individual students and tutor groups.

In addition to the skills training offered during the 2014J module presentation it was decided to provide four revision sessions for the who cohort of W201 students – a ‘revision bootcamp’. These were run in the final month before the exam, with up to 69 students at one time accessing the online classroom for a live session and other students listening to the recordings. Students were given three exam questions at the beginning of the week and told to focus on one of the four module manuals as a basis for answering the past exam questions. The following Friday the students could attend a live online classroom session during which the module chair together with a group of ALs went over the exam questions. In response to student feedback from the early sessions, the students were given information demonstrating what a high quality and poor quality answer might look like. 81% of W201 students sitting the exam in 2014J passed it at the first attempt.

As a result of the positive feedback from tutors and students in the forums and the OU live sessions themselves¹⁸ it was decided to replicate the provision of essential study skills prerecorded sessions for the 2015J presentation of W201. This time at the start of the presentation. In addition, students were provided with TMA preparation sessions for the whole cohort in the essential study skills room. These sessions took place prior to the TMA due date and were heavily focused on skills development for the TMA under preparation. In addition, it was decided to provide OU live materials to enable tutors to run their own additional online groups if they chose to do so.

An additional intervention was made on W201 for the 2015J presentation. The Module Chair implemented Module Chair Monday. This involved the chair

¹⁸ Some examples of this feedback is provided under the heading ‘qualitative analysis’ below.

appearing (making a post to) the student café on a Monday throughout the presentation to engage with students on a regular basis. The idea was to bridge the gap between the students and the central academic team. Feedback from the tutor monitoring the café indicated that this had a positive effect on the forum and that student engagement and behavior improved substantially when compared with previous years. There were no formal complaints during the presentation since any issues could be dealt with immediately and students felt they had direct access to someone who would address the issues they raised.

Reflecting on the impact of the action research

In order to reflect on the research and assess where improvements could be made and, in order to record student satisfaction and any successful results it was necessary to take feedback from the students who had taken part in the sessions and from the tutors using the sessions. Feedback was taken within the online sessions themselves and in the student and tutor forums. In addition to direct feedback within the module forums and online sessions, data on both qualitative and quantitative module results was collected centrally by the Open University statistics team. In considering the impact of the action research within the module team and its wider impact within the law program it was also necessary to obtain feedback from the various team members to check whether the action research could be implemented more efficiently.

The following sections provide a reflection on the impact of the research, explores a model for assessing the collaboration between team members in implementing the research and assess the collaboration undertaken by the team in the light of the model for collaboration proposed.

Flexibility

The high level of importance attached by students to flexibility is discussed in Part I of this article. Since sessions were either prerecorded or, if provided live, were generally recorded, the module wide project resulted in flexible tutoring and, the advantages already identified, were rolled out to all students on the two modules subject to the research. Students who could not attend live sessions reported that they found the recordings helpful, thus increasing student satisfaction beyond those able to attend the sessions live. Recording module wide sessions also enabled tutors and students to use the sessions at a later date, thus potentially impacting on their own individual student satisfaction and retention ratings, this was particularly useful where tutors had chosen not to have online classrooms themselves.

Qualitative analysis

At a module level student satisfaction expressed in live essential study skills tutorials and revision sessions was high. In addition, tutors expressed satisfaction on the tutor forum indicating that they found it useful to have material available to which they could refer students when marking TMAs.

One tutor feedback during the 2014J presentation that:

‘At my tutorial last Saturday, there was huge praise for the OU Live revision from some very appreciative students, who were also encouraging and explaining to a couple of others about them, and telling them they should also be looking at the recordings of the consolidation sessions -and explaining that wasn't difficult...

Then this morning I was speaking to another student who volunteered that she was finding the OU Live Revision sessions 'absolutely brilliant' as 'they put things across in a way that she could understand'

In the 2015J presentation students also responded positively to the TMA preparation sessions, in response to a request for feedback on the student café one third of those who attended the sessions posted to the forum indicating that they found them helpful. They explained that:

‘Last night’s tutorial was very helpful. I found it to be much more interactive than I was expecting and, this again helped me to reflect on my existing knowledge’

‘I actually found the OU live TMA tutorial with you and others in group very constructive. There was still a great degree of involvement and I personally almost forgot that it was online, and not in the same room.’

‘The information was in my head but, the tutorial has helped me to compartmentalize the mush! I feel more confident tackling my TMA now.’

‘The session that I attended was very helpful, and it helps holding them over several evenings so that there is plenty of opportunity for people to attend. It gives us a chance to talk subjects over in more detail, something that is hard to do if you live remotely or are not in a position to regularly attend face-to-face tutorials, or just need something explaining in a different way in order to understand better’

‘I couldn't attend but listened to the recording this morning and have to say it was a great help to me in preparing my TMA’

‘I listened to the recording of the session and found it extremely helpful. Although the manual information is understandable your session helped put

everything into perspective. I felt more confident about my TMA after listening to the recording.'

What was evident from the feedback was that students commented that the sessions helped to build their confidence in preparing their TMAs. While TMA marking could reveal certain study skills gaps: the interaction with students around TMA preparation was having the additional advantage of encouraging students in their studies. This was building their confidence, an essential element of exam, as well as, TMA preparation.

Quantitative data

Results for the 2014J presentation were in line with previous years on W201 and slightly lower than previous years on W200, since W200 was in the final open presentation these results were not unusual. In addition, there were various factors external to the research project influencing these outcomes and it was therefore difficult to assess the impact of the study skills and revision sessions with precision on module results overall. It was therefore necessary to run the session again and assess whether further interventions were necessary in order to see the hoped for raise in retention and pass rates. In addition, the qualitative feedback was sufficiently high and the impact of the revision session on W201 sufficiently good for the research to be run again on W201 the following year.

The data on W201 in the 2015J presentation indicated that student retention half-way through the module was at 94% and three quarters of the way through the module was at 92%, this was higher than the previous year. For a module in teach out in its last open presentation these were positive results¹⁹.

Analytics data available during the module presentation

In addition to assessing results and student satisfaction it was possible during the 2015J presentation of W201 to access analytics data on student activity on the web page for both 2015J and retrospectively for 2014J. This demonstrated, for example, that web page activity around the revision TMA sessions on W201 in 2014 rose and remained constantly high throughout the revision period. This was, in addition, higher for a longer period than it had been during the module presentation in general. This was an indication that the students found these sessions useful for revision purposes.

This also meant that a comparative analysis was possible throughout the 2015J presentation in order to assess whether there was any improvement. This enabled

¹⁹ These percentages were measured from the date at which students became liable for the full fee.

the team to discover, for example, whether recording TMA preparation sessions in the online classroom resulted in students accessing the web page in greater numbers and for longer periods. Trends on another module recorded by the Department of Information and Education Technology at the Open University had indicated that an increase in students accessing the module web page led to higher retention figures or, put another way if web page activity was going down so would student retention. If it could be shown the students were accessing the web page to view the TMA online preparation sessions and that retention rates were also high this would provide quantitative data and, when coupled with qualitative data, would go towards supporting the use of TMA preparation sessions in the module wide online classroom on an ongoing basis and for future presentations.

Levels of access to OU live sessions at the start of the module were high and then although they saw a drop of between 10-20% at various periods, there was nevertheless an ongoing interest in and use of the sessions throughout the module and, in particular around the time prior to TMA submission and the exam.

The student retention rates saw a not unusual small and constant decline throughout the module dropping 4% between each TMA submission with 6% of students not sitting the final exam²⁰. However, the module data available in the first half of the 2015J presentation did demonstrate rounded spikes in web page activity around TMA submission time which indicated activity which involved more than accessing the web page to submit a TMA. Retention levels remained slightly higher than the average retention levels in previous years for the same period until TMA 04 when it leveled out. Given this was a teach out presentation when a drop in retention levels would normally be expected, this provided sufficient evidence, together with high levels of student satisfaction recorded on the forum, to continue the TMA online preparation sessions throughout the module presentation.

Making a connection: the distance learning challenge

Using prerecorded and live OU live sessions and running Module Chair Monday enabled students to meet the module chair and have contact with other associate law lecturers on the module. For the distance learning student this personal connection to the academic team bolstered the existing link with their own associate law lecturer and SEM. It facilitated a sense of belonging to the OU law school. It also gave students a sense that their voice was being heard by someone who could do something about their questions or issues that arose in areas which had to be dealt with by the module team, this was because there was a direct link.

²⁰ This figure reflected TMA submissions and some student had assessment banked from a previous presentation and so were not submitting TMAs at specific points in the module.

The advantage for the module team was that the academics were able to respond to and interact with students and have a sense of how the module presentation was going. It also provided a means for tutors who taught on more than one module to meet students again who had joined different tutor groups on subsequent modules.

One example of academic/student engagement was a discussion between students on the student café indicating that they would find it interesting to hear a debate between academics on a subject related matter. In response to this and when the opportunity arose the module chair, together with a colleague was able to record a live debate on the issue of whether or not Britain needed a British Bill of Rights. Students were able to join the session live or, they could watch the recording.

Further Reflections on the Module Action Research Project

By lifting the skills training into an online classroom setting it was possible to extend the teaching and learning to more students and thus support the values of being open to people, places and ideas.

The longer term goal of skilling students so that they understood how to approach exams in the future was more difficult to assess because of the need to track large numbers of student across modules, but with developments in analytic research at the Open University it would soon be possible to track this by following students' progress across their study path. A US study had indicated that enhancing students skills at an early stage bore fruit in the short and long term²¹. The research project needed to demonstrate that these results could be achieved within a distance learning context when rolled out to large cohorts of students.

In addition, assessing the effectiveness of revision and exam skills training in so far as it had an impact on fostering deeper rather than surface learning would require more in-depth research and analysis by considering improvement in student performance over time. Initial results were encouraging with 81% of students who sat the W201 exam in 2014J passing it at their first attempt and higher levels than this indicated for the 2015J presentation.

What can be said is that students were provided with the opportunity to master threshold study skills at level 2 and were therefore more likely to have consolidated their learning more effectively and be able to cope with higher level study on their study journey.

²¹ L M Christensen, "The Power of Skills: an empirical study of lawyers skills grades as the strongest predictor of law school success (or in other words, it's time for legal education to get serious about integrating skills training throughout the law school curriculum if we care about how our students learn)" (2009) 83 *St John's Law Review*, p. 795.

In addition, student satisfaction levels recorded in the sessions and on the forums in respect of the interventions were high and results on the 2015J presentation were showing increase retention rates when a teach out module in final open presentation would normally indicate lower retention rates.

Results and feedback within the tutor group and module context had demonstrated that the training benefitted students across the skills spectrum, raising standards overall. Encouraging more students to take this up was likely to reap benefits in both the long and short term. Essential to this task was having a body of associate law lecturers who were enthusiastic about the skills training of their students.

III Collaborating to implement action research:

The implementation of the action research at a module level required that team members worked together efficiently and effectively. It was necessary, as part of the research, to discover a means of assessing the operation of the team and its effect on the research. This in turn would enable the researches to implement changes necessary to improve the implementation.

The Collaborative Context

Rolling out the skills and revisions sessions to whole cohorts of students required collaboration across the module team. The SEMs fed ideas into the research and sought funding and appointed associate law lecturers to assist with the project. The materials were designed by a combination of the central academic, SEM and associate law lecturer members of the team. In 2014J the program coordinator dealt with over 170 emails from students requesting to attend the various study skills live tutorials – the method of requiring students to sign up for tutorials was altered for the 2015J presentation to take this burden off the program coordinator role and students were able to sign up online, so that the use of technology rather than program coordinator time, produced the required information – namely the number of students attending the session in question. The module chair, curriculum manager and associate law lecturer overseeing the student café then dealt with questions arising on the café and the module chair, regional manager and curriculum manager also dealt with questions arising on the tutor forum. The module chair then provided online sessions to explain the materials to the tutors and to receive ideas and feedback from them.

The revision sessions were run for the students by the combined academic and associate law lecturer team.

The associate law lecturers used the study skills sessions by pointing students to them in the feedback they provided on the TMAs. Some also developed their own

skills sessions in online rooms, others ran the skills based online sessions that were created to replicate the face to face tutorials.

The implementation of the project was only possible through the collaborative working of the teams – without this there would have been insufficient support to produce and present the sessions and communication to the relevant parties at the right time would have failed. It was necessary to draw on the expertise of various team members in order to understand what the optimum timing of the interventions would be and how to most effectively communicate and roll out the tutoring. Because of the large numbers of students and tutors on the modules care had to be taken to fit in with existing study patterns. For example, the provision of live module sessions had to fit in with existing face to face and online provision on the modules, otherwise it would have cut across and undermined existing support, rather than bolstering it and adding value to it. This meant the academic presentation team needed to consult with the SEM and program coordinator.

Collaborative Advantage

The model of module team working required for an OU module in presentation was mainly intra-organisational, it required members from various OU departments to come together to present a module, as outlined above. The requirement for external examiner approval for module content, assessment and processes added an element of inter-organisational working.

The role of the module chair and the working of the various members of the team did not fit easily into a team-working framework. This was because the module chair role was not a typical leadership role where there is a formal leader who influences or transforms members of a group who are followers. The idea of hierarchical relationship did not sit well with the operation of the team. This was because first there was considerable expertise in each member of the team and other members of the team did not have a role in influencing or transforming them in the manner in which they undertook that role, particularly because no one member of the team had the overall expertise to do so. Second, the allegiance of various members of the team was strongly focused in the department to which they belonged, rather than given to the module chair or module team as a whole. Members of the team would also be working across several modules. This is not to say that the contribution of each team member was not vital to the success of the presentation, it was, but it was necessary to be realistic about the way in which the team operated in order to discover a theory to analyse its operation. Team roles were defined and controlled by departments in which they were located and team members were answerable to the head of their department before and over and above any answerability to the module chair of the team. Team members also had a multiplicity of commitments across various modules. This was overseen by their head of department, not by individual module chairs.

In order to find a theory which would assist in analysing the operation of a module team in presentation it was therefore necessary to go beyond team working and identify a theory which explained and provided a practical analytical framework for a group which was working together on a project while retaining a high level of independence in their given roles and whose loyalties were defined by and strongly focused in their own department and whose expertise demanded respect from all members of the team. Leadership, to the extent that it was focused in the module chair, needed to reflect facilitation and motivation in respect of the action research project.

The theory which appeared to fit the *modus operandi* of a module team in presentation, and in particular one that was undertaking action research, was the Theory of Collaborative Advantage, see for example, Vangen and Huxham (2013)²². This theory was developed to analyse and promote the management of collaboration in practice in an inter-organisational context, however because of the manner in which team member loyalty fell within the department to which the team member belonged over and above its loyalty to the team itself and because of the expertise within the team and the nature of the module chairing role, the theory resonated with and provided useful insights for a module team in presentation.

The concept of collaboration, namely the drawing together of expertise of team members in order to produce something greater than could be achieved by any one individual team member or partner within the group, was a positive one which not only sent out a message of encouragement but also accorded a high level of professional respect and individual responsibility to those within the team. This seemed appropriate for the high level of skill that individuals brought to the management of a module team in presentation. Straightforward team working bore images of the need for a strong leader to mentor and manage the team in need of support. Given the competence and independent nature of working of the team members, the collaborative model was a helpful model against which to measure the operation of the team.

The theory of collaborative advantage is based on research that engages practitioners in identifying themes representing issues causing anxiety or reward within collaborative projects. It looks at the impact of the themes on collaborative action while also including topics relevant to policy considerations: Vangen and Huxem (2013)²³. It views collaboration as paradoxical: it facilitates the positive impact of collaboration between partners on the one hand while creating an awareness of and means of working through collaborative inertia, that is the likelihood of conflict and slow progress. TCA is non-prescriptive in that it provides “handles to support reflective practice”: Vangen and Huxham (2013)²⁴.

²² Op cit foot note 8

²³ Op cit footnote 8, pp 1-2

²⁴ Op cit footnote 8, p 2

TCA is a developing area and the themes applied to collaborative practice expand over time. For the purposes of the current research project specific themes outlined below were chosen within the current framework of themes established under the TCA by way of a trial using the action research methodology. In the event that positive results were achieved the theory and methodology could then be used to address additional themes.

The themes within the TCA framework included: managing aims (goals), negotiating purpose, identifying membership structures and dynamics, culture, trust, using power, identity and collaborative leadership.

Roles and to a certain extent goals, were predefined by University frameworks and the research project itself.

The Situation on the Modules Prior to the Implementation of the Action Research

Prior to implementation of the action research collaborative advantage was stable – qualitative and quantitative results on the module demonstrated that the team had been working to produce similar results year on year. The situation would not therefore be described as collaborative inertia since a certain level was already being achieved by the teams, but perhaps the best way of describing it was collaborative status quo. This had been the experience over a number of years prior to the implementation of the research project. The module team members were carrying out their roles effectively and efficiently but, they were not maximizing their capacity in order to facilitate an improved performance in the modules.

Managing Goals

In order for collaborative goals to be achieved they must be explicit and acknowledged: Agranoff and McGuire; Ansell and Gash in Vangen and Huxham (2013). The scholarship research project provided an additional goal to that normally undertaken by a module team in presentation in that it was focused on raising pass rates and retention.

It was therefore necessary to discuss the research project with the module team explaining the collaborative goals of the project to raise retention and pass rates through use of online rooms and additional resources for students.

In the first year of implementation the discussion around this goal was held between the module chair and SEMs. There were also live online sessions held between the module chair and associate law lecturers. This did not engage all the expertise of the full module team and it meant that on occasion the research was

implemented through rather time-consuming methods impacting on various team members. Had a wider discussion taken place based on the TCA model, a more streamlined approach could have been taken in the first year of the project.

Accordingly, early in the 2015J presentation, at the first W201 module team meeting, a discussion was had around the scope of the research project in order to identify how it was to be implemented and to assess the extent of the support for it. Members of the team gave initial support for the project and a more streamlined approach was taken to implementation, ensuring minimum disruption of those involved in putting the additional resources in place. Interestingly although support for specific interventions during the year was not always forthcoming (thus creating goal diversity at the level of organizational purpose concerning the students long term and short term learning), there was an understanding between the team members that everyone was ultimately working towards common collaborative goals and seeking to act in the best interests of the students. This held the team together when it might otherwise have suffered an irreparable rift. It was the early discussions around these ultimate goals and the making of those goals explicit that acted as the glue holding the team together in the long term. It ensured that the research did not founder and that collaborative inertia did not ensue.

For the AIs, the skills training prerecorded in online rooms was particularly useful because it provided a mechanism for reaching students with tailored study skills material in situations where they would not otherwise be able to reach the students, either because of distance from the tutorial or often because the students could not make the time at which the tutorial was due to take place. The interaction between tutor and student was really important and this additional resource and the additional tuition gave rise to high levels of student goodwill. Feedback to tutors demonstrated that students valued the revision preparation sessions highly, it not only assisted them with their revision preparation but calmed their nerves to talk with a member of the central academic team and AIs. For those who were too shy or unwilling to 'bother' their tutors it provided a means of obtaining tuition without being put on the spot or being asked difficult questions.

Culture

Interestingly although all the departments, except the role of the external examiner, were internal to the OU, each team member was immersed in the culture of their own department. It was not the case therefore that there was an 'OU culture' affecting all team members. An enquiry into how this differentiated departmental culture affected collaboration would have prove interesting and useful, but with an imminent relocation of various departments due to take place within the OU, it seemed appropriate to wait until this change had taken place to research this aspect of the collaboration. The culture of the working environment was likely to change for certain team members and it was difficult to assess the impact of the relocation on culture at the time of the research project.

What was evident was that in order for collaboration to work effectively it was important for team members to have an awareness of the pressures and context in which others were working so that demands placed upon them were sensitive to this background. Understanding the team members particular culture and demonstrating sensitivity towards it was key.

Identity

Identity of the various team members was fixed by various factors including: past practice as members of a module team in presentation; previous roles in other institutions and; OU role descriptors in place. The research project involved team members stepping outside their comfort zone in order to expand that identity to accommodate the action research project. Where there was an unwillingness to do this, it was necessary to find ways to accommodate this or to find alternative means of achieving the collaborative goals. Those who had undertaken scholarship research before found it easier to adapt, as did those who were keen to expand their understanding or who were focused on the collaborative goals and who were therefore highly motivated to undertake new activities. As trust was built up and the goals appeared to some degree achievable, additional members joined the W201 team and the research project expanding their identity by doing so.

Trust

Trust is essential for meaningful collaboration to take place: Lane and Bachmann (1998) in Vangen and Huxham (2013).

Trust between members of the group was necessarily high because collaboration had been running for some time on both modules in order to present the module over a number of years. Each team member expected and relied upon the expertise of the others, in areas of overlap or where time pressures on one member of the team were high, team members would be equally as competent to deal with matters and take over a task. This trust had maintained the status quo on the module but what was required was an increase in trust between team members in order to undertake the research project.

Trust was initially an issue in the implementation of the action research and it was necessary to take incremental steps to build up trust over time, particularly because team members were incredibly busy and the impact of implementing the research project on team members and stakeholders had to be discussed and carefully managed in order not to create a breakdown in the trust between team members leading to a withdrawal from the project altogether.

The research had the advantage of having produced demonstrable results at tutor group level and so these could be used as a starting point when discussing the project at module level. The research was initially lifted onto a module level in a relatively low key way, by prerecording sessions in the OU live room one third of the way into the 2014J module presentation on W200 and W201. Half-way through the presentation two weeks of live sessions on skills training were provided on both modules for resit students. Finally at the end of W201 presentation a revision boot camp was run in the revision period prior to the exam. Because this was a more intensive intervention it was run on W201 alone. With positive feedback from students for these interventions it was then possible to establish trust amongst team members to the extent that these could be run in the following year on W201.

Trust had to be built up not only within the module team itself, but also with the stakeholders within the wider University context where the research impacted on them. Also, within the associate law lecturer body – they were essential to the implementation of the research project. It was important to ensure tutors did not feel undermined in the tutoring that they were already providing to their students. Smooth integration of the materials was vital. It was also important to seek to ensure there was no uneven experience between tutor groups. Feedback from tutors on the tutor forum indicated that this had been achieved for the 2014J presentation and tutors requested the additional support for 2015J of W201.

Having analytics data available to demonstrate positive results was a helpful way of building trust. Communication and reassurance of those team members who were less sure about the research project was also essential.

Using power

The collaborative method of working is based on the idea that collaborative relationships work more easily when there are no major disparities of power: see Inkpen and Beamish; Mayo and Taylor, in Huxham and Vangen (2005)²⁵. This element of the TCA was particularly important for the effective working of the module team because of the high levels of expertise within the team and the need to accord each member of the team respect for that expertise and the role they were undertaking. Lifting the action research from a tutor group level onto a module level therefore required an element of letting go by the module chair of the individual tutor level project in order to focus on empowering and inspiring by the module chair of team members. This was to ensure other members of the team took on a role with regard to the research. SEMs played a key role in obtaining funding to implement specific interventions and checking materials as they were authored. Associate law lecturers also played a key role in taking on the skills training and additional online sessions for their own tutor groups. The program director spent considerable time organizing students into tutorials.

²⁵ Op cit footnote 8.

While traditionally it is those who control funding that are perceived to have the power in collaborative relationships, in the research project it was a question of time as well as funding, that was to determine who had the power to influence the research project. Each team member had a heavy workload and, it was necessary to make additional time in order to create and present additional materials for the students. In the 2014J presentation the result was that the research was driven mainly by the module chair and associate law lecturers on W201, with assistance from the SEM on W200 and from the program coordinator. Once the knowledge, skills and information had been shared at a module level in 2014J the power started to become more dispersed and this increased in 2015J on the W201 presentation with the creation of additional online classroom materials which were made available to the whole cohort of associate law lecturers and as the essential study skills sessions were run for a second time at module level.

In 2015J the collaboration was located in the W201 module team as a whole as well as between the module chair and the associate law lecturer body. A supportive head of law school, regional manager and the willingness of associate law lecturers to make additional time available made all the difference when it came to providing resources for revision sessions. With funding coming in from various budgets and time being made available through the willingness of various members of the team, including the SEM and ALs, there was a genuine sharing of power to work towards collaborative advantage on the project. Upon reflection this was one of the most positive elements of the collaboration and one that for the most part, worked very well.

Power was also located outside the module team since the module itself sat within an LLB qualification and was subject to internal law school and OU frameworks and procedures. Impact on present and future presentations of other modules within the qualification had to be considered by other module chairs as well as by the leadership team within the law school. Setting student expectations on one module meant those expectations then needed to be managed when students arrived at their next module. This, of all the “power” factors affecting the research project, had the greatest impact in determining how far and fast the research project could move forward.

Collaborative leadership

Vangen and Huxham (2013) argue that collaboration requires a move away from traditional forms of leadership and this resonated with the experience of the module team. Influence and transformation of members of the team was required not merely through the leadership of the team in the form of the module chair role, but through each member contributing to the tasks in hand and transforming and allowing themselves to be transformed by other members of the team. The idea of hierarchical relationships did not sit well with the roles undertaken by team

members, rather decentering of leadership (Martin) and distributed and shared leadership (Crosby and Bryson) in Vangen and Huxham (2013) appeared more appropriate models. The focus for the module chair was therefore, in accordance with the collaborative model, more on facilitating, empowering and enabling. This required that collaborative activity was led in a specific direction and, it was incumbent on the module chair to ensure that action was taken by various team members to maintain that direction. To this end structures, processes and participants were important in collaboration. The module chair therefore needed to empower, involve and mobilize others and create a structure within which this could occur. Relational skills such as patience, empathy, honesty and deference were therefore key. Directive leadership, that is being focused and engaging with those participants who are interested in moving forward with the project in hand, was also an important factor in avoiding inertia.

The structures set up for collaboration on the action research project were virtual, online structures. More than one structure was used for collaboration. The tutor online classroom was used for tutor briefings. The essential study skills OU live online classroom and forum were set up to prerecord the essential study skills sessions and thus facilitate collaboration between the module team and AIs. This enabled ALs to use the skills materials for the benefit of the students. Further collaboration then took place within the student café between the AL moderator and module chair. The module team met online at the start of the project and maintained regular email contact concerning the progress of students on the module with TMA submission dates providing a focus for reporting by the module chair to members of the team. The authoring of materials for the students was then shared between ALs, the regional manager and module chair.

Reflections on the Collaboration

Using the TCA to assess the operation of the module team in implementing the action research project had helped to identify some areas where improvements could be made. For example, decreasing the impact of implementation to lighten the workload for team members and viewing the leadership role as an empowering rather than hierarchical one so as to accord team members respect due to their roles and expertise.

The importance of being aware of individual identities on the team and the culture within which team members were located in their own department, facilitated a high level of respect and sensitivity between team members. The additional theme that was required within the TCA model was one that enabled gaps in engagement to be identified. A “levels of engagement” theme needed to be developed for this. This was highlighted within the current action research project with regard to the SST role. The support for students was outstanding and the faculty lead was supportive and available to module team leaders, but SST link engagement on module teams was limited. Each team had a named SST link, but whereas all other team members attended team meetings and engaged fully with each other there

was no built-in requirement that SST links attend module team meetings or provide individual feedback to the module teams. It was difficult to assess whether this was necessary – the SST support was functioning effectively and efficiently and increasing workload for the sake of it was inappropriate. From the point of view of the collaborative process and on the basis of the cyclical action research model this point of reflection provided the next step in the research project.

Conclusion

The cyclical nature of action research necessarily means any conclusions are interim and point towards further action. Reflecting on the research project in order to identify elements to expand upon and move forward revealed the following key points: the high levels of student satisfaction and tutor feedback had revealed that students enjoyed and benefitted from assistance with skills training and found it valuable to have contact with the central academic team, both in prerecorded sessions and live online sessions. They also responded particularly positively to collaborative work in online rooms between the central academic team and ALs to deliver content and skills training. The students particularly valued support around revision time. The feedback was that the additional provision complimented the tutoring by ALs for their own tutor groups. Using the TCA model to assess the implementation of the action research by the module team had led to some interesting insights and it was likely to prove valuable for future reflection and implementation of action research. The analytics data had demonstrated that focusing on the module team collaboration was the key to enhancing pass rates and student satisfaction on a module. W201 recorded the highest pass rates in its presentation history (its first presentation was in 1999) as a result of this additional intervention. Not only was there an improvement in pass rates, but the standard of students' exam performance increased, in particular for the lower performing students.