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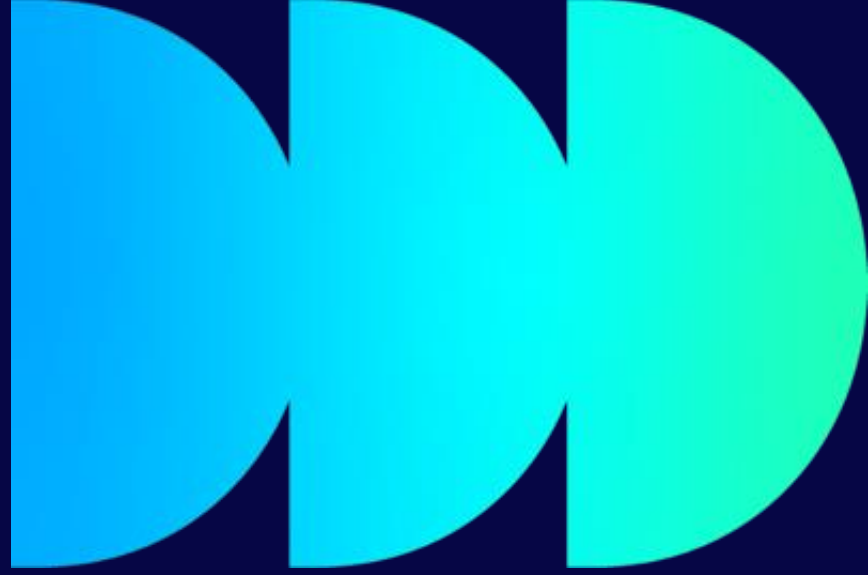
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# SCONUL Access

The OU student experience

Caroline Barratt and Tyne Stanley

Library and Knowledge Services

July 2023

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# Foreword

The SCONUL Access scheme is a testament to the collaborative, cross-sector service-led culture of academic libraries, where we share resources and expertise to deliver a network of learning spaces to students. Established in 2003 in response to an increase in the mobility of academic researchers, it has provided the largest reciprocal borrowing scheme in the UK and Ireland for twenty years.

Sharing knowledge is in our librarian DNA: we have taken the unusual step of publishing this report, which would typically be for an internal audience only, to provide a greater understanding of the value and impact of the SCONUL Access scheme.

With almost 200,000 registered students, The Open University is the largest academic institution in the UK, and we are the largest users of the SCONUL Access scheme. We'd like to acknowledge and thank the original founders of the scheme, and all libraries who have opened their doors to our users, for fostering a mutually supportive community.

The Engagement and Insight team at the OU Library routinely work with our students, putting them at the heart of everything we do. We are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis, and students are not immune from this. We thought we had a good understanding of the challenges our students face; however, the findings of this report surprised even us. Some students are studying without a suitable place in the home to work. Some students are studying without Internet access at their home. Some students are studying while homeless. The SCONUL

Access scheme therefore offers a lifeline to all students, providing a safe haven for academic endeavour, which ultimately improves society as a whole.

While Open University students may not be perceived as the typical university students, we suspect the experiences our students are facing are not unique.

Working together as a sector to raise the awareness and benefits of the scheme is likely to provide an increase in support for students, and ultimately an improved library service.

We hope you enjoy this report.

Selena Killick, Associate Director (Student and Academic Services).

Gary Elliott-Cirigottis, Director of Library and Knowledge Services.

# Summary

This research includes two phases focussing on students at The Open University: an analysis of SCONUL Access membership and the correlation with attainment and a second phase which uncovers what aspects of the SCONUL Access scheme members use (if any) and the impact that the programme has on their studies.

In the data analysis, we found that a higher percentage of students who were members of SCONUL Access gained a distinction (32%) in comparison to students who weren't a member (22%). This difference is calculated as statistically significant.

In the second phase of our research, most students (62%, n=320) reported that being part of the scheme has a positive impact by supporting their studies and wellbeing.

Themes that emerged in analysis of the impact data included:

- Attributing access to the scheme to better academic achievement
- Enhancing their experience as an OU student
- Contributing to wider participation by providing high quality study space and collections as a free benefit

Almost all survey participants found their experience signing up for and using the scheme met or exceeded their expectations (94%, n=336). Though there were many positive comments about the scheme, there were also some ideas for improvement. The most common themes were:



- More advertising of the scheme and its benefits
- Faster/more streamlined application process
- Information on host library's services/Ts and Cs
- Improved clarity of local policies for staff and student visitors

Comments about the scheme's importance in supporting academic success and enhancing the student experience, especially as distance learning students, appeared in both the survey and interview data.

A few examples:

- "Having a quiet space to study after a tutorial at the library meant I was able to put into practice what I had just learnt without distractions of family life. I scored 95% on that TMA [marked assignment]."
- "The SCONUL Access scheme gave me the opportunity to find a welcoming, positive and quiet place in which to study. As a low-income, distance learning student, I feel this has been instrumental in my successes so far as an OU student."

One student described how the scheme works in a unique way for them and for many OU students:

"As I do not live local to an OU campus, it is helpful to be in the university environment to motivate and facilitate my studies. Accessing other university libraries allows me to have the benefits of a brick uni while having the flexibility of distance learning."

This research shows how the SCONUL Access scheme is a key benefit to studying with the OU and one that supports student success and well-being.

# **Part 1 – Data analysis on SCONUL Access membership and attainment**

## **Research question**

In our data analysis we have repeatedly found a correlation between student engagement with library resources and services and better attainment scores, but we had not looked at membership in the SCONUL Access scheme as a variable. To explore this question, a pilot analysis was carried out in October 2022, comparing attainment (e.g. instances of receiving a distinction, pass or fail at the end of a module) and SCONUL Access membership for students in who started studying a module in May 2018 and October 2018. We found that a higher percentage of students who were members of SCONUL Access gained a distinction (28%) in comparison to students who weren't a member (20%). To further test this finding, we repeated this analysis with data from students who started studying in October 2021 to assess whether similar results are obtained.

## **Method**

We matched student data from the OU's data analytics team with data from our SCONUL Access membership records to compare an individual's attainment on module completion with their status as a SCONUL Access member.

We compared attainment and SCONUL Access membership data for students who began study with the OU in October 2021. For individuals who studied multiple modules concurrently, the module where they achieved their highest attainment was counted (and the lower attainments were removed from the dataset). For example, if a student studied three modules, gaining a 'distinction' on one and a 'pass' on the other two, the 'pass' modules were removed, and the 'distinction' module was kept.

### *Limitations*

Removing the lower performing modules for individuals who studied multiple modules concurrently could arguably skew the data in a positive direction.

We have data on who has applied to use the scheme, but no way of knowing if that student used the scheme by checking out a book or visiting another library to study. We cannot say conclusively that they have engaged in any behaviour other than that they applied for the scheme. Recognising the limitations of this approach, we went on to conduct additional research as described in Phase 2 of this report.

### *Data protection*

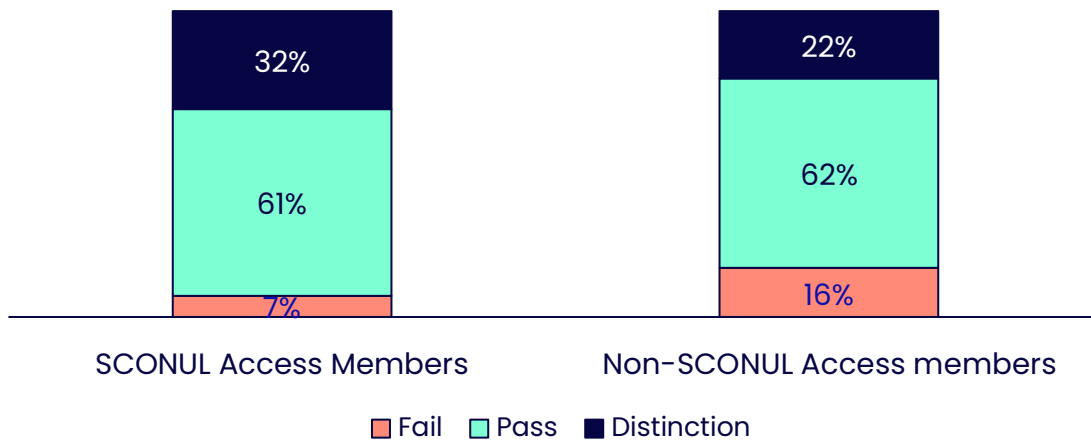
Use of personal data is subject to Data Protection regulations, [OU guidelines on using student data](#) and the [Ethical use of student data policy](#). Our analysis follows these guidelines.

## Findings

In comparing attainment results by SCONUL Access membership status, we found that:

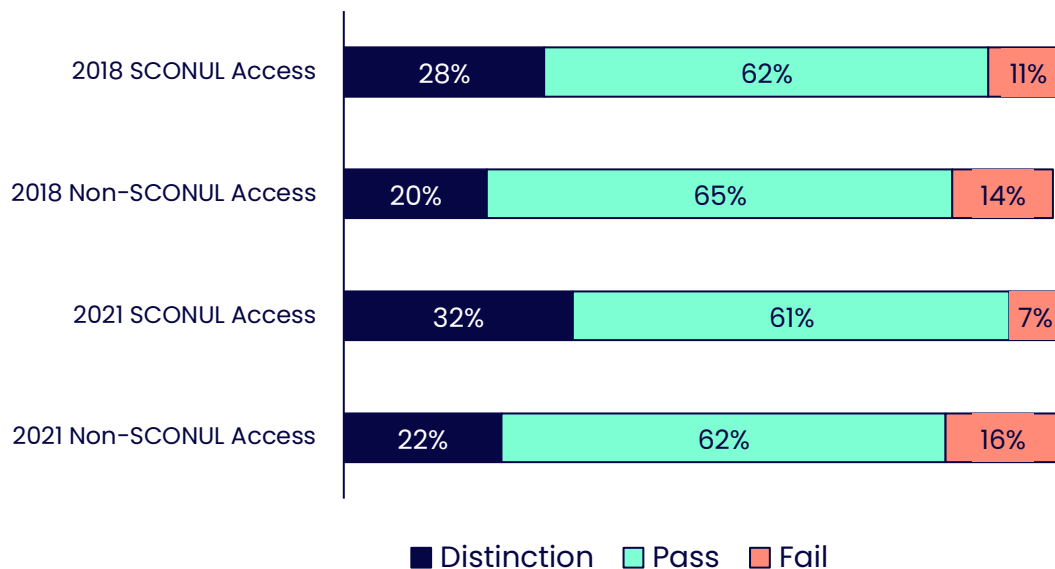
- A higher percentage of students who were members of SCONUL Access gained a **distinction** (32%) in comparison to students who weren't a member (22%). This difference is calculated as statistically significant.
- 61% of students who were SCONUL Access members obtained a **pass** in comparison to 62% for those who weren't members of the scheme. This difference **was not** calculated as statistically significant.
- 16% of students who weren't SCONUL Access members obtained a **fail** in comparison to 7% for those who were members of the scheme. This difference is calculated as statistically significant.

### Attainment results for October 2021 modules by SCONUL Access membership status



*Attainment results by SCONUL Access membership – cohort comparison*

### Comparison of attainment results for October 2021 and May and October 2018 cohorts by SCONUL Access membership



# Part 2 – SCONUL Access and the OU Student Experience

## Research question

Building on the data analysis, this phase of the research uncovers what aspects of the SCONUL Access scheme members use (if any), what students value most about the scheme and the impact that the programme has on their studies.

## Method

We began with an online survey of all SCONUL Access members in the October 2021 cohort, matching the student group used in the data analysis. The survey collected data from these students about their use of the scheme, what services they accessed, their experience with signing up for and using member libraries and the impact the SCONUL Access scheme had on their studies. The survey also served as an invitation for a second phase of the project, which was individual interviews with students to explore their experience using the scheme in more depth.

## Survey results

### Participant demographics

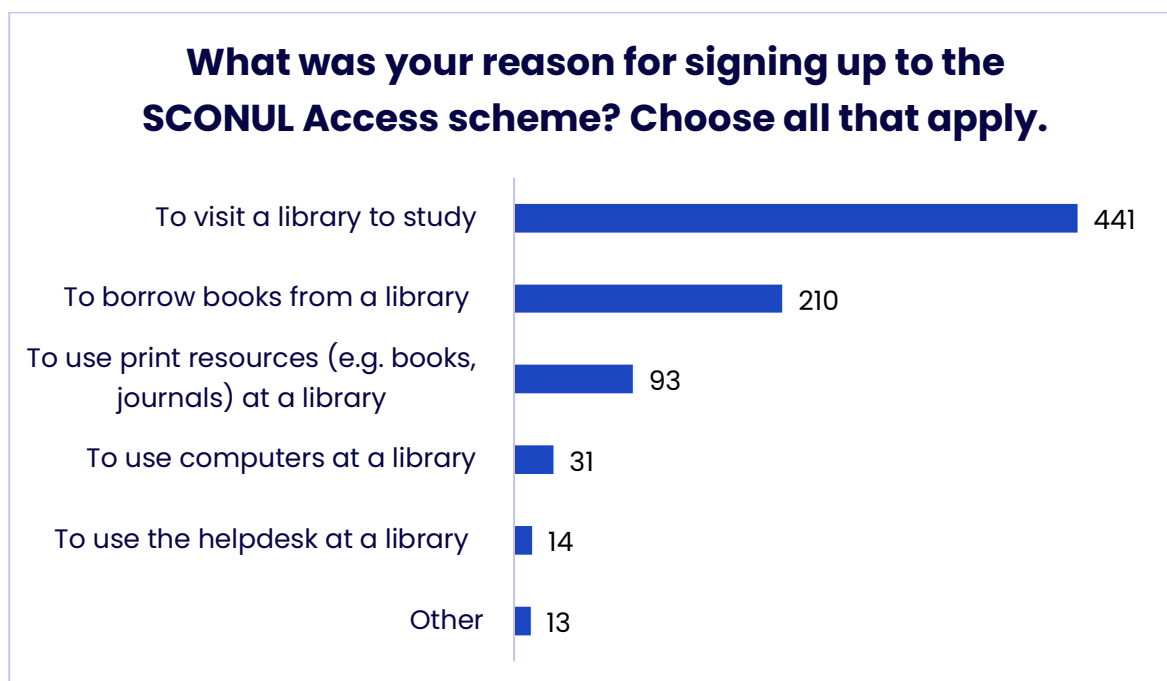
The survey was completed by 516 individuals, giving us a response rate of 16%.

Participant ages ranged from under 25 to 56 and over with good representation across the age spectrum. Survey participants' demographic categories closely

followed percentage representation of the whole OU population, including ethnicity, declared disability and economic band.

## Reasons for joining the scheme

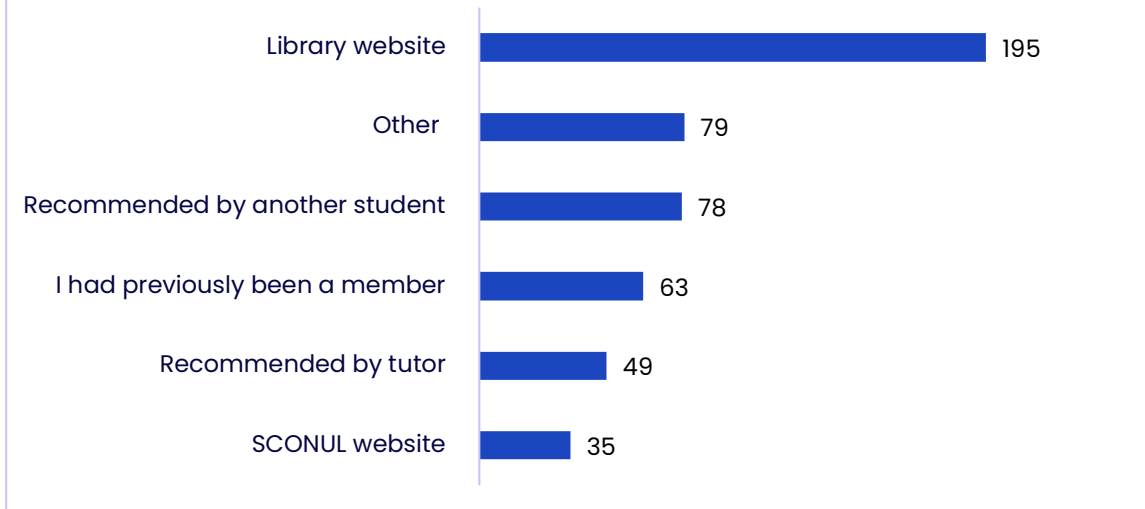
Survey participants were asked their reason for joining the SCONUL Access scheme. Most were looking for a place to study and many wanted to borrow print books and other print resources from a library near them.



## How they learned about the scheme

Most students reported that they learned about the scheme through the OU Library website. Some were recommended by another student or their tutor, showing the importance of learning about the service through word of mouth. For those who chose "Other," they most frequently cited "the OU" or "the OU website" as where they learned about the scheme. Currently, the only OU website that mentions or promotes the scheme is the [OU Library website](#).

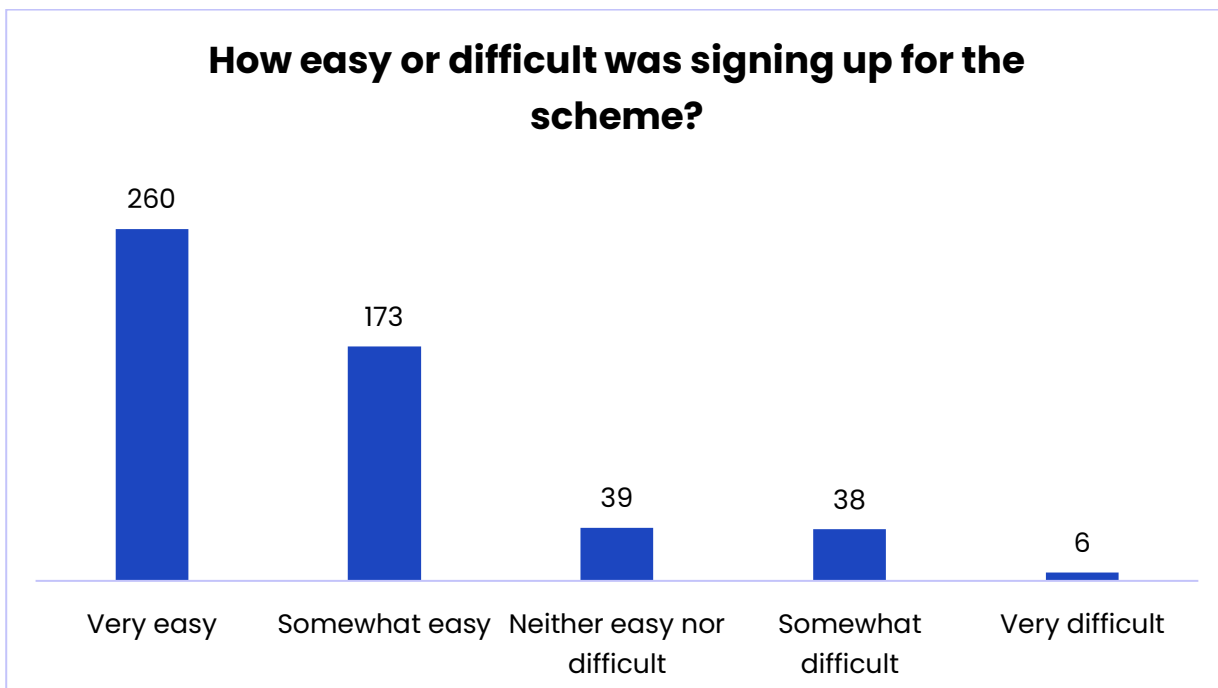
## How did you learn about the SCONUL Access scheme?



## Experience joining

A majority of respondents found signing up for the scheme to be Very easy or Somewhat easy (84%, n=433). Only 9% of respondents found the process to be Very difficult or Somewhat difficult (n=44).

## How easy or difficult was signing up for the scheme?





## What library they used

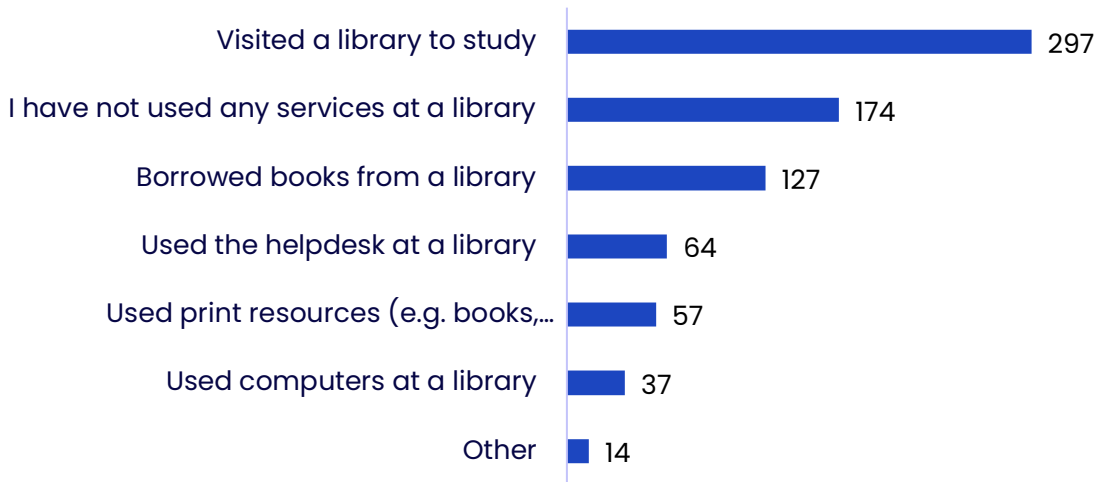
We asked if they used the library they indicated in their application or if they used other libraries. This question also provided data on if they had or had not visited a library as part of the scheme. Just over half used the library they originally intended to visit (52%), but many had not yet visited a library (35%).



## What services they used

For this question, 34% percent of respondents had not yet used a library as part of the scheme. For the rest who have used the scheme, many used multiple services whilst visiting the library.

### As a SCONUL Acces member, I ... (Please choose all that apply)

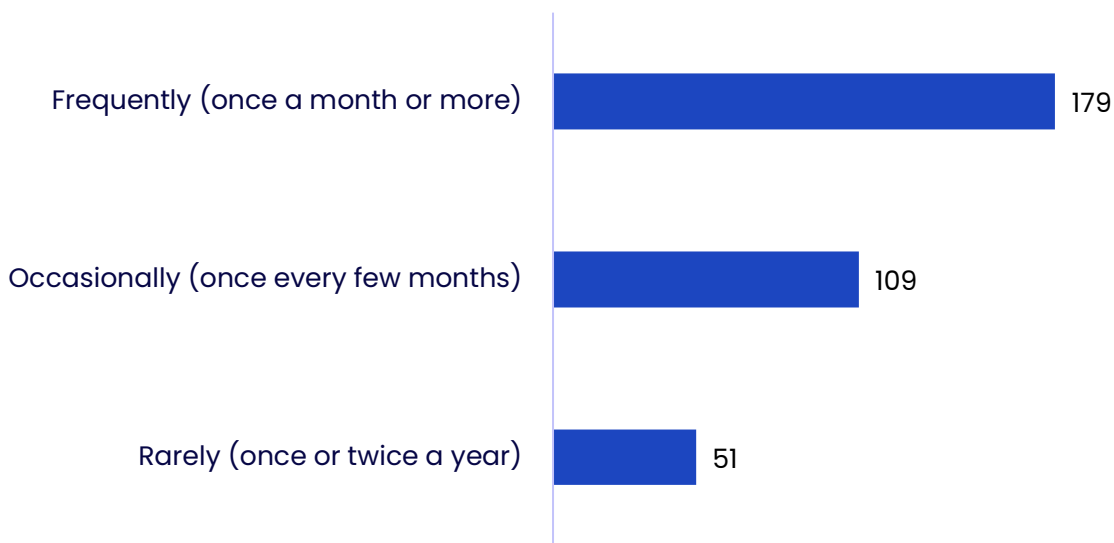


In comparing the reasons for joining with what they reported actually using, we found that students use additional services once at their SCONUL library. For example, 256 students said they signed up for the scheme to visit a library to study and did not indicate they planned to use any other service. When asked what services they used in practice, 48% of those students said they used the library for study only, but 17% said they studied in the library *and* used additional services like borrowing books or using the library's computers.

### How often do they use the scheme

For those who do use the scheme, most visit libraries at least once a month.

## How often do you use these services?



### Why some have not used the scheme

Most respondents said they planned to use the scheme but have not yet had a chance to. Having the time or ability to travel were also reasons for not visiting a library, as was not yet needing the services provided by the scheme.

Two respondents noted that their preferred SCONUL Access library was inaccessible to them. Neither elaborated on what was inaccessible about the library so we do not have further details. For the individual who needed a service not part of the scheme, they indicated that they needed to borrow books but were not allowed to do so at their SCONUL library.

### Please tell us why you have not used any SCONUL Access services

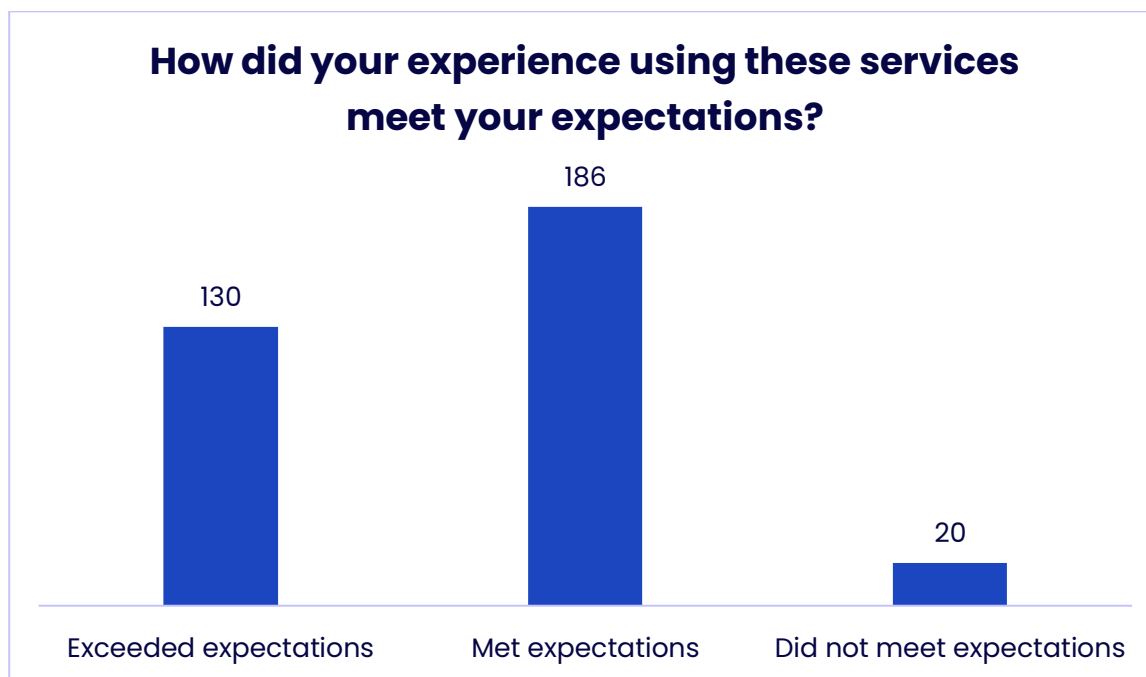


There were several themes around the "Other" reasons students had not used the scheme. Some did not like their local library or did not find it suitable for what they needed (n=4). Others used another facility like a local public library or non-member library instead (n=4).

We may want to investigate further the students who reported either never hearing back from the library they applied to or were still waiting to hear back (n=12). Also, those who have not visited their library because they were unsure how the scheme would work in practice and did not feel confident enough to make a visit (n=5). Perhaps there is something that can be done to improve communication and response time as well as equip students with enough knowledge of the local amenities, policies and how they can make use of the scheme at their local library, so they feel ready to use it.

## Meeting expectations

Students who used the scheme were asked to rate their experience. Almost all respondents rated their experience using services in the SCONUL Access scheme as meeting or exceeding their expectations (94%, n=316).



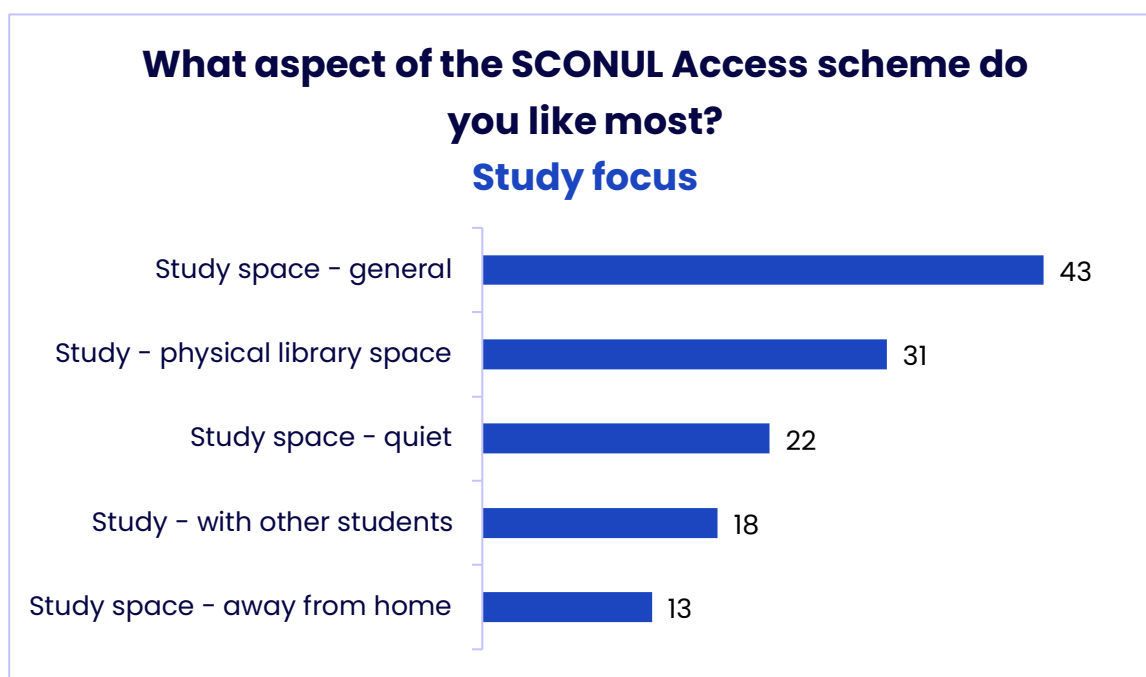
Cross-referencing this response with answers to the survey question asking for ratings of the scheme's impact on their studies, for those who did not feel their expectations were met, eleven said the scheme's impact was neutral. Five students said it had a positive effect on their studies. Three said the scheme had a negative impact and one did not answer. Two of the students giving a "negative impact" answer elaborated: one explained that the library did not have the books they needed, and the other said they were not allowed to use computers in the library. More detail on what students like most about the scheme and what they feel should be improved appears in the following sections.

## What they like most

Students appreciate the many benefits of the scheme including access to university libraries for study, to browse and borrow print materials, and the way that being in a university environment amongst other students enhances their own experience as a distance learner.

### Study space

When categorised into themes, comments around studying were the most common. Students appreciate a quiet, academically focussed environment as well as being around other students who are studying like they are.



Comments from students illustrate this theme:

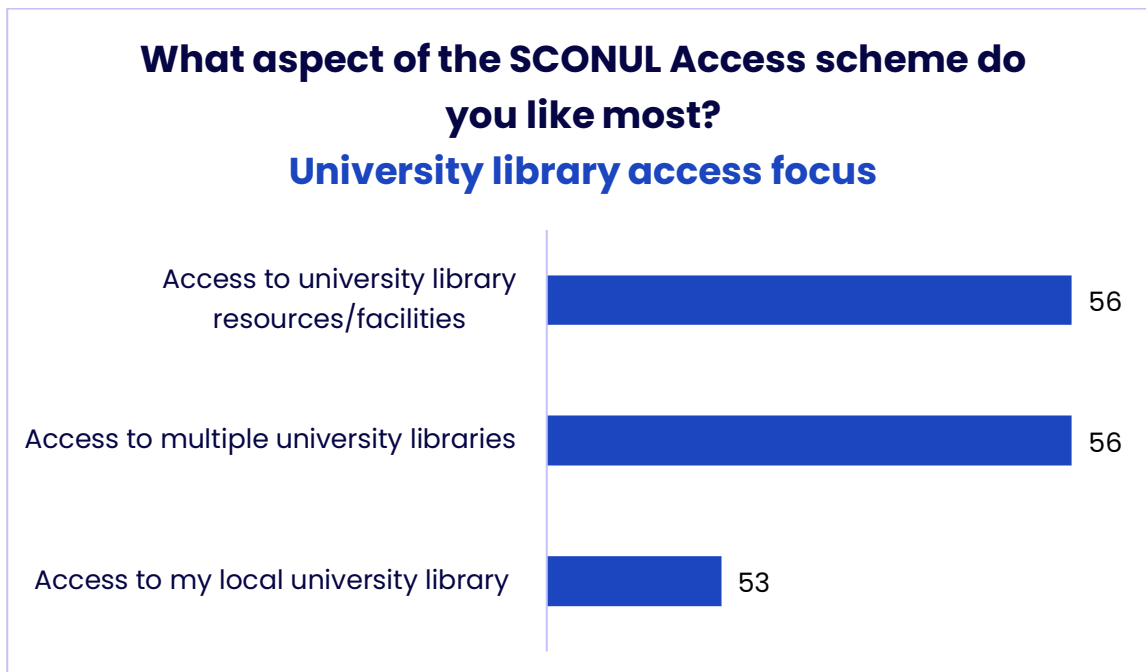
- "I have visited my local university library once a week for this entire academic year. It has given me a consistent place to study which is easy to focus in and makes me feel part of a wider academic

community. It allows me to study with friends who attend the local brick university so that we can study together. Having a learning environment away from home has allowed me to focus on my work."

- "Access to an academic environment which really helps to improve my study quality."
- "Being able to use a study space is much better for wellbeing."
- "Having a space outside of the house to study, you are surrounded by other students which can help with the motivation to study."

## Access to university libraries

Access to university libraries in a more general sense was also important. Whilst many students liked being able to join a library local to them, the ability to visit libraries across the UK was also highly praised, as was access to the resources and facilities provided at academic institutions.



Comments from students illustrate this theme:

- "I like the fact that I can use a variety of resources offered by other universities, whilst the OU has a wealth of resources that I enjoy and find supportive, going to other universities gives me the chance to use various types of software and technology that I would not have been exposed to otherwise."
- "[I like] the flexibility to be able to use different libraries [and] the ability to feel a part of an academic environment despite studying remote."
- "It gives me access to various nation-wide libraries and their resources."
- "Access to an excellent collection at my local university library."

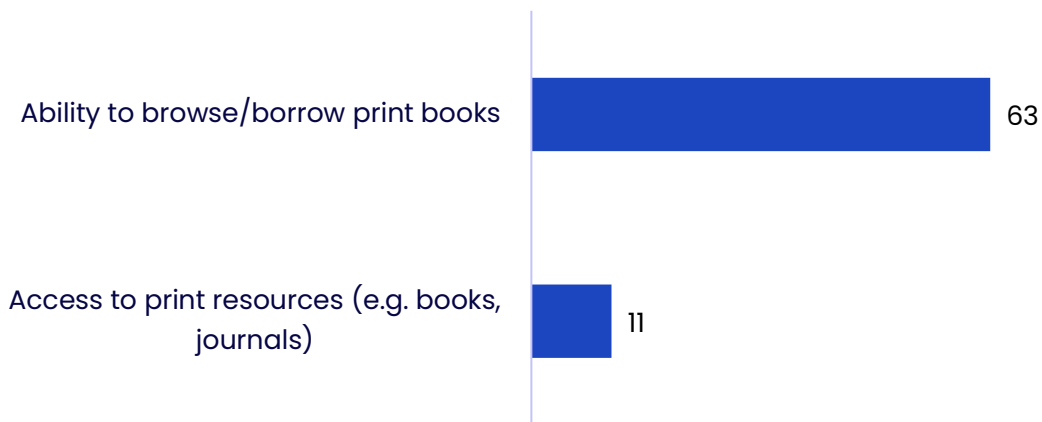
### **Access to print resources**

Students mentioned access to university library resources and facilities as being an important part of the scheme. Many specifically spoke about the ability to browse and borrow print materials, especially books and textbooks, as a key benefit (n= 63). A few mentioned that this feature allows them to save money on purchasing books as they could borrow them for free.



## What aspect of the SCONUL Access scheme do you like most?

### Print materials focus



Comments from students illustrate this theme:

- "It's great to be able to access such a vast number of books - and to have borrowing rights is especially useful."
- "[I like] Access to print books. Not all books are available online and buying is too expensive."
- "I am studying with the OU so may need physical access to books unavailable in the OU digital library."
- "Being able to have access to many books which are not available for me to buy as I can't afford them."
- "I'm a member of three university libraries with SCONUL and the books available to borrowing all vary depending on the library. This versatility really supports my studies."

## Participating in university student life

Participating in student life in a brick-and-mortar university library setting enhances OU students' experience by providing a sense of community, motivation, and the buzz of being around others who are hard at work. Students left twenty-three comments about this facet of the SCONUL Access scheme and explained how this benefit complements their experience as a distance education student:

- "I love that as a distance learning student, I can still feel like a regular university student, with a specific study space as an alternative to a public library."
- "Gives you the university experience even when studying with the OU while also being a good place to study."
- "Able to attend a brick university library, so it gives you the sense of being a student, surrounded by the other students."
- "Nice to feel part of another learning community."

## What needs improvement

Survey participants were asked, "What aspect of the scheme could be improved?" Their responses fell into several categories, but by far the most common was that "nothing" could be improved, indicating satisfaction with the scheme (n=111). Other respondents did have ideas for improvement which included:

## Ideas for improvement (incl. five or more comments in each theme)



### Advertising

Advertising the scheme more often and more widely was a frequent comment. Students cited wanting to see it on OU websites, to be informed of the scheme via their tutors and to receive information about it in their induction materials or upon registration.

### Faster/more streamlined application process

The desire for faster processing of their application was also a frequent request. Adding comments on faster application processing to comments on a more streamlined process and easier/clearer sign up with the host library accounts for 47 comments.

Comments illustrating this theme include:

- "Time too long for an application to be processed. Should be days not weeks."
- "Each library has individual processes even once you got the SCONUL access and that was a bit annoying and more complicated than it needed to be."
- "I had to wait over a week and fill out a whole new application form before I could actually visit the library."
- "Sign up was difficult - lots of different forms to fill in both online and in person."
- "Signing up is a pain. A single SCONUL library card, accepted by all universities in the scheme and that can be issued by your home institution would be much easier."

### **Information on host library's services/Ts and Cs**

Upon acceptance, receiving information from the host library about the services offered to SCONUL Access students such as how to access the library and any restrictions on access would be helpful to students. There was some confusion about what they would need to bring with them to enter and what they would be able to do once there. This included stories about disappointment upon arriving and being denied access to the library during busy exam periods, inability to use services like printing, lack of access to computers and problems using the wi-fi. Knowing practical information on where to park and policies on food and drink (or where to get it) would also be appreciated.

## Clarity of local policies

Though less frequent, there appears to be a need for more consistent SCONUL library staff training to ensure a welcoming and positive experience for students visiting a host library.

One comment illustrating a negative experience:

"The staff in the bricks and mortar university library's need to be trained in how to handle students from the SCONUL scheme attending their libraries as the way my partner and I were treated was not good enough and made us feel like we were unwanted. It took a while for us to build up the confidence to go back which is really disappointing since as mentioned the other libraries in the area are only open during the day when we both have work."

Another comment describes a different scenario, but reflects a negative experience due to varying understanding of in-house policies and an inconsistent experience across SCONUL Access libraries:

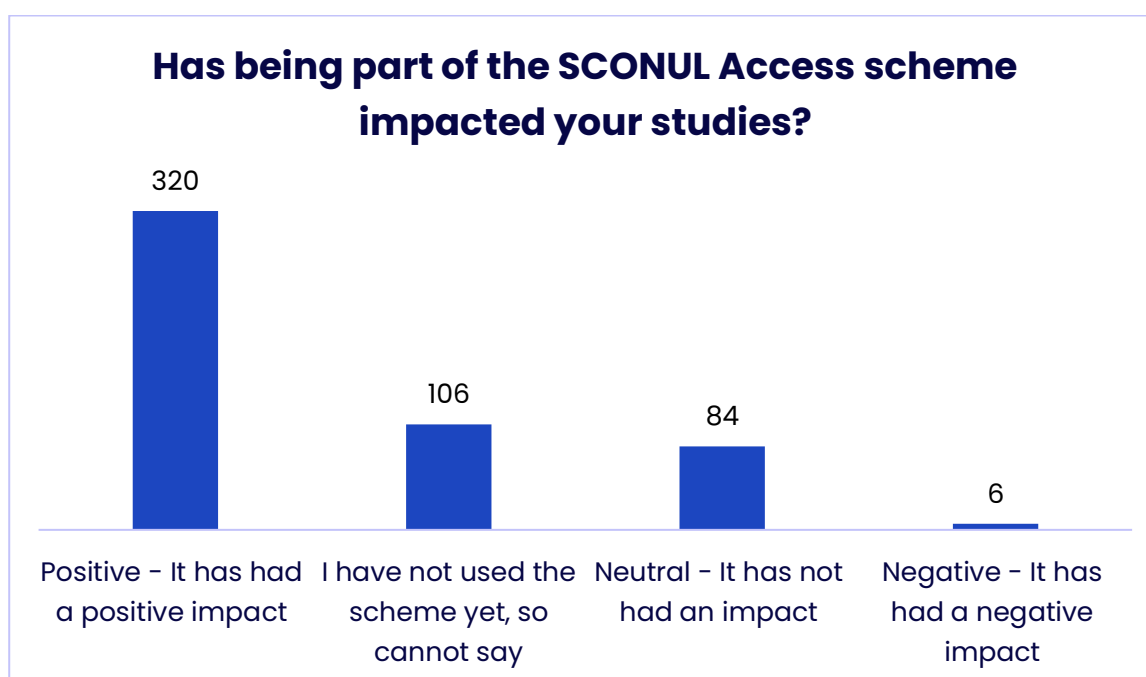
"[Improve the] actual access to participating libraries, in particular consistency - I've had one staff member let me straight in and another say I needed to email first at the same library, at a different uni the online form was broken and I was told to book an appointment to get a library card, at another uni the hours for SCONUL access were so short for a big chunk of the year that it was useless for my purposes."

Improvement in setting expectations from the start with clear communication on policies, what access is granted in the scheme and what is not and ensuring

host library staff are equipped to welcome visiting students would be helpful in ensuring a better experience, especially as we understand how important it is in supporting students' academic achievement and wellbeing.

## Impact on their studies

Being a SCONUL Access member impacts students' experience. A majority (62%) report that being part of the scheme has had a positive impact and gave eloquent explanations of how the scheme has supported their studies and wellbeing. For this question, about 21% of the survey respondents had not yet used the scheme, so could not comment, and 16% percent were neutral. A very small number (1%) reported a negative impact.



A few themes emerged in students' comments about how participating in the scheme has impacted their studies and their lives. These include attributing access to the scheme to better academic achievement, enhancing their

experience as an OU student, and contributing to wider participation by providing high quality study space and collections as a free benefit.

Student comments are grouped by theme:

### **Illustrations of some of the most commonly noted benefits**

- "I love using the SCONUL scheme. Being in another library helps me focus and the resources in the library are perfect for my studies."
- "As I do not live local to an OU campus, it is helpful to be in the university environment to motivate and facilitate my studies. Accessing other university libraries allows me to have the benefits of a brick uni while having the flexibility of distance learning."

### **Connecting the SCONUL Access scheme to academic achievement**

- "Being able to have a professional study environment away from home has been critical in the final year of my physics degree with the open university."
- "Having a quiet space to study after a tutorial at the library meant I was able to put into practice what I had just learnt without distractions of family life. I scored 95% on that TMA."
- "Having a separate space after a hard day working has been great and great to be motivated by other students that you can see slogging hard. I passed my module with a distinction as a result. Thank you for this service. All the staff connected to it at The OU are fab."

## **Enhanced experience as an OU student and providing a sense of community**

- "I loved having the use of this scheme as studying remotely often comes with a lot of unwanted distraction. Whilst coffee shops are great, they can be noisy and result in lost focus. The library was a great option and allowed likeminded people to meet. I met some OU students whilst using the Dundee university library."
- "One of the big issues with distance learning is the isolation and lack of physical space – SCONUL Access goes a long way to fixing those things."
- "I met up with other Open University students as it was a good meeting place to study at together."

## **Contributing to widening access and participation**

- "I love this scheme as I find it really hard to study at home as I get easily distracted, and I don't get out much due to having poor mental health. This helps me achieve the feeling of living a 'normal' life and feeling like I am a part of the world just like everybody else."
- "I use SCONUL access to complete my studies. Being homeless, I have daily access to complete my degree."
- "The SCONUL Access scheme gave me the opportunity to find a welcoming, positive and quiet place in which to study. As a low-income, distance learning student, I feel this has been instrumental in my successes so far as an OU student."



# Interviews

Several students volunteered for interviews in the second phase of the research.

We chose potential subjects based on their availability and to get a good breadth of demographic facets. We interviewed five students.

## Interview participants

Name	Age band	Ethnicity	Disability status	IMD%	Course subject and level of study
Diana	56 and over	White	Disability declared	30-35%	Languages level 1
Emily	45-55	White	No disability declared	45-50%	Arts and humanities post-graduate level
Liza	Under 25	White	Disability declared	55-60%	Social sciences level 3
Grant	56 and over	White	No disability declared	15-20%	STEM level 2
Sofia	36-45	Mixed	Disability declared	95-100%	STEM level 2

We asked about their experience using the SCONUL Access scheme, how they learned about the scheme, what they liked, what they thought could be improved and how participating in the scheme has impacted their studies. Their responses are summarised individually. Names have been changed.

## **Diana**

Diana is a mature student and is semi-retired. She had a professional career for decades and has returned to study to explore her passion for languages.

Though she has a study space in her house equipped with her own laptop and wi-fi, she enjoys going to the library to be around other students and to be in the university library space. For her, being in the library is an immersive experience that "enlivens your senses."

Diana had a positive experience both in getting access to the scheme and in her visits to her local university library. She said it was a "long time" before she got her library card but found access to her library to be a "positive and enriching experience." Other key quotes illustrate the positive experience she had and make a powerful testimonial for others to join the scheme, especially for mature students like herself.

### **Key quotations**

- Well, I went into the university and I was like the oldest person there by many decades. And the guy that I spoke to initially didn't know anything about it, so asked a supervisor. But then they basically issued my card and they did everything to try [and explain everything]: "And this is where you get your books issued. This is the way it works. If you've

got any queries, just come and ask us. This is what we're here for." And then one of them took me, gave me a guided tour around the University library. [Timestamp 0:9:32.620 --> 0:10:3.310]

- [On being in the university library with other students] And I think that kind of support, I think the youth, the energy, the positivity and the idea that there are people there, you know, making something for the future. I just found the whole thing really quite engaging. [Timestamp 0:5:54.850 --> 0:6:24.730]

- That for me walking into a library, the actual atmosphere, the silence, the smell, the sight of all these young people studying. Yes, it was different [from when she went to university 40 years ago] because they will have computers and everybody was at a computer station. But there was also space and people were still sitting there with books, and I just felt the whole thing was warm and engaging. And it's just something else that I'd never have [experienced] had I not done the course with the Open University and applied for this card and gone through that process. So, I think for anybody who, like me, may be a bit older and particularly if you find the OU experience a little bit isolating go join go and get in that environment and it just gives you a buzz. [Timestamp 0:13:6.210 --> 0:13:19.790]

- It's not just like something that you read, it's something that you feel it's something that enlivens your senses, the smell, the environment. So, it's sound, hearing touch, particularly the smell for me that made me think, "Yeah, this is what I want to do." [Timestamp 0:14:7.30 --> 0:14:10.710]

## Emily

Emily is studying Creative Writing with the OU. She has a dedicated study space, laptop and wi-fi at home. She joined the scheme primarily to borrow books, but also "liked the idea of a traditional library." Emily told us it took 3-4 weeks to get her library card and that not having access over the summer was "frustrating."

She travels by public transport to get to her nearest participating library and enjoys the ritual of preparing for the journey, visiting the library, browsing and borrowing books, and returning home to study. The process also gets her into "the study mindset" and helps her "feel more like a student." She enjoys the access she has to a print book collection at a university library but would like to be able to borrow more than four books at a time (for her 8-10 books would be ideal). She also wishes her library's collection of poetry was better updated.

### Key quotations

- I used to do lots of writing on the train to get there, so I used to take a notebook and I used to enjoy that. And I quite like being in a different environment but the actual library itself was too noisy, probably, and the way it set out is sort of like in big tables for kind of group work doesn't seem to be for an individual. You can't sort of shut yourself away there.  
[Timestamp 0:4:2.110 --> 0:4:12.760]
- So, it was really helpful, especially at the beginning. I just got some quite basic sort of textbooks for the first term. Just sort of overview of the subject really and books that I, you know, save money obviously because they would be really expensive to buy and I have loads of books I buy anyway so it stopped me spending so much. That was good and it kind of

motivated me because I think sometimes when I felt a little bit stale I could go on a trip into Ipswich and have a look at their books there. And sometimes also I think seeing a physical book and you're looking through it, you might not even be that interested when you're looking at it online.

[Timestamp 0:9:11.530 --> 0:9:17.980]

- I think it's just, for me, that I need both [print and online books/articles]. I think I need to be able to do that [research] on the computer and almost like a Google search, but then I also my brain needs that physical thing, the book titles and going down into the different areas and the physical thing of, "I'm in the poetry section now. I'm in the short stories section." There's something [about] picking out [a book] and flicking through. There is something. It's a different experience, I think. But, yeah, I suppose [having online and physical library collection] support each other.

[Timestamp 0:15:7.560 --> 0:15:20.520]

- The only the frustrating thing is ... I can only take four out so [books]. And if I was a student of [the local university], I'd be able to take a lot more out. And I think I'd be able to order stuff in and things which I can't do either. So, that is actually quite frustrating, and I wish I could borrow more and I wish I could. ... Why aren't I trusted with as many books as a regular student? It felt a little bit of a trust issue. [Timestamp 0:16:3.270 --> 0:16:3.840]

## Liza

Liza is a younger student who is in higher education for the first time. Many of her friends have already finished university, so she enjoyed studying in an academic library to participate in the kind of environment and feeling of student life she felt she missed by not attending a brick-and-mortar institution.

She was unable to use the SCONUL Access scheme until this year as there were restrictions during the pandemic and she didn't feel she needed access to the university library until she reached her current level of study. She has study space at home, but during a recent move found access to the scheme essential to find a quiet and peaceful place to study. She now incorporates visiting her SCONUL library weekly as part of her study routine.

Though a regular visitor at her library, she had a negative experience during exam time when she was turned away and told entrance during exams was restricted to students at that university. Her story illustrates how setting out clear expectations for what SCONUL Access students can expect from their host library is very important for delivering a good experience. Also, it might be food for thought about the policy itself. Is it necessary to lock these students out during busy times?

### **Key quotations**

- At the start of the new academic year, I was friends with people [through work] who are at the local university and they kind of were saying, "Oh, it would be really nice to study together." So, we just studied together and because obviously as an OU student you just don't get that interaction. Like, I don't know anyone else on my course. I don't know any other OU students. [Timestamp 0:0:51.600 --> 0:1:21.730]
- So, it started more as a place for me to find a way to study with other students as a bit of a kind of communal thing. But then once I started using the library, I realised I just quite liked it as a study space anyway, just to give me a bit of a differentiation from home study to

somewhere else to work and its sort of helped me. I started just going weekly and even if I wasn't meeting other people just because it was kind of a nice routine. This academic year I've gone like every single Wednesday go to my local university library and then if I had assignments and things maybe a little bit more to get that done and that's basically how I've been using it this academic year. [Timestamp 0:0:51.600 --> 0:1:21.730]

- It kind of made me feel more like a student like because, you know, I wasn't going to go to university at 18 and you know the traditional way. And all my friends did. I guess, you know, part of me always feels a little bit like I missed out but actually being able to go to the uni and kind of being surrounded by all the other students and being able to like access those things [and] being in an academic setting ... It kind of made me feel like I was getting a bit of more of a taste of like my own uni experience. And especially when you can kind of sit down in a group and talk about things it made me feel more included in that whole student life. [Timestamp 0:3:47.150 --> 0:4:17.60]

- I think I think it's definitely made [my studies] more enjoyable this year. I like the way that the OU is in terms of the flexibility. I wouldn't change. It's not like I'd now want to go to a brick uni because you know, I still enjoy the self-directed learning I still enjoy the flexibility that the OU has. I still like the way the courses are taught [and] all the rest of it. But it is just nice to have as a little bit of an extra to have the option to go somewhere and have the option to when I want to sometimes kind

of you know interact with that real life physical setting it's nice to have as an additional thing. [Timestamp 0:4:41.590 --> 0:5:2.190]

- I think it's definitely helped a lot this year. When you've not got a lot of direction, I found if I was sat at home and kind of just not really knowing what to do, whereas if I go to the library, it's like: "OK. No, I'm here to work." There are no distractions. It's like a dedicated study space. It mentally gets you into that space where you're like: "This is what I'm working on." So, it helped me. [Timestamp 0:9:34.60 --> 0:9:38.570]
- It made me feel a lot more on top of it and it definitely helped alleviate some stress. Because even if I was getting stressed out with it, I felt like, well, it's OK because I'm going to the library this weekend. That's when I'll get it sorted. And it helped me feel just a lot more productive. [Timestamp 0:11:11.290 --> 0:11:15.560]
- [Negative experience, denied access during exam time] Yes, so it's annoying because I had such a positive experience all year with the SCONUL scheme and with that library in particular. Like I, you know, I had nothing but good things to say about it. And then the last couple weeks, of into April, which is obviously when I was really needing to use the space, as well. So, I turned up and I went to beep my card as usual. They gave me a library card. And it didn't go through, it didn't beep. And I thought, "Oh, that's strange." So, I said to the lady, "Oh, you know, I'm sorry. My card's not working." She said, "Oh, that's absolutely fine. That's not a problem. Just tell me a student number." And I said, "Well, I'm not actually a [university name] student. I'm an OU student so I



don't have a number." And she said, "Oh, no. You're not allowed in. Well, we have to prioritise, you know, the real students." And I said, "Well, I'm studying with the Open University, so I am a student." And I said, "I've got, you know, my own dissertation thing to do my own research project to do, you know?" And she said, "Yes, but you're not proper student then, are you?" [Timestamp 0:12:50.450 --> 0:13:20.500]

## **Grant**

Grant is a mature student who lives in London. He heard about the SCONUL Access scheme through his son, who was previously a university student, and now regularly visits a local branch of the University of London. He has study space and facilities at home, but likes being in the university library for the quiet environment, to browse and borrow books, and for the discipline it brings to his study time.

As a regular user of the scheme, he relies on access to the library as part of his routine. The biggest problem for him is loss of access to these facilities over the summer. He would like continuous access so that he can revise what he has learned before he starts a new module. He contacted the OU library to have his access extended this summer and was granted this request. Perhaps this might be something that could be part of the scheme going forward as having uninterrupted access was something many of our survey respondents also requested.

## **Key quotations**

- I use it quite regularly because I use the library facilities at [college name], which is part of University of London. That's not far away from where I live and it's quite a convenient place and it's a nice place to study in ... quiet. And they've also got a lot of books there which helped and were very useful that I can also borrow, and sometimes I do. [Timestamp 0:0:10.80 --> 0:0:23.790]
- It's different than studying at home. I do study at home here, too. I've got a place that's quiet that I can study. But I think for me it's quite nice to have that discipline of going to the library and knowing that I'm gonna sit there for two or three hours and not allow myself to be disturbed, particularly if I've got something more challenging to work on, which sometimes one can inevitably sort of try and pull out of. You know if you're at home, there's always something else that you can get on with and do what you really have to do. So, that's been quite useful in that sense. [Timestamp 0:0:41.180 --> 0:0:50.790]
- [On the problems he faces with losing access to the SCONUL scheme over the summer] I think it would make it more difficult because I would have to find that discipline myself, which is sometimes difficult to do.... So that's the effect it would have. And I think that is quite an effect because I need to revise the work that I did during the year. I need to revise quite a lot of that. Although I've done quite well on the assessments, I don't remember things I and I'm older now, I'm in my 60s. So, I don't remember things anything like a as well as I may have done when I was in my 20s. So, I have to go over that material again. [Timestamp 0:3:6.500 --> 0:3:14.93]

- The biggest benefit [of the SCONUL Access scheme] is the quiet study space [and] not being disturbed, but it's also been helpful to have a library of books there on the subject that I'm studying and there are there's shelves and shelves of stuff there. [Timestamp 0:7:41.680 --> 0:7:53.980]

## **Sofia**

Sofia is a working mum and is returning to study for additional qualifications. She has used the SCONUL access scheme in the past and, now as an OU student, has visited SCONUL libraries near her. Her experience gave us some insight into how the SCONUL Access scheme is implemented a little differently at each library. For Sophia, having to apply to each library was tricky. She suggested being able to choose multiple libraries when applying to streamline the process. Also, staff at the different libraries had varying levels of understanding of the scheme. Some knew what to do and how to give access whilst other were unsure.

Sofia feels the time from registering for the scheme and gaining access is quite long. She wishes the registration process was quicker and said the current system was "a bit clunky" and feels it could put people off from using the scheme. That said, Sofia thinks the SCONUL Access scheme is an "amazing opportunity" and "an absolute lifeline." For her, access to university libraries is a wonderful benefit that she depends on.

## **Key quotations**

- Well, it's an amazing opportunity, I have to say. I've been very excited to be able to have access to libraries and especially given it's a distance learning course. So, where you miss out on that student community really. So, it's that's been really good. [Timestamp 0:0:8.270 --> 0:0:27.840]
- I think there's there is something about being in quite focused environment. I suppose you could get that in most library areas, but I think it's probably more a psychological thing rather than anything else. It's being immersed in an environment where there's people working round the clock. What I really like is that libraries that open 24 hours, so it isn't set by the working week. [Timestamp 0:4:20.180 --> 0:4:25.590]
- That's definitely something that I've really missed with the Open University, especially with the pandemic. We did used to have tutorials and things, but obviously that's all gone completely virtual. So, I think that's been more important than ever for me, having the SCONUL Access, I valued it more now than I did 10 years ago. [Timestamp 0:5:36.440 --> 0:5:57.47]
- Like my last deadline, for instance, I really struggled to find a quiet space and at weekends you don't really want to use cafes because it's just full of people having lunch. And having a library to go to was my absolute lifeline. [Timestamp 0:10:12.820 --> 0:10:22.90]
- [On improving time it takes to get the SCONUL card] The time when you register for access to a library to when you actually get the access, it's quite long. And what I suppose probably my situation being a

mature student and then having some holidays and then suddenly realising you've got to study and everything happens at once in September! I think it can take around two to three weeks and I think that sort of means that you might be waiting or studying at home. I think they could probably verify ID or do this kind of thing much quicker on an online system or an app. Like there's lots of ways to get this done really fast, so I would say the registration process impacts in that it takes a while. It's a bit clunky, might put some people off using it, not me, but it might do. [Timestamp 0:8:14.910 --> 0:8:15.840]

- What might have been bit more helpful is being able to select multiple libraries. Because I think in this day and age, people move around a lot. People travel a lot with their work being remote.

[Timestamp 0:0:44.970 --> 0:1:5.35]

# Appendix

## SCONUL Access 2023 Survey

Survey was composed and delivered in Qualtrics

### Intro

SCONUL Access is the scheme which allows you to visit other member libraries to study, check out books and use other services. We want to know more about how you have (or have not) used the scheme and what effect it has had on your studies so we can make improvements and understand how the scheme impacts on your experience as an OU student.

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Q1 What was your reason for signing up the SCONUL Access scheme? (Please choose all that apply)

- To visit a library to study (1)
- To borrow books from a library (2)
- To use computers at a library (3)
- To use print resources (e.g. books, journals) at a library (4)
- To use the helpdesk at a library (5)
- Other (6)

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Q2 How did you learn about the SCONUL Access scheme?

- I had previously been a member (1)
  - Library website (2)
  - SCONUL website (3)
  - Recommended by tutor (4)
  - Recommended by another student (5)
  - Recommended by another library (6)
  - Other (7)
- 
- 

Q3 How easy or difficult was signing up for the scheme?

- Very easy (1)
  - Somewhat easy (2)
  - Neither easy nor difficult (3)
  - Somewhat difficult (4)
  - Very difficult (5)
-



*Display This Question:*

*If How easy or difficult was signing up for the scheme? = Somewhat difficult*

*Or How easy or difficult was signing up for the scheme? = Very difficult*

Q3a What would make signing up easier for you?

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Q4 Did you use the library that you planned to visit when you signed up for the scheme?

- I used the library I planned to visit (1)
  - I used the library I planned to visit and other libraries (2)
  - I did not go to any library (3)
  - I don't remember which library I planned to visit at sign up (4)
-

Q5 As a SCONUL Access member, I ... (Please choose all that apply)

- Visited a library to study (1)
  - Borrowed books from a library (2)
  - Used computers at a library (3)
  - Used print resources (e.g. books, journals) at a library (4)
  - Used the helpdesk at a library (5)
  - I have not used any services at a library (6)
  - Other (7)
- 

*Display This Question:*

*If As a SCONUL Access member, I ... (Please choose all that apply) = I have not used any services at a library*

Q6 Please tell us why you have not used any SCONUL Access services.

- Have not had time (1)
  - Have been unable to travel to a library (2)
  - Have not had the need to use these services (3)
  - Plan to use them, but have not yet (4)
  - Need services that are not part of the scheme (please tell us what those are in the Other box) (5)
  - Unable to use the library because it is inaccessible to me (6)
  - Other (7)
- 
- 

*Display This Question:*

*If As a SCONUL Access member, I ... (Please choose all that apply) = Visited a library to study*

*Or As a SCONUL Access member, I ... (Please choose all that apply) = Borrowed books from a library*

*Or As a SCONUL Access member, I ... (Please choose all that apply) = Used computers at a library*

*Or As a SCONUL Access member, I ... (Please choose all that apply) = Used print resources (e.g. books, journals) at a library*

*Or As a SCONUL Access member, I ... (Please choose all that apply) = Used the helpdesk at a library*

*Or Or As a SCONUL Access member, I ... (Please choose all that apply) Text Response Is Not Empty*

Q7 About how often have you used these services?

- Frequently (once a month or more) (1)
- Occasionally (once every few months) (2)
- Rarely (once or twice a year) (3)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If About how often have you used these services? = Frequently (once a month or more)*

*Or About how often have you used these services? = Occasionally (once every few months)*

*Or About how often have you used these services? = Rarely (once or twice a year)*

Q8 How did your experience using these services meet your expectations?

- Exceeded expectations (1)
- Met expectations (2)
- Did not meet expectations (3)

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Page Break

Q9 What is the aspect of the scheme that you like most?

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Q10 What aspect of the scheme could be improved?

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Q11 Has being part of the SCONUL Access scheme impacted your studies?

- Positive - It has had a positive impact (1)
- Neutral - It has not had an impact (2)
- Negative - It has had a negative impact (3)
- I have not used the scheme yet, so cannot say (4)

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*Display This Question:*

*If Has being part of the SCONUL Access scheme impacted your studies? = Positive - It has had a positive impact*

*Or Has being part of the SCONUL Access scheme impacted your studies? = Neutral - It has not had an impact*

*Or Has being part of the SCONUL Access scheme impacted your studies? = Negative - It has had a negative impact*

Q12 Please tell us more.

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Q14 Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the SCONUL Access scheme?

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End of Block: Default Question Block

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Start of Block: Further research

Q16 If you are willing to share more details about your experience, please let us know if you would like to participate in a one-on-one chat about your experience as a SCONUL Access member. As a thank you for your time, we will send you a £20 AmazonUK voucher.

We are interested in talking to both students who have actively used the scheme and also those who are members but have not visited a library yet. These chats will take about 20 minutes and will take place online. Your comments will be anonymised and we will not use your likeness, voice or identifying information in any reporting. You can opt out of answering any questions you do not want to answer.

If you are interested, please sign up and we will be in touch by 26 May to let you know if you were selected.

\* We regret that AmazonUK vouchers can only be used by students residing in the UK and we cannot provide them to OU staff.

- Yes, I would like to participate (1)
- Maybe, please email me so I can learn more (2)
- No, thank you (3)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If you are willing to share more details about your experience, please let us know if you would like to participate = Yes, I would like to participate*

*Or if you are willing to share more details about your experience, please let us know if you would like to participate = Maybe, please email me so I can learn more*

Q17 Thank you for your interest in the next phase of our research! Please enter your email address.

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