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Building communities for student success: facilitating student belonging through online inductions

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Abstract

In 2022, The Open University in Wales launched a series of online induction events for new students, aiming to develop students' sense of belonging, provide an effective transition to the university, and ultimately, to support students to succeed.

A theory of change (ToC) model informed the design and evaluation of the induction events. This article presents the initial evaluation, using qualitative and quantitative data to test the assumptions underpinning the ToC and explore questions such as: are online induction events effective for developing a sense of belonging? Which students attended the events? What do we know about the subsequent academic performance of students who attended compared to those who did not?

The results suggest that well-designed online induction events can effectively foster a sense of belonging among students. However, when examining factors such as socio-demographic characteristics, certain groups of students appear less likely to participate. The authors emphasise the importance of using data to develop awareness of potential systemic barriers to engagement, and using these insights to remove barriers, address the specific needs of diverse student populations, and foster a more supportive and inclusive educational environment.

Key words part-time; higher education; student success; community and belonging; online induction; transition; theory of change

Introduction

An effective university induction is fundamental in helping students to successfully integrate with the university community. When students feel more connected to the university – including to other students and staff – they are more likely to succeed

(Thomas, 2012). While there is a growing body of research on the importance of student communities and effective induction, it is mostly focused on campus-based universities. This article looks into the effectiveness of online induction events for part-time distance learning students, exploring key themes such as student sense of belonging, transition to higher education (HE) for part-time, distance learning students, and student success. The evaluation is designed using a theory of change (ToC) model.

The Open University (OU) provides HE through supported distance learning, which presents specific challenges to consider for delivering inductions and building student communities. For instance, there are fewer organic prospects for students' sense of community and belonging to develop (Redmond *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, online students are more likely to be older, working, managing caring responsibilities, and subsequently to have limited time resource (Rizvi, Rienties and Khoja, 2019; Chen, Lambert and Guidry, 2010) to participate in community-building activities.

The overarching mission of the OU is to promote educational opportunity and social justice. Most courses do not have entry requirements, enabling people of all ages and backgrounds with no prior educational qualifications to studyⁱ.

In 2021/22 around 15,500 students studied at the OU in Wales, with 45% living in Wales' most deprived areasⁱⁱ, 27% declaring a disability and 41% entering with fewer than two A Levelsⁱⁱⁱ. Student data analysis undertaken by the OU in Wales shows that these factors can impact a student's likelihood to access and succeed in HE.

Over the last three years, the number of students not completing their modules has increased^{iv}. Concurrently, the OU in Wales has performed below the sector average on the National Student Survey (NSS) question on whether students feel part of a community^v.

A student success plan was developed in the spring of 2022 to address the increasing number of students not completing modules. One strand of this plan centres on induction, recognising the importance of effective early interventions to ensure students have appropriate knowledge, reassurance and access to support systems (Thomas, 2012). An online induction

programme was created, which included staff introductions and welcome videos, study preparation advice, signposting to key resources and services, and online forums. The main induction activity was a live event (delivered multiple times across three weeks), which will be the focus of this paper.

Why focus on induction, community and belonging?

There is a wide body of research on the relationship between engagement, belonging, community and student success – although much of this focuses on campus-based delivery. Kahu (2013) and Tight (2020) evidence significant association between belonging and achievement. Thomas's (2012) extensive review of activity across the sector found an empirical link between students' engagement with their institution, staff and other students, and retention. Masika and Jones (2016) demonstrate that involvement in the institution through positive staff-student relationships, peer interactions and extracurricular activities all contribute towards a sense of belonging and, consequently, retention. Conversely, research has also shown that when students feel they do not belong, they are at a higher risk of non-completion (Maunder, 2018).

Increased engagement in the student-staff community, combined with a sense of shared ownership of that community, can empower students to be more active in their studies (Gray, Swain and Rodway-Dyer, 2014). This helps to challenge concepts of 'us' and 'them', breaking down the barriers between staff and students (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2016). Students who feel more connected to the institution also have a positive ripple effect on the engagement levels of staff and other students, improving collective motivation levels (Matos *et al.*, 2018).

The first year of university study is a crucial time for students to successfully integrate and connect with the institution (Meehan and Howells, 2019; Thomas, 2019). As Thomas (2012) observes, induction activities should provide students with an opportunity to build connections with peers and staff, and increase their awareness of the institution and its relevance to their values and aspirations.

In the context of online distance learning, delivering induction activities to build communities can be more challenging (Foley

and Marr, 2019). Students in these environments are less likely to see themselves as part of a community, particularly if they are part-time, mature learners balancing work, life and study commitments (Butcher, 2015). As such, facilitating a sense of trust – which is fundamental for developing community and belonging in an online space – requires deliberate planning and reflection (Meyer, 2014). Interactions are most effective when there are opportunities for social and emotional engagement (Redmond *et al.*, 2018), and anchoring onto concepts of shared experiences and interests as primary aspects of community can facilitate online relatedness (Foley and Marr, 2019).

Concepts of community and belonging are distinct but related. In the OU, belonging is defined as:

'A students' sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged, feeling that they are an important part of the life and activity of the learning environment' ^{vi}

Belonging is seen as a key building block for developing communities among groups of individuals who share the same purpose.

At the OU in Wales, feedback from student representatives and National Student Survey (NSS) results highlighted that students felt isolated and wanted more opportunities to connect with each other. In response to this feedback, and as a mechanism to address module non-completion rates, an induction project team was established with a specific remit to focus on 'community and belonging'.

Developing a Theory of Change for induction events

The induction events were designed using a Theory of Change (ToC) model, as outlined in Table 1. ToCs are useful for identifying connections between a project's inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes (TASO, 2023a). The ToC iterative approach provided a framework for continuous improvement, which shaped the design and development of the induction events through several stages. The first iteration of the ToC focused on fostering a sense of belonging as the main aim. Following the pilot, an additional two aims were developed and added to the ToC. The updated ToC is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Induction Events Theory of Change model

Situation	Over the last few years, there has been (i) a decline in the number of students completing their modules and (ii) more students reporting they do not feel part of a community (NSS) and want more opportunity to connect with other students (student rep feedback).
Aim	Design and deliver an induction programme that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 helps students develop an understanding of what OU study involves. 2 provides reassurance and highlights support available. 3 fosters a sense of belonging.
Rationale	A response to student feedback, combined with a need to improve student module completion rates. Many new students feel isolated, unprepared for OU study and are often unaware of the support available to them. An induction event could support students to start their studies feeling more prepared, confident and connected to other students, which could ultimately support higher module completion rates.
Evidence	Higher rates of student engagement, sense of belonging and community lead to higher rates of student success. It is particularly important to embed this as early as possible into the student journey.
Assumption	Online induction events are effective to prepare students for their studies (and meet the three aims stated above), which will support future development of student communities.
Risk	Student engagement may vary across socio-demographics.
Inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A project team (staff and students) • Data analyst support • Staff and student input for feedback/consultation • A platform to deliver the online event
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration with student representatives • Initial pilot event • Collaborative workshop with staff and students • Induction event design • Evaluation design
Output	An online induction programme including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introductions • study preparation advice • forum for online conversations • a series of online synchronous induction events for all new undergraduate students at the OU in Wales.
Short-term outcomes	Following the event, students will: have a better understanding of what OU study involves (aim 1); feel reassured and aware of support available (aim

	2); feel better connected to staff and students (aim 3)
Medium-term outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Higher first assignment submission rates (aims 1/2)• Higher first assignment grades (aims 1/2)• Contact rate with the student support team (aim 2)• Higher rates of student engagement (e.g. Virtual Learning Environment Engagement, event attendance, online forums) (aim 3)
Long-term (impact)	An increased sense of belonging and community, and an ability to identify where to go for support, which could support increased module completion and pass rates.

As a complex initiative in the early stage of development, the evaluation focused primarily on process and assumptions rather than impact evaluation and causality – an approach advocated by TASO (2023b). Several evaluative questions were developed, three of which are the focus of this article:

- Q1 - To what extent are the online induction events effective in facilitating a sense of belonging among students?
- Q2 - What are the socio-demographic characteristics of students who attended the induction events?
- Q3 - What do we know about the subsequent academic performance of students who attended compared to those who did not?

Quantitative data was used in the form of descriptive statistics to inform testing of assumptions underpinning the ToC.

Qualitative data

To address Q1, data was collected through a variety of evaluation activities:

- During the induction events, students anonymously submitted responses via online polls at the start, middle and end of the live session.
- A post-event survey (anonymised) sent to students who attended the induction events. The survey questions focused on measuring student belonging and were adapted from The Centre for Higher Education and Research and Scholarship toolkit on education evaluation (2023).

- Post-event reflections from staff and student representatives.

The team undertook a thematic analysis of the qualitative data. The emerging key themes contributed to the overall evaluation and are discussed in the Findings section.

Quantitative data

To address Q2 and Q3, student unique identifier numbers were used for anonymised monitoring using learning analytics data. A descriptive analysis was undertaken, considering student socio-demographic data (declared disability, Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) Q1 and Q2ⁱ, low previous entry qualifications (Low PEQs) ⁱⁱ) and initial student success markers (first assignment submission rates, average grades and module completion rates). This paper does not investigate access to support services, but this aspect will feature in the next iteration of the ToC.

Developing induction events

The team undertook a staged approach to the design and delivery of the induction events, informed by staff reflections and student feedback. This iterative approach has been fundamental – through each stage, the project team were able to gather more information and test their understandings; this was further strengthened by including staff and student voices. The information gathered through the various stages led to new iterations of the ToC and informed the design of the induction events.

Stage 1 (Pilot)

A small pilot induction session was delivered for new students starting in February 2022. The aim was to assess the level of interest from students and test some content ideas. The session was well received, with 95% of the students saying they would recommend it to others.

Stage 2 (Workshop with OU staff and students)

Staff and students were invited to a collaborative workshop. The aim was to identify the needs of new OU students and determine what could be addressed by the induction events and how. The NERUPI framework^{vii} was used as a reference point in

some of the workshop discussions. There are certain limitations in applying this framework within the context of the induction events due to its primary focus on younger learners. Despite this, the Transition stage of the framework proved helpful for considering what students might need as they begin university. Workshop attendees were encouraged to review the NERUPI readiness statements and consider their applicability to part-time distance learners. Three main themes emerged:

1. Students need to understand what being an OU student means in practice and how to navigate this new online environment.
2. Students need to be reassured and made aware of the support and services available to them.
3. Students need to feel they are joining a community of learning and understand how to connect and build relationships with staff and peers.

These themes directly influenced the aims and content of the induction events. They also led to a second iteration of the ToC (see Table 1), expanding it beyond the initial focus on community and belonging.

Stage 3 (Induction events)

The online induction events were delivered by student support practitioners, academic colleagues and student representatives. The events were intended to be student-centred, interactive and inclusive. Figure 1 shows how the content and approach was designed to address the student needs identified through the stage 2 workshop.

Develop an understanding of the OU experience

- Explain how distance learning works in practice
- Support IT confidence with informal Adobe Connect drop-in sessions
- Describe the role of the tutor (Curriculum Support)
- Describe the role of Student Support (General Support)
- Describe the role of the Students' Association (Peer Support and socialising)
- Describe the Help Centre (Self Support)
- Deliver a Question and Answer interactive session shaped by students

Provide reassurance and highlight support

- Manage expectations
- Normalise help-seeking behaviours
- Demystify the technology involved
- Use an informal tone – friendly and approachable
- Humanise the online environment
- Remove 'us' and 'them' concepts by getting to know staff
- Deliver immediate answers, real-time responses
- Provide anonymity for students

Encourage a sense of belonging

- Run polls on goals and expectations – highlight similarities between students
- Deliver anonymous Q&A on worries and concerns – highlight similarities between students and reinforce common queries
- Emphasise Welsh identity and geography (Guess the Castle Quiz, and incidental everyday Welsh language)
- Draw out lived experiences
- Share demographics of OU students – normalise their backgrounds and reiterate that they belong in HE
- Provide the chat function for students throughout – peer-to-peer interaction

Figure 1: Designing the online induction event aligned to identified needs of students

The first half of the induction event was a structured presentation. Students were encouraged to ask questions, interact using the chat function and engage in polls. This section included information on the four main sources of support: – the tutor, student support services, peer support and the Students Association, and self-directed support.

The second half of the session was led by students' expressions of their worries or concerns, submitted anonymously through a question-and-answer feature. The staff delivering the session used these queries and concerns as a framework to explain how university and OU study works.

Findings

This section attempts to check whether the assumption in our initial ToC (that online induction events are effective in preparing students for their studies) is true and whether the aims of the programme were met. It draws on the qualitative and quantitative data analysis to address the three evaluation questions.

Q1: To what extent are the online induction events effective in facilitating a sense of belonging among students?

During the sessions, students were initially asked in a poll 'What do you want from today's session?' Their comments provided an insight into the nature of their motivation for attending the induction events and were grouped into three areas of concern, illustrated by the students' quotes provided below.

Students told us that they didn't know what to expect and wanted to understand how OU study works:

'I want to know what to expect – how will I learn?'

'Show me how it works and help me feel less anxious.'

'I want a more personal introduction to the university before my module starts.'

Students described feeling nervous, because of a lack of experience or worry about fitting in study around their busy lives, and wanted to be reassured:

'...it's my first time studying – I need reassurance'.

'I want to feel less nervous and more confident.'

'Can I really fit this in around other responsibilities?'

Finally, students expressed feelings of isolation and a desire to connect with peers:

'I want to link with other students from Wales and know I am not alone.'

'I'd like connection and to get to know people.'

These concerns mirrored the themes initially identified in the staff and student collaborative workshop and the corresponding aims of the induction events. This confirmed that the content and approach of the induction events aligned with the needs of new students who attended. The findings echo previous research showing that part-time distance learner needs are complex and often relate to confidence building, providing support and reassurance (Canning, 2010).

The post-event survey was completed by 38 attendees out of 501^{viii} – a 7.6% response rate. Seventy-three per cent of respondents said that they felt the event helped them feel connected to other students; 84% agreed that it helped them feel connected to the OU in Wales; and 100% said they would recommend the event to other students. Open-ended survey feedback demonstrated success in meeting the aims of building connections and providing reassurance.

Students were asked: 'What did you like most about the event?':

'The feeling of being heard and being part of a community, not just a number. It put my mind at ease about the course.'

'I enjoyed seeing the OU face to face.'

'I felt more at ease and not so anxious.'

'I found the event really reassuring and it calmed my nerves. It was great to read other students' comments as it made me feel less alone. The three people who conducted the event were excellent.'

'It was good to feel like there was a local flavour to being part of The Open University.'

The students' comments suggest that the assumption underpinning the ToC was broadly correct: the online induction events can be effective for developing a sense of belonging. However, the discrepancy in the percentage of students who felt more connected to the OU in Wales than to their peers illustrates a potential need for more peer-to-peer interaction.

Staff reflections also highlighted the effectiveness of the events in developing a sense of belonging at a distance. Firstly, staff realised the importance of intentional design and planning to foster a sense of belonging. The use of polls generated conversations about OU study, which helped to normalise any concerns students had. Deliberate use of cultural markers linked to Welsh identity and geography – such as a 'Guess the Castle' quiz – prompted students to share their stories, locations and experiences. This helped to facilitate a sense of belonging, as similarly perceived by Barnard, Paton and Rose (2007).

Moreover, the impact and visibility of creating connections appears to have had a cumulative effect. Community can be a challenging concept to measure and takes time to build, but student representatives reported that the induction events continued to have an ongoing positive impact. Comments about involvement in these events prompted further discussion in OU and student-led spaces (online forums and Facebook groups) giving opportunities for students to continue to engage and connect with others. It created pathways for students (attendees and non-attendees) to see the value and get further involved with similar events, having a positive ripple effect on the student community.

Q2: What are the socio-demographic characteristics of those students who attend?

This second research question is designed to monitor the risk identified within the ToC – that engagement in induction events may vary across socio-demographic characteristics.

In Wales, 3,971 new undergraduate students were invited to the induction events over the academic year, which included two cohorts – September 2022 and February 2023. Of these, 16% (626) attended a session.

The initial analysis considered the socio-demographic characteristics of students who attended an induction event and compared it against students who did not attend. This included key characteristics aligned with the OU Access, Participation and Success strategy, as shown in Table 2. As students may relate to multiple characteristics, some students will be counted multiple times in the data (e.g. a student might be under 30 and declare a disability).

Table 2: The socio-demographic characteristics of students who attended compared to those who were invited but did not attend

Group	Attended	Invited but did not attend
Total number of students	626 (100%)	3345 (100%)
Declared disability	28%	24%
Black, Asian, minority ethnic	4%	6%
WIMD Q1 and Q2	49%	51%
Low Previous Entry Qualifications	41%	47%
Under 30	36%	33%
Women	76%	69%

When compared to the students who did not attend an induction event, the cohort of students who attended included a higher proportion of three of the characteristics: declared disability (+4 percentage points); under 30 (+3 percentage points) and women (+7 percentage points).

The higher proportion of declared disabilities among attendees might be influenced by the induction content's relevance to these students. However, the retrospective nature of the data analysis meant it was not possible to ascertain when a student declared their disability and whether it was in response to the induction event, if existing needs led them to attend, or indeed no relationship existed between the induction and the disability disclosure.

The majority of students studying at the OU in Wales are women and while this accounts for the higher proportions of

women across both cohorts, it does not explain the seven percentage point gap between attendees and non-attendees.

The characteristics with a lower proportion of students attending include Black, Asian and minority ethnic (-2 percentage points), WIMD Q1 and Q1 (-2 percentage points) and Low Previous Entry Qualifications (-6 percentage points). Caution is needed when considering the differences for Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups as they relate to small numbers of students.

Numerous factors could contribute to these differences, and they will inevitably be impacted by intersectionality. For example, the scheduling of induction events may inadvertently favour students not engaged in full-time employment; national statistics reveal a significant gender disparity in employment patterns, with women being less likely to work full-time compared to men and more likely to engage in part-time roles (House of Commons Library 2023). Equally, the digital way in which the events are delivered may favour certain groups or present a barrier for others. For instance, younger students might be more inclined to attend the events due to greater familiarity with such programmes, including the digital nature in which they are delivered (Matthews, Nazroo and Marshall, 2019). Conversely, students with lower prior qualifications may have had fewer opportunities to develop the necessary digital literacy skills to fully navigate and participate in online environments (Khalid and Pedersen, 2016). Additionally, students from areas of higher deprivation may be limited by poor infrastructure or financial constraints, leading to digital exclusion and poor internet connectivity (Morris, Morris and Bowen, 2022).

These potential explanations do not assume a lack of interest or value placed on education by these groups. Instead, they highlight possible systemic barriers impacting their engagement levels. This highlights the importance of implementing strategies to understand and consider challenges in order to encourage inclusive participation. By understanding these dynamics of induction event participation, it will be possible to better tailor induction events to remove barriers and address the specific needs of diverse student populations, fostering a more supportive and inclusive educational environment. These findings

will inform the next iteration of the ToC, so that it focuses on addressing unequal participation across socio-demographic characteristics.

Q3: What do the early indicators of student success tell us about students who attended induction events?

The learning analytics data allows us to identify differences between students who attended an induction event and students who did not.

Table 3: Comparing learning analytics data of students who attended induction events vs students who did not*

Group	Attended	Did not attend
First assignment – average submission rate	85%	81%
First assignment – average grade	73%	68%
Module completion rate	76%	58%

*Based on data from the September 2022 cohort as the full February 2023 cohort data was not yet available.

Table 3 illustrates that students who attended an induction event performed better across all three indicators of student success: module completion rates; first assignment submission rates; and first assignment grades, which addressed the medium-term outcome of the ToC. However, rather than asserting causality (which would not be possible with the current approach, nor was it the aim), the value of these findings lies in shaping questions to guide further exploration.

The higher academic performance of induction event attendees is perhaps not surprising; the literature already highlights the importance of early engagement for student success (e.g. see Thomas, 2012), and it is possible that students who engaged in the induction events were a self-selecting group already likely to perform well. While it may be too ambitious to suggest that a one-off induction event could increase module completion rates, existing research suggests there is a role for induction events in helping students to engage early by alleviating transition-related

anxieties, clarifying academic and support queries, and helping students to navigate the new environment.

Conclusion

The online induction events were designed to facilitate the transition of students into online distance learning, with the aims of helping them develop an understanding of OU study, providing reassurance by highlighting available support, and encouraging a sense of community and belonging. Given this is a new initiative, the evaluation focused on testing the assumptions underpinning the ToC (i.e. that induction events are a suitable mechanism for delivering these three aims).

The data suggests online induction events that combine information provision, reassurance and opportunities to connect with other staff and students may develop a student's sense of belonging, but careful planning and early integration in the student journey is essential to encourage engagement for those who are 'time poor'. This is particularly important for students studying at the OU: the student representative on the project commented that students are more likely to attend social/community-building activities if there is a direct link to their studies. Activities that are purely social risk being perceived as a luxury of time that students cannot afford. The induction events appear to have been successful in developing students' sense of belonging within activities linked to study, thus optimising time for students.

In addition to thinking about the pedagogy of online programmes, consideration of the socio-demographic characteristics and needs of the student population – those who attend events and particularly those who do not attend events – is important. While students declaring disabilities, those under 30, and women are overrepresented among attendees, there is under-representation from Black, Asian and minority ethnic students, those from higher deprivation areas, and individuals with low prior qualifications. The analysis draws on existing literature to offer some possible reasons for the differences, but further research would be needed to explore this more fully. The analysis also highlights a difference in academic performance between induction event attendees and non-attendees. This

observation should not be interpreted as direct causality (i.e. that the welcome events resulted in improved academic performance), but rather as an indication that warrants further research into how early engagement might correlate with academic success (for previous examples see Thomas, 2012; Maunder, 2018). Nevertheless, the theory of change model appears useful for designing interventions with consideration to the systematic barriers faced by certain groups of students.

Prompted by these preliminary findings, the project team has identified additional questions for consideration, such as: How do we engage students who are under-represented in the induction events (e.g. low previous qualifications)? Could the differences in academic performance be reduced by targeting tailored one-to-one support at students who do not attend induction events? Are one-to-many induction activities a useful tool for supporting larger groups of students with limited resources and a small agile team? Do induction activities generate more contact with the student support team? These questions will be considered in future iterations of the ToC.

The data presented in this paper suggests the initial ToC model and underpinning assumptions were broadly appropriate: that online induction appears effective for (1) helping students to understand what OU study involves (2) providing reassurance through highlighting support and (3) fostering a sense of belonging. As a result, the project team will move on to the next iteration of the ToC, considering additional questions that have been raised, testing further assumptions and, ultimately, moving towards evaluating the longer-term impact of the student retention plan.

The article aims to contribute to the expanding body of research exploring the complex relationships between student outcomes, effective induction processes, and the cultivation of a sense of belonging and community – particularly within the context of part-time, distance learning students. It is important to note the limitations of this study, including its focus on a single institution and the reliance on self-reported data, which may not fully capture the nuances of student engagement and success. However, the focus on these student socio-demographics highlights potential nuances and distinct challenges faced by

learners outside traditional full-time, on-campus settings. It stresses the importance of developing specialised strategies within induction programmes that resonate with the specific needs and realities of part-time students, whose experiences and pathways in distance education may differ from their full-time counterparts. This targeted approach in understanding and enhancing their educational journey seems important for fostering a more inclusive, engaged and successful academic community.

ⁱ Other Higher Education institutions in the UK have entry requirements, usually in the form of qualifications that they use in determining student offers of course places. For more information on types of entry requirements, see <https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/advice/ucas-application/what-are-university-entry-requirements>. To review institutions' varied acceptance rates see UCAS data <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-data-resources-2022>

ⁱⁱ Based on the bottom two quintiles (Q) of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). For further information, see: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation>

ⁱⁱⁱ Low PEQs (Previous Entry Qualifications) are defined as less than 2 A Levels or equivalent. For further information on A Levels as a qualification, see: <https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/advice/a-level-choices/how-are-my-as-and-a-level-studies-structured>

^{iv} At the OU, modules are typically 60 credits and occur across a whole academic year (9 months) of study. The largest intake of students is in September/October, and there are smaller intakes throughout the year, the second largest being in February.

^v The NSS is a UK-wide survey that collected feedback from university and college students. This particular question asked students whether they agree with the statement: 'I feel part of a community of staff and students.' In 2022, the Wales part-time sector average was 59% agreement, and 61% for full-time students. The OU in Wales figure was 51%, and the OU overall was 48%. The sector-wide averages decreased in 2021 and 2022 from 2020 as the sector shifted to online provision as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information, review the released statistics: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/nss-data-provider-level/> .

Note: this question was removed from the NSS in 2023

^{vi} Definitions of belonging and community were developed as part of a year-long Task and Finish group, which included mapping existing and previous community activities across the institution and identifying recommendations to improve NSS rankings. This activity is ongoing.

vii The Network for Evaluating and Research University Participation Interventions (NERUPI) is a community of practice focused on reducing inequalities in HE. The NERUPI framework brings together theory, research and practice to help evaluate student access, participation and success interventions. For further information, see: <https://www.nerupi.co.uk/about/overview>

viii The survey was only given to the September 2022 cohort.

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