

## THE SENATE

### Group Tuition Policy

The Group Tuition Policy has built on the Principles previously discussed by the Senate (S-2014-01-08). They and the resulting Policy have been enhanced by contributions from across the University through a wide-ranging consultation process over the last year.

The implementation process will commence on agreement to the Business Case and related Implementation Plan by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE). The Implementation Plan aims to phase in impact on students from October 2015 onwards, dependent on the development of both systems and processes to support the proposed change.

The Senate is asked **to approve** the Group Tuition Policy.

## INTRODUCTION

### Rationale

- 1 Group tuition has been a fundamental part of the Open University's teaching, learning and student support model since its inception; its facilitation by Associate Lecturers (ALs) through tutorials, day schools, residential schools and online has enhanced the educational experience for many thousands of OU learners. It is vital that we maintain and develop the quality of all aspects of learning support, to better facilitate the achievement of learning outcomes of our increasingly diverse student body as we expand into new local and global markets. Group tuition, embracing dialogic and transactional pedagogies, is an essential aspect of the OU's model of high-quality learning support.
- 2 This Policy and its underpinning Principles aim to bring a new focus and clarity to the use of group tuition within the University and to offer greater quality and parity in the student learning experience. In the student consultation on the Principles (March 2014) many students said that they wished to attend group tuition events but were unable to do so because of the restricted nature of current provision. This policy aims to increase pedagogic benefit to students through participation in group tuition, by enabling students and staff to engage more creatively and inclusively, as well as by increasing flexibility and choice. The policy will enable the University to use its resources well by bringing to the surface necessary changes to pedagogic, managerial, operational and business processes.

### Problem Statement

- 3 The policy is aligned with the Student Charter, particularly its emphasis on aiming to inspire and enable learning within an academic community (Principle 2), promoting inclusivity, supporting diversity and challenging inequality (Principle 1). Notwithstanding the importance of addressing the needs of all of our diverse student cohorts, with their variety of national, social and religious cultures and educational and working environments, the Student Charter establishes a requirement to meet the more specific needs of international and other geographically remote or isolated students. Whilst the challenges and benefits of providing group tuition to a very diverse student body are not unique to students outside the

United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (UK/RoI), the issues raised by tutoring students in different time zones must be addressed explicitly and are therefore part of this Policy.

- 4 The Policy refers to group tuition delivered by Open University staff, including that delivered as part of a partnership agreement. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) requires that all learners studying towards an Open University qualification have an equivalent study experience.
- 5 The Policy is focused on group tuition within modules – the vast majority of the University's current provision. However it also recognises the needs of group tuition to support students consistently at the qualification and/or wider curriculum level.
- 6 The main purpose of all group tuition is, in the broadest sense, the facilitation of learning. Its ultimate aim must be to improve the learning experience of our students and their academic success, as measured by retention, attainment and progression. However, the OU's current rate of students achieving their stated outcomes suggests that we need to strengthen the use of every mechanism we have to improve students' success.
- 7 The range of support (including group tuition) available to students is a key factor in the OU's consistent success in the National Student Survey (NSS), helping to maintain the University's reputation and enhance recruitment. Student consultation on group tuition revealed high levels of support for the activity, with frequent expressions of regret when unable to attend. Those who do partake in group tuition value the opportunities it offers (see research repository at <https://intranet7.open.ac.uk/project-collaboration/tuition-strategy/SitePages/Home.aspx>). Despite students' support for the learning experience offered by group tuition, more than 50% of our students currently do not attend group tuition regularly.
- 8 Over the years, tuition practices have naturally shifted to address the changing needs of learners, the availability of new technologies and the varied demands of disciplines: what may have started over forty years ago as a unified picture has become very diverse. This way of working has enabled successful responsiveness to changing environments. For instance, we are already embracing increased flexibility to enable more students to access group tuition. However, the role of group tuition is highly varied across modules and not always clearly planned for when modules and qualifications are being designed. This in itself is unsatisfactory as the University seeks to better address pressures to provide equal opportunities that will enable all our students to succeed. The purpose and quality of this part of the student experience has to be subject to review, quality assurance and quality enhancement along with all others.
- 9 Significant research, innovative pilots and exploration, both of the wider literature beyond the OU and as undertaken by staff across the University since 2003, has contributed to our understanding of what constitutes good practice and informs the Policy. This includes research on 2012J students commissioned specifically for the purposes of the group tuition review in 2013 (Goodfellow, 2014 in the repository <https://intranet7.open.ac.uk/project-collaboration/tuition-strategy/SitePages/Home.aspx>), which considered students' self-reported attendance at tutorials, day schools and online tutorials and their subsequent performance on the module. Wider research has highlighted relevant potential benefits from or purposes for group tuition which are recognised in the Policy and will be explored further over time (e.g. Crook and Jelfs, 2007 in the repository).
- 10 Some of the research and pilots that have informed this Policy are focused on understanding how group tuition can best be supported through online technologies. From the research and from much AL experience, it is clear that simply transferring face to face group tuition practices to an online context does not work. Incorporating online tuition into a blended learning environment which includes face to face tuition clearly requires us to think

carefully about how different media can be used to achieve comparable and/or different objectives. There are many lessons which we can take from the existing literature on the purposeful use of the virtual classroom, alongside what we already know is good practice in other learning environments. Learning design must include consideration of good practice across the range of learning environments, whether face to face or online: the focus is on how we can best support our students to achieve their qualifications or other study goals.

- 11 It is important to emphasise that the review of group tuition and the development of this Policy aims to build on all that we know of good practice in all forms of tuition including face to face tuition, which remains a central part of the provision. The Policy draws together and reflects the good practice already in play in the University, whilst aiming to ensure we remain fit for purpose in the future by encouraging experimentation and innovation.

## DEFINITIONS

- 12 The following definitions are intended to clarify terms used throughout the Policy.
- a) **Group tuition** refers to any interactive tuition activity or event delivered by Open University staff for a group of students to facilitate their learning and/or support, normally on a module or qualification. This definition, and hence this Policy, **excludes** the tuition delivered by an individual AL to an individual student, the use of recordings of online events and student to student peer support activities.
  - b) The Policy uses the term **learning event** as a short-hand inclusive term, meaning any group tuition taking place in real time, either online (normally through OU Live) or face to face (tutorials, day schools and residential schools), either within a tutor group, a cluster or another grouping of students (e.g. a residential school), led by a member of staff. It is synonymous with **synchronous group tuition**. Such events will normally be referred to as 'learning events' because the term 'synchronous' tends to be used in a technical online context so can be read as excluding face to face events, which is not the intention.
  - c) **Asynchronous group tuition** refers to learning that may be delivered via a range of media not limited to but including email, forums, wikis, blogs and other social media where interaction is not inherently in real time. The distinction is drawn between this form of group tuition and group tuition delivered via learning events because the differences in the nature of the interactions will drive significant differences in the purposes identified for the different forms of group tuition, the activities designed for the different media and the pedagogy employed. Asynchronous activities may of course be linked to learning events and /or time-bound in other ways.
  - d) **Blended tuition** refers to a strategy where a module or qualification explicitly chooses to use a mix of face to face and online learning events and asynchronous group tuition within their tuition strategy – the norm within the University. In terms of learning design, a blended tuition approach suggests that the different teaching media are integrated to best learning effect.
  - e) **International students** in the context of this Policy (not beyond) are those students who register as living outside the United Kingdom and/or the Republic of Ireland (i.e. living outside those areas where ALs are able to be employed by the OU). Republic of Ireland students, whilst technically 'international' in relation to a UK organisation, can be treated the same as any Northern Ireland students in relation to issues relevant to this Policy. Three factors, the creation of appropriately mixed tutor groups, the delivery of group tuition to students who are geographically isolated from their AL and the management of students across time zones, create the need to define 'international students' within this Policy. All other aspects of working with students living outside the UK/RoI (e.g. language and cultural differences, variable access to IT equipment and

skills) will also be found with students resident within the UK/RoI, even if to a lesser extent.

- f) Students on a module are allocated to **tutor groups** (normally 15-20 students per Associate Lecturer). The Associate Lecturer facilitates the learning of the students within this learning community, including supporting individual students as they work through the module and undertaking grading of and feedback on continuous assessment for those students.
- g) A **cluster** is a set of tutor groups combined to enable students to engage more flexibly in some or all of their group tuition within this larger learning community.

## PRINCIPLES

### Principle 1: Purpose

- 13 All group tuition must have a core purpose which is made clear to students and which should enhance their learning experience.

### Principle 2: Student learning communities

- 14 The University recognises the importance of group tuition to support the formation of learning communities which include the students and their Associate Lecturers (ALs) along with other academic and academic-related staff.

### Principle 3: Clusters of Tutor Groups

- 15 Clusters of tutor groups will be formed to enable more diverse and more flexible delivery of cluster-based group tuition within an extended learning community, along with tutor group-based group tuition as required.

### Principle 4: Face to face and online learning events

- 16 Face to face and online synchronous learning events (tutorials, day schools, residential schools, workshops) will be offered in such a way as to optimise the student attendance and pedagogic benefit for a diverse student body.

### Principle 5: Online provision<sup>1</sup>

- 17 Each cluster will provide online learning events that address the core purposes of the module tuition strategy (or, where relevant, qualification or wider curriculum), in order to optimise flexibility, even where the core purposes are also provided for at face to face learning events in order to optimise attendance (see Principle 4).

### Principle 6: Student choice

- 18 Students will be able to choose flexibly, from the modes of learning events offered for their module, which actual learning events they wish to attend in order to maximise attendance and thus their ability to benefit.

### Principle 7: Asynchronous group tuition

- 19 Asynchronous group tuition will be offered as per Principle 1, either at the level of the tutor group and/or at the level of the cluster and/or for the whole module, to ensure that all students have the opportunity to join a relevant learning community with peers and staff.

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<sup>1</sup> Principle 5 does not apply where face to face attendance is an absolute requirement for passing a module or qualification, mainly as required by a professional accreditation body, partnership or particular jurisdiction..

**Principle 8: Diverse and international students' group tuition**

- 20 International students will normally be allocated to tutor groups together with UK/RoI students and will be able to access a full programme of group tuition online along with other students in their cluster.

**Principle 9: Planning of learning events schedule**

- 21 The core learning events schedule will be planned and communicated well ahead of module start to optimise student planning and attendance.

**Principle 10: Evaluation and sharing good practice**

- 22 The University will support a continuous programme of evaluation, scholarship and research into group tuition.

**POLICY STATEMENT****Learning Design**

- 23 Students need clear information about the purpose of group tuition, as a general principle at University level and specifically on a given module. The purpose of group tuition should be distinguished from individual tuition (such as correspondence tuition) and especially assessment, particularly where students might suspect covert assessment at a tutorial, as has been found to be the case in the absence of that clarity.
- 24 Principle 1 states that, 'All group tuition must have a core purpose which is made clear to students and which should enhance their learning experience'. A consistent framework for group tuition will be captured in the learning design for the overall blend of modes of delivery across a qualification.
- 25 The tuition strategy for the module will reflect the module's place within its most relevant qualification(s), the overall learning design for the module, and its predicted student numbers, to determine how best to incorporate learning events and asynchronous tuition with the wider blend. Where pedagogically appropriate, it will identify more specific purposes and modes of delivery of group tuition related to core purposes at particular points within the module. It may, for instance, need to take into account the pedagogical demands of collaborative learning or links to assessment. The module's tuition strategy will be approved through Stagegate processes, captured in the curriculum management and other systems, and used as part of the information available to students and staff.
- 26 ALs and Staff Tutors/Regional Managers who are experienced in the practical design and delivery of group tuition will be closely involved in this aspect of learning design and module production. It is important to specify a group tuition strategy in such a way as to clarify that it does not negate the need for ALs (or, where relevant, other members of the teaching team) to be as responsive as possible to the immediate learning needs of students in the tutor group or cluster, whilst at the same time taking forward the core purposes identified.
- 27 The core purposes which any individual learning event or activity may seek to address include:
- a) Facilitating student achievement of learning outcomes
  - b) Identifying any challenges with and supporting student understanding of difficult and/or threshold concepts
  - c) Fostering dialogue about learning in the context of the academic content of the module and/or qualification
  - d) Deepening students' learning and sense-making through greater engagement with learning resources

- e) Enabling the development of students' professional, cognitive and key study skills, employability and PDP (personal development planning) skills, including group working, communications and other social and collaborative learning skills, as appropriate to the module and/or qualification
- f) Contextualizing students' learning within professional and other wider subject settings
- g) Helping students to prepare for and succeed in assessment
- h) Connecting students to at least one curriculum-focused OU learning community, building identity as an OU student and a sense of belonging
- i) Building confidence through academic engagement with peers, and helping students recognise others' strengths and weaknesses as well as their own
- j) Helping students to structure their learning through understanding the different roles of learning resources and opportunities
- k) Strengthening students' interest in the subject and ongoing research in the area to build knowledge and motivation to persist with their studies and achieve their goals
- l) Enabling staff to gauge strengths and weaknesses of a student through a medium other than the written word in order to offer better support.

Any one event may address one or many of these purposes, which reflect much of current good practice. These purposes may have been implicit in all we do; they will now need to be expressly considered before Stagegate approval. Over the life of a qualification, or even an individual module, one would expect most of these purposes to be addressed at some point.

- 28 Some modules may make some aspects of group tuition compulsory (e.g. participation in forums or residential schools) in order to deliver learning outcomes (such as collaborative working, or development of oral skills in language modules) or for formative or summative assessment (e.g. of oral skills in language modules). The requirements of any compulsory group tuition will be clearly explained to students along with information about the impact of not engaging.
- 29 There is significant discipline-related variation across qualifications, programmes and Central Academic Units (CAUs) in the level of autonomy which ALs have to design group tuition activities. That variation will continue and will continue to drive innovation. At the same time the learning design within a module or across a qualification will structure the blend of teaching and learning modes and purposes, giving shape to group tuition to ensure a level of consistency which is reasonable for the discipline. Information about the identified purpose(s) of different teaching and learning modes, including group tuition, will be communicated to students. ALs will continue to use their professional judgement to deliver group tuition within this framework in a way that is responsive to the needs of the students who engage with it.
- 30 ALs' innovations need to be recognised as part of the development of a body of scholarship of group tuition across the University and should continue to be shared, as now, through staff development events and in AL module and qualification forums. Findings will inform both AL practice and subsequent learning design. A repository of scholarly research relating to group tuition will be available to all members of staff to add to and to access when reviewing group tuition strategy on a module or qualification.

### **Learning Communities and the AL-student individual educational relationship**

- 31 Principles 2, 3 and 7 express the central role which learning communities can play in facilitating a student's learning. Whilst informal learning communities (e.g. OUSA forums, Facebook groups) can play an important part in supporting students' learning and motivation, communities focused on the formal study of a module or a qualification form an essential part of the student experience and should be part of the learning design. Where students identify themselves as working within a recognised community of practice it has

been shown to improve retention, achievement and completion rates (Tinto, 2006-7 and Kuh, 2008). Helping students to establish such identities is therefore an important aspect of all aspects of learning support. Learning communities can be developed through both asynchronous and synchronous group tuition and can be facilitated by their own AL and other ALs in their cluster, through the students' own tutor group, and/or their wider cluster. When delivering group tuition, the aim will be to give students the best possible access to ALs' and others' expertise and specialist knowledge (e.g. module team members at Day Schools, central and regional academics, external experts) to enhance their experience of the learning community.

- 32 The individual educational relationship between a student and their AL, which contributes to student confidence, motivation and the success of the feedback and assessment process, will continue to be built through individual support (welcome messages and conversations, proactive and reactive emails and telephone calls) as well as through engagement in asynchronous group tuition and through meeting at learning events within the cluster or tutor group, either face to face or online.
- 33 A cluster of tutor groups (or the whole module cohort, depending on the learning design and the size of the cohort) will improve the viability of group tuition, offer greater choice for student engagement and build broader learning communities. Clusters may form within existing geographical groupings (Regions and Nations) or may cross these boundaries. There may be points in the module where all ALs in the cluster offer a particular form of group tuition; there may be other points where group tuition is only offered by some of the ALs in the cluster (e.g. as is often the case with Day Schools). This will enable some of an individual AL's contact hours to be used in more flexible ways (e.g. to team teach on OU Live or to offer more targeted support to students where specific needs have been identified).
- 34 While clusters will form the basic organising structure for the majority of group tuition on a module, there may be aspects of the module's group tuition strategy which requires individual tutor group-based tuition where attendance is restricted to the actual members of an individual tutor group (e.g. collaborative learning events and activities, linked to assessment, would normally be run at the level of the tutor group). Unless there is a specific requirement for attendance at a face to face learning event (see Principle 5) this tuition will always be offered online even if such a learning event is also delivered face to face to optimise the attendance of students.

### **Grouping Students into Clusters to Schedule Group Tuition**

- 35 Principles 8, 9 and 10 express the need to consider how the creation of tutor groups and clusters may have an impact on the scheduling of learning events and the need to learn from practice to allow for improvement and ongoing adaptation to a changing student body. However clusters should deliver significantly less variation in the schedule of core learning events year-to-year than there has been traditionally, when reliant entirely on individual tutor groups. This should drive both efficiency and stability.
- 36 Schedules for core learning events will need to consider a range of factors, particularly related to both the needs of the module and/or qualification and the needs of the student cohort. The overall set of factors to consider when scheduling learning events includes the need to react to:
- a) the module's:
    - i) tuition strategy
    - ii) assessment strategy
    - iii) study planner so that purposes can be delivered in a timely manner

- b) the qualification's
  - i) learning outcomes
  - ii) identified overarching student support requirements
  - iii) overall programme, working to avoid clashes whenever possible between modules commonly taken together on a qualification
- c) the predicted student cohort's needs at demographic and geographic levels, including:
  - i) the need for diversity of group tuition provision within the cluster, always including at least one online option for any core purpose at an appropriate time to deliver greater equality of opportunity for students leading diverse lives
  - ii) the impact of the needs of funding bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on our provision for students
  - iii) enabling students in the Republic of Ireland to make best use of group tuition provision in the island of Ireland
  - iv) the likely composition of the cluster in terms of students' time zones

37 The student cohort on a module or within a cluster will often include some students who are geographically remote or isolated, studying within a range of constraints including the times at which they study. A cluster may include all students from a congruent set of time zones.

38 Grouping congruent time zones will help to support practical delivery of group tuition within clusters so that the schedule of events can more easily facilitate distant students' engagement whilst at the same time providing diversity of learning events provision for all students irrespective of location. Whilst recognising that this level of discrimination may not always be sufficient, the grouping will at least consider specifically the needs of students in:

- a) Australasia and Far East
- b) Central Asia
- c) Middle East, Africa and Europe
- d) Americas

39 If the Programme Director primarily responsible for a module and the relevant Dean have agreed that there are strong professional/ partnership, pedagogic/ support or logistical/ jurisdiction reasons to put some defined subsets of students into their own separate tutor groups or clusters this will be facilitated. The University will aim to avoid tutor groups where there is only a single international or a single UK/RoI student.

40 The University recognises that the needs of students in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and England have to be addressed to ensure that they fit the requirements of separate legal (e.g. Welsh language) and funding requirements and are not simply subsumed into wider University provision. In practice this is likely to mean that tutor groups will need to be formed for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England whenever possible and the provision of face to face learning events (if offered on a module) will need to be offered in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England whenever possible. It does not mean that students in any of the four Nations cannot be included in a larger Cluster that is organised across nation boundaries.

41 Changes to systems and processes will enable the creation of clusters for module presentation in a timely manner, to enable the creation of the schedule for core learning events for that cluster, well ahead of module start. Tutor groups will then be formed within the cluster. The implementation of these changes is a major strand in the implementation plan (see Appendix 1).

## Schedule creation, sign-up, recording attendance and evaluation

- 42 The early development and release of a schedule for module-based core learning events, available to students about three months before the module start, will enable students to plan their attendance and sign up in a timely manner. Information from the module team will enable students to see which learning events within a cluster are duplicating the delivery of particular purposes, to avoid them unintentionally attending a similar event twice. Other learning events, either required by the module team to address an issue arising mid-presentation, or which are planned to be agreed flexibly within a cluster to suit students during presentation, may be added to the learning events programme later, though this should not diminish the intention or commitment to provide students with advance notice of all learning events for their qualification, module or cluster group.
- 43 Learning events will be planned to allow for more than the predicted number of students in a module or cluster wanting to engage in a learning event at a specific time to sign up. The scheduling and design of a learning event will assume that not all students who sign up will actually attend. However, there will inevitably be rare situations where a learning event, either face to face or online, is particularly popular and fills up; where possible, additional provision will be made at the same time and place (actual or virtual). However, students who have not signed up for an event in advance may not be able to be given late or on-the-day access to the event.
- 44 ALs will use enhanced systems to record individual student attendance at learning events, enabling better learning analytics, further development of Student Support Team (SST) interventions to take account of this wider information, and a more consistent programme of evaluation, scholarship and research.
- 45 Recording student attendance will give a better understanding of the relationship of group tuition to individual student success, as well as enabling the identification and sharing of good practice in group tuition. It will also support the further development of the clustering and scheduling of learning events for a module, qualification, programme/subject or CAU. Ultimately it will inform the refinement of the Policy and principles as students' contexts and needs, SSTs, CAUs, the University and the technology all continue to develop.
- 46 Scholarship and research will be a priority in order that we as an institution understand the benefits of group tuition and capitalise on the lessons already learned through pilot schemes and by drawing upon the formal literature associated with tutorial pedagogy/practice. Recording of student attendance and subsequent achievement will provide essential data for such scholarship and research.

## Face to face, Online and Telephone Technologies

- 47 Principle 4 states that face to face and online synchronous learning events (tutorials, day schools, residential schools, workshops) will be offered in such a way as to optimise student attendance and pedagogic benefit. In order to achieve this, Principle 5 states that each cluster on each module will include at least one full programme of online learning events to deliver the defined purposes for the module. This aims to ensure that students who are geographically remote or otherwise isolated or studying with a range of constraints including the times at which they study (e.g. working in retail or working within specific religious requirements and unable to attend tutorials on Saturdays) will not be excluded from addressing the purposes identified by a module or qualification group tuition strategy which has been designed to include face to face delivery to optimise attendance and student benefit where appropriate. The online learning events programme may be supported by specific asynchronous processes to deliver the totality of those purposes.

- 48 The main exception to Principle 5, of being able to attend learning events online to optimise flexibility, is where face to face attendance is an absolute requirement for passing a module or qualification (e.g. due to the requirements of an external body or a particular jurisdiction). In these circumstances it is assumed that there will be no alternative modes of delivery. The only other foreseeable exception is where a telephone conference is more accessible than either face to face or online tutorials. In some cases (e.g. in areas of low broadband access) group telephone conferences will be a valid, alternative mode of delivery of a learning event. There may also be a case for considering wider use of telephone technologies with particular student groups (and see point 50 below).
- 49 If a module tuition strategy requires tutor group-based learning events (as well as or instead of cluster-based learning events) these will be delivered by each AL online (but see point 48 above) and, where part of the tuition strategy, face to face.
- 50 The use of mobile technologies based around the telephone is likely to develop rapidly as the technology continues to develop and merge with computing technologies. The use of mobile technologies in group tuition is an exciting area for scholarship and, in the OU, is an area ripe for innovation and scholarly investigation.
- 51 Viewing or listening to a recording of a learning event does not in itself constitute a valid replacement for participation in an interactive learning event. Recordings of learning events are therefore outside the scope of this Policy. They are already covered by a set of protocols available on TutorHome (<http://www2.open.ac.uk/tutors/tutorials/recording-tutorials>) which safeguard the needs of students with disabilities and leave individual CAUs, programmes and module teams with some autonomy regarding their use. ALs may also choose, as now, to make use of recorded material (such as podcasts) within their tutorials.
- 52 The exclusion of recordings from this Policy is not to deny that there are some pedagogic benefits to students being able to engage with recordings of learning events (e.g. they can aid revision and enhance recall, give other perspectives on module material or offer clarification of what's expected in assignments). There are, however, risks associated with such recordings which need to be researched in more depth before a policy can be produced. These may include reduced student ownership of their learning as they have not actively participated in discussions as intended or that watching or listening to recordings simply increases students' workload. There is anecdotal evidence of reduced attendance at learning events which are being recorded and reduced willingness to engage in discussion.
- 53 Similarly, students often request handouts and/or tutors' notes from learning events. They have very similar pros and cons to recordings – they can enhance some aspects of understanding and may support revision; however, they can also reduce student ownership of their own learning and increase the volume of material students feel they must manage.

### **Student Flexibility and Choice**

- 54 Principle 6 stresses the importance of students being able to choose more readily how and when they engage with group tuition, within the tuition strategy for the module and the schedule of learning events. Students will be able to choose their preferred mixture of modes within an individual module, depending on the availability of tuition delivery modes. They may choose to attend learning events delivered within their cluster by their own AL and by other ALs from the same cluster. If a student wishes to attend a learning event outside their own cluster's provisions and learning community this will be facilitated if it is face to face (as at present) and may be possible online (depending on technical restrictions).
- 55 Modules with low student numbers, where there is little opportunity to offer more than one group tutorial event at any one given point in the module, will offer choice by both blended

tuition making full use of asynchronous technologies and potentially by varying the times of learning events across a presentation to enable a variety of students to be able to attend. Research is urgently needed into the times that students would like to engage with online learning events and the relative merits of delivering a programme of events at a consistent time against delivering a programme of events at a variety of times to reduce exclusion of those who cannot benefit at one particular time.

- 56 Whilst schedules of events will be designed to maximise choice for students, there will always be some students who cannot attend because of personal circumstances. Alternatives will be provided via individual student support sessions for students with particular accessibility requirements due to a disability who wish to engage in the activities, although these cannot realistically be promised to be 'group' events. For other students, they will need to discuss the situation with their AL and/or SST to see whether an individual student support session would be appropriate. The nature of our engagement with offender learners means that they are unlikely to be able to engage in group tuition in any form, but will continue to receive individual support as at present.

### Implementation and Conclusion

- 57 Implementation of the Policy for all modules, undergraduate and postgraduate, and for all other group tuition (qualification, subject, etc.) taking place from that time, will be phased in from October 2015. Some aspects of the Policy will require culture change and the development of new relationships, which are best done over a period of time, working on the implementation as a collaborative process. Some important aspects of the Policy (e.g. the consistent introduction of clusters) cannot be phased in and will be implemented from an agreed presentation onwards. Whilst much of the Policy can be delivered to some extent within existing systems, the final timeline for completing implementation is dependent on addressing requirements, including IT, for:

- a) learning design and Stagegate developments
- b) operational, process and management changes in SSTs
- c) operational, process and management changes in AL Services
- d) staff development
- e) wider IT systems requirements

This will require careful management and engagement by many communities within the University, particularly in IT, the CAUs and Student Services. It will take full account of equality and diversity requirements. It will incur transition costs so may need to be delivered over time, depending on the availability and affordability of IT and other development resource (see Appendix 1).

- 58 The Policy will provide a basis upon which to develop the group tuition model in a more consistent and holistic manner in future. The academic community will be able to consider more clearly how to use group tuition to deliver more dialogic and transactional forms of learning. Improving access to group tuition for an increasingly diverse student body, spread across national, social and educational cultures and environments, with increasingly diverse learning needs, sits at the heart of the aims of this Group Tuition Policy.

### REVIEW

- 59 Aspects of this Policy will be reviewed every two years with a more extensive review to align with Learning and Teaching Plan and Curriculum Size and Shape reviews as they occur, to ensure continuing fitness for purpose; any subsequent significant changes will be taken through the appropriate governance structure.

**ACTION**

60 The Senate is asked **to approve** the Group Tuition Policy.

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With thanks to both the wider reading team and to everyone across the University who has contributed to the enhancement of this policy through active engagement with the consultation.

Attachments:

S-2014-04-09 Appendix 1: Implementation Plan – A summary of issues to be addressed  
S-2014-04-09 Appendix 2: Useful Links and References

Implementation Plan – a summary of issues to be addressed

## **DEPENDENCIES AND NEXT STEPS REQUIRED FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

Most aspects of the Group Tuition Policy are already being delivered in some form across existing modules, regions/nations, programmes or CAUs. However significant further work will be needed to draw together good practice from different areas and to implement the policy consistently across the University. Consultation on the Group Tuition Policy has sought to offer opportunities to reflect on the implementation requirements so that there has been overlap in the development of the Policy and of the Implementation Plan.

Close liaison with all stakeholders will need to continue throughout the implementation process. In particular wider consideration of both quality assurance and quality enhancement processes to support development of the policy, its implementation and the skills of individual staff across all categories involved in group tuition, will need to be undertaken. Equality and diversity issues will remain at the forefront of the wider considerations impacting on the implementation.

The consultation with key stakeholder groups regarding the Policy identified activities that would span a two-year period and that could logically be broken into five different work-streams, namely:

- Project and Governance
- Systems
- Learning Design
- Business Process Change
- Staff Development, Communications and Student Information

The first year of the two year programme would concentrate on managing the changes required for implementation and the second year would embed it in rollout across successive module presentations.

The implementation plan and associated business case are currently under development to address the issues identified during consultation, to define the timescales and to clarify the costs of the Policy's introduction. A draft timetable is attached.

Each of the proposed work-streams will have its challenges. Some of those identified to date include:

**Project & Governance:** ownership and the division of activities between programme-funded activities and those that are an extension of existing business as usual processes. This will be addressed early on within the business case development.

**Systems:** new systems and enhancements to existing systems will be required to support the implementation of the Policy. Some of the Policy-related proposals and requirements have informed two new system developments which are already in hand to address related business requirements (Named Teaching Support and Learning Events Management); other interdependencies and requisite development activities have not however been fully specified, although the following existing systems will need enhancements:

- Curriculum Management (PLANET) – will need to incorporate the new module/qualification tuition requirements
- Student Record – will need to record student attendance at learning events
- VOICE/SST tool – will need updating as it manages student contacts and reflects student engagement across an SST
- VLE/OU Live – will need to allow clusters to be reflected in access to forums and OU Live rooms in a more automated fashion
- StudentHome and TutorHome – will need to reflect and enable different forms of student and staff engagement

**Learning Design:** Learning Design and Stage Gate processes will need to reflect the range of group tuition options and pedagogic implications, as part of a wider tuition strategy. Module teams in production, in conjunction with qualification teams and programme committees, will need to change their practices to consider and explicitly express the purposes of specific group tutorial opportunities and how students on a module, in the context of their qualifications, will benefit from engagement in group tuition. Module teams on existing modules, working with Staff Tutors/Regional Managers (ST/RMs) and relevant Associate Lecturers, will need to review their current tuition strategy to ensure at least baseline implementation of the Policy (implementation of clustering, basic purposes) with plans for full implementation over a specified period as modules are reviewed.

The implementation of these learning design requirements needs to be managed with a clear view of practicalities and will need to be supported by baseline formulations (models, exemplars and toolkits).. These formulations will develop as scholarship and quality assurance and enhancement processes for this area develop and deliver greater sharing of good practice.

**Business Change:** change of practice within SSTs, national and regional offices, AL Services and amongst ALs will need to be managed, with strong support from senior CAU staff. Organisational practices will need to be redesigned to take allocation to clusters into consideration and thoroughly tested to ensure ALs are well supported through the changes.

Once adequate systems are designed, AL Services, STs/RMs and ALs will need to review their practices for timetabling group tuition, as schedules for core learning events will need to be created and publicised much earlier in the year. This will represent a change in practice which has a range of dependencies.

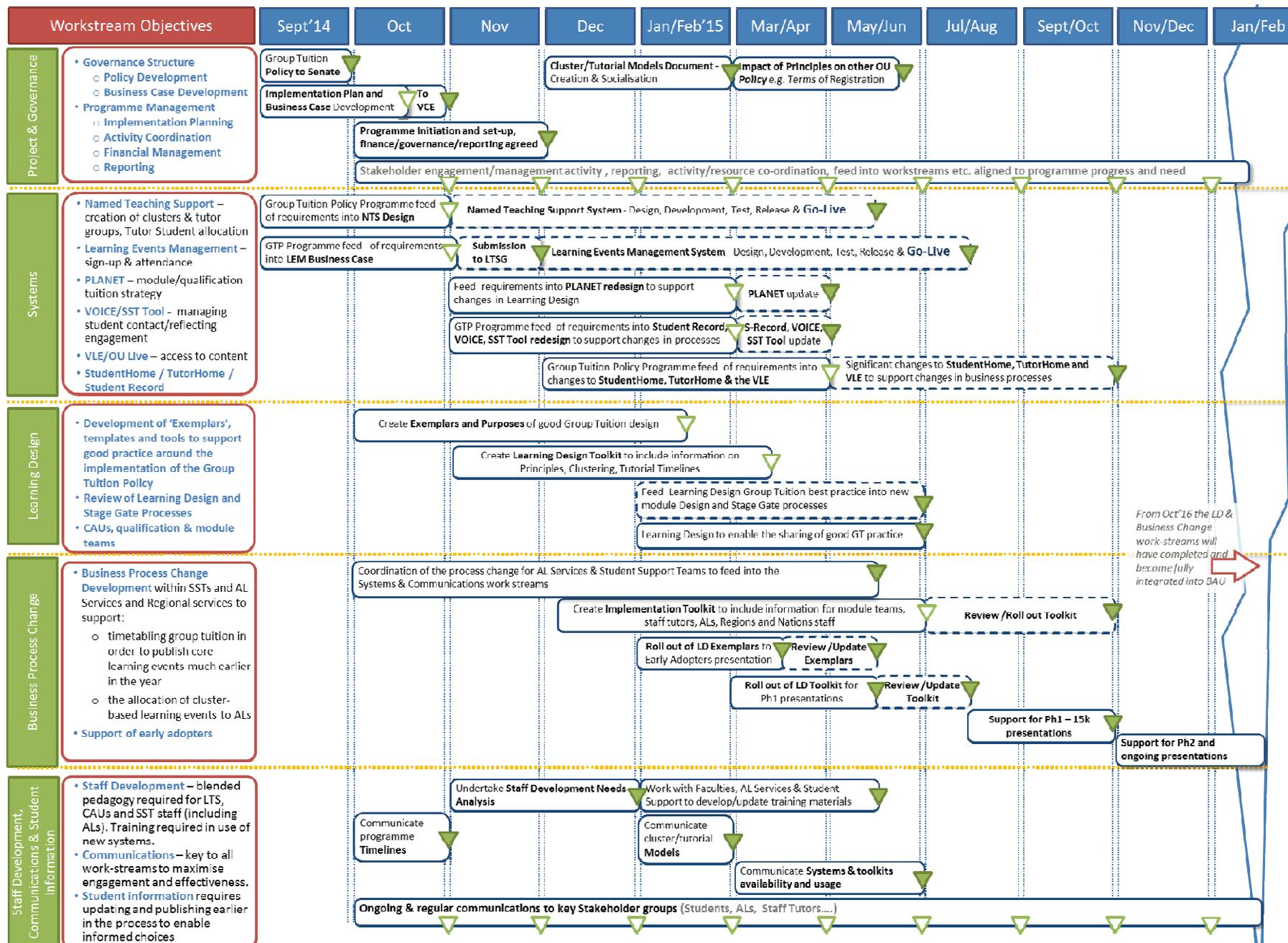
**Staff Development, Communications and Student Information:** Some staff development and information will be needed for a range of staff across LTS, CAUs, SSTs and ALs in new systems and processes and to ensure sharing of good practice to enhance group tuition as part of blended learning pedagogy. Staff development will be embedded within the relevant business as usual area wherever possible but will require input and overview from the implementation programme. Information requirements for students will also be considered, as they will need timely, accurate, well-worded information in order that they can fully benefit from the changes brought about by the policy.

### **Conclusion**

The implementation plan will need to address all of these challenges, as well as others that may arise through the implementation and ongoing review processes. The timeline may need to change in the light of further developments but the consultation and preliminary work suggests that it is achievable, although as ever it is dependent on active support and prioritisation by the University and its management, including in particular the development of the IT systems to enable changes of process and practice.

If approved by Senate, the Group Tuition Policy Implementation Plan and associated Business Case will be submitted to VCE for consideration later in the Autumn of 2014. The implementation is expected to deliver the necessary systems, tools and change to business process and practice in order to support baseline implementation for existing modules from the 15K (November) presentation onwards and production principles and processes for new qualifications and modules will be finalised and introduced during 2015.

This means that all students' group tuition should be embedded in the new processes by 16J (October) presentation although there will be much development beyond that as modules roll through presentations, review processes and develop a more detailed set of group tuition purposes and the University develops and is in a position to share a greater understanding of good practice in group tuition.



## USEFUL LINKS AND REFERENCES

Student Charter

<http://www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/>

University Student Consultation on Group Tuition <http://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=9134>

Promoting Effective Tuition Project, Scotland, 2007 and Sciences Online Rooms event on online synchronous tuition: <http://learn3.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=37305&section=1.1;>

For asynchronous online tuition, the research papers page in the Tutor Mods wiki:

<http://learn3.open.ac.uk/mod/ouwiki/view.php?id=8788&page=Research+papers;>

K101 group research at

<http://kn.open.ac.uk/workspace.cfm?wpid=8199> and earlier work on tutoring at

[http://kn.open.ac.uk/document.cfm?documentid=9338;](http://kn.open.ac.uk/document.cfm?documentid=9338)

**Repository of recent OU group tuition research, scholarship and pilots–**

<https://intranet7.open.ac.uk/project-collaboration/tuition-strategy/SitePages/Home.aspx>

The repository includes a range of informal reports and continues to grow:

Law programme – using Elluminate for revision and consolidation rather than to replace face to face tutorials (2013)

B120 team teaching and Elluminate (2013)

DSE212 Elluminate pilot (2013)

S366 Elluminate tutorials study (2012B)

F61 MBA Student Retention and Progression Pilot March (2012)

Report on potential for cost savings in tuition venues and other direct costs using London (R01) and South West (R03), undertaken in (2010).

### **It also includes formal reports:**

Crooks, Beryl and Jelfs, Anne (2007). Evaluation of Student - Tutor Interaction in terms of Learner Support and Retention within Face to Face and Online Tuition Presentation Modes

Gibb, Graham (2003). The cost-effectiveness of tuition patterns: issues from the literature

Goodfellow, Robin (2014). 2012J Tutorials Survey: Summary of Results

### **Other relevant publications and references:**

Nicolson, Margaret; Southgate, Margaret and Murphy, Linda (2011). Teaching in synchronous and asynchronous modes. In: Nicolson, Margaret; Murphy, Linda and Southgate, Margaret eds. Language Teaching in Blended Contexts. Edinburgh, U.K.: Dunedin Academic Press, pp. 95–111.

Thorpe, Mary (2008). Effective online interaction: mapping course design to bridge from research to practice. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 24(1) pp. 57–72.

Kuh, G, (2008), 'High-impact educational practices: what are they, who has access to them, and why they matter', Association of American Colleges and Universities, Washington.

Rennie, F. and Mason, R. (2008), e-Learning and Social Networking Handbook: Resources for Higher Education. London, Routledge.

Tinto, V. (2006-7), 'Research and Practice of Student Retention: What Next?' J. College Student Retention. Vol. 8(1), 1-19, 2006-2007.

Yu, A.Y., Tian, S.W., Vogel, D. and Kwok, R.C-W. (2010), 'Can learning be virtually boosted? An investigation of online social networking impacts', Computers and Education. Vol 55, Issue 4, December, pp.1494-1503.