

	Usually did this	Sometimes did this	Never did this	No answer
Read comments carefully and, where appropriate, tried to incorporate advice into later assignments.	72	23	3	3
Made use of comments for examination revision.	43	33	19	5
Read comments carefully and followed up references made to units, books, articles, etc.	33	45	17	4
Took up points made on TMAs in tutorials.	17	29	50	4
Did additional work on TMA in the light of comments.	12	33	53	3
Only ever took a quick look at grades and comments.	9	19	68	4
Contacted tutor outside tutorial to take up points.	5	22	70	4
Used comments in self help groups.	6	12	75	7
Looked at grades but ignored comments.	2	6	88	4
TMA — tutor marked assignment		Kelly and Swift (1983)		

Table 4.6 Types of use of correspondence teaching by students

Given the importance of correspondence teaching, it is an important area for monitoring and evaluation. This can be done by asking students directly, as in the case of the survey findings reported above. However, it may also be particularly important to check that professional norms are being achieved by individual tutors, and this requires the judgement of professional peers. In a system like the OU, monitoring of tutor comments requires that scripts are read by a subject expert with experience of correspondence teaching. A proportion of scripts is selected from one or more assignments marked by the tutor being monitored. A tutor can expect that the scripts they mark will be monitored at least twice a year on a full credit course (440 hours and around 8 assignments), and at least once a year on a half credit course (220 hours and around 4 assignments). New tutors, and any tutor whose work causes concern, are monitored more often.

The criteria which can be used to judge the effectiveness of an example of correspondence teaching naturally depend on the type of learning outcomes of a course, and its difficulty. Figure 4.7 lists a range of possible criteria.

A tutor marked assignment can be assessed for

Efficiency:	returns marked script within the period required by the system writes legibly Completes associated records/forms in full and accurately
Grading:	accurate/lenient/severe correct use of marking scheme (if there is one)
Relationship with learner:	tone friendly and sympathetic Comments likely to encourage continued learning Further contact suggested, where desirable

Overall appraisal of learner's work

- : praise on achievement
- : reasons for the grade given
- : suggestions for what would have been necessary to get a higher grade
- : improvements needed for next assignment
- : assessment of progress in course as a whole

Detailed comments

- : corrects any errors
- : suggests improvements in approach/structure as necessary
- : suggests course pages or components learner needs to revise
- : tells learner what she is doing well/adequately
- : comments on any irrelevance by referring to wording of the assignment
- : shows where marks have been lost (if relevant)
- : picks up over/under length, poor presentation
- : points to the relevance of materials/developments outside the course for development of ideas the learner has expressed.

Figure 4.7 Criteria which can be used in monitoring a tutor's scriptmarking

As important as checking standards is the communication back to a tutor of the results of monitoring. During the course of an evaluation of the OU's briefing of its part-time staff, it was discovered that tutors value monitor comments and use them as an indication of whether they are meeting the University's requirements for correspondence tuition. (Thorpe, 1985.) Some faculties now send the monitor's comments direct to the tutor, who has the right of reply, if necessary. The monitor's comments therefore need to be phrased with the kind of constructiveness and consideration that is expected of tutors in their comments to students.

Face to face tuition

Face to face tuition takes different forms depending on the context for open learning. Figure 4.8 indicates some of the variety in this range.

Category	Duration	Learning context
On-site supervision	Mostly under 1 hour, available continuously, on demand from learner	Often 1 to 1: Job supervisor may act as tutor for employee on 'on-the-job' training
College-based 'class' or workshop	Approximately 1-3 hours	By appointment or drop in. Learners may consult a tutor for 1 to 1 help. Group work also organised
Resource Centre	By arrangement	Learner uses packages (text, video or audio based, or CBT) either on site or elsewhere. Help often available on site, on demand
Tutorials in distance open learning		
— weekday evening	1½-2 hours	Usually 1 tutor with a group of learners
— Saturday	½ to 1 day	1 or more sessions available to learners, led by different tutors
— Specially scheduled session	around 1 hour session scheduled during study to respond to needs of one or more learners which had not been predicted	Tutor with one, or a group of learners
Residential Schools	Weekend, up to one full week	Variety of group and one to one activities with several tutors. May include lab work, lectures and counselling too

Figure 4.8 Some of the forms of face to face tuition

In most forms of open learning, face to face tuition has a voluntary aspect; it is provided with the assumption that learners will want to use it. But do they in fact use it, and for how long and how often? There are also important managerial considerations for monitoring attendance, because buildings, rooms and salaries are costly resources to offer a group of learners. Does take-up justify provision? Could we increase take up if we re-organised provision, to better match learner convenience? These are important questions, particularly for providers like the OU which has not made tutorial attendance compulsory; although the value of face to face interaction and group tutorials is emphasised, it must still be

Attendances for the first ten weeks by all learners electing for the Monday afternoon session

Counsellor	Student Registration Number	Part-time/ Full-time	Name (Alphabetical order)	Monday Afternoon Week No											A* A/P	
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11 etc		
ND	7099487	F	ALNASER	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	10/10
SH	7115180	F	BASHIR	/	/	/	/	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4/9
ND	7071191	P	CHAN	/	/										X	2/2
PB	7126522	P	CLARKE	/	0	/	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2/10
PB	709437A	P	CLOUGH										/	/		2/2

* - Attendance: Actual/Possible X - indicates withdrawn

Source: N. Dow, Mathematics Workshop, BICC

Figure 4.9 Session Register: Mathematics Workshop

possible to pass an OU course without having attended tutorials. This is one of the features of 'openness', most obviously for those who are physically disabled, geographically isolated, or otherwise prevented from attending.

Reliable figures for learner attendance can only be gathered by a meticulous and systematic monitoring process. This is likely to require the co-operation of learners, clerical staff and tutors, depending on the system. In the case of a college-based workshop, the learner initiates a record of attendance which is collated and reviewed by clerical or tutorial staff. At the Bradford and Ilkley Community College (BICC) Workshops for Mathematics and Communications, learners are asked on enrollment which sessions during the week they elect to attend. This information is entered onto the microcomputer database set up for the Workshops. A new printout is produced for each day of the week, listing the names and sessions of all those who ought to attend on that day. As each learner comes in, they sign for the appropriate session against their name and at the end of the week, all the registers are entered onto the learner database.

Data can be taken off the database in various ways, for different purposes. Figure 4.9 shows a version of the printout of a cumulative register for the Monday afternoon session, showing all learners due for attendance at the session together with the number of attendances achieved out of the total possible (remembering that learners can register at any point during the year, after week one).

Name: MISTRY		Course: A3															
D of Birth: 30/10/51		Subject(s) Pure Maths, Applied Maths															
Reg Number: 7145313		Start Week No 07															
Attendance details as at 27-11-87		Week No												Sessions		Hours	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	act/poss	act/poss		
Tue Eve 5.30-8.00								/	/	/				3/3	7.5/7.5		
Thur Eve 5.30-8.00								/	/	/				3/3	7.5/7.5		

Source: N. Dow, Mathematics Workshop, BICC

Figure 4.10 GCSE Mathematics: Learner Register

This register would enable a counsellor scheduled to cover Monday afternoon sessions, to check the attendances of all learners who have been allocated to them and due to attend every Monday afternoon. It is also possible to generate a printout for every learner, showing all sessions attended, and total hours (figure 4.10). This enables the counsellor, or a clerical assistant to pick up all who have missed for more than, say, two weeks, (or a specified number of attendances), so that a follow-up letter can be sent, offering support and asking the learner to get in touch.

Where learners are using flexi-study or distance learning options, it is more likely to be the tutor who records contact. South Manchester Community College uses a proforma similar to that shown in figure 5.2 chapter 5, which is provided in duplicate form to flexi-study tutors who complete and return the duplicate copy to the college on a monthly basis. The open learning staff transfer the information to a cumulative form for each tutor, and also onto a computerised learner database. These records are regularly checked by the Workshop Co-ordinator; if a tutor has a contact with a learner for two consecutive months, the co-ordinator sends the learner concerned a follow-up letter.

Each of these systems could be used to produce a cumulative total of actual versus possible attendances for all learners (in the case of workshops), and number and type of contact between learner and tutor, in the case of flexi-study. The Open University has undertaken a large number of studies of this kind for two main purposes: the first to ascertain the nature and distribution across the year of tutorial and counselling tasks; the second, to provide indicators of the efficiency with which face to face tuition has been provided and its effectiveness as a medium for teaching and learner support. I shall return to the value of attendance rates as indicators, but first we need to look more closely at the methods which can be used.

	Percentage of students making	
	Use	Extensive Use
Correspondence tutoring	90	31
Study Centre Tutorials	59	29
Telephone Tutorials	15	02

Source: Grundin (1980)

Table 4.7 Student use of tuition

Monitoring attendance can take a variety of forms but is the basis of calculating usage and therefore must be done systematically and reliably. Collecting attendance data is only the beginning though, and a review of the findings of OU evaluation in this area will serve to indicate some of the pitfalls.

Some of these arise from differences in what has been measured. For example, two measures have been used most often, and they produce quite different rates. The first measure is the *student user rate*, that is the proportion of students who have used tutorials *at least once* on a course. Three major studies since 1976 have consistently produced a figure of around 60 per cent of students who say they have used tutorials during the course studied. In 1979, a survey of 16,000 students studying 91 courses produced findings shown in table 4.7.

Similarly 63 per cent of the post foundation students surveyed in 1983 said that they used tutorials, whether evening or Saturday morning sessions. However this survey also asked students to discriminate between different forms of tuition, and to say whether they were aware that a particular form of tuition was available to them. As table 4.8 shows, if we take this awareness into account in calculating percentage usage, rather higher figures result. Thus 75 per cent of those saying they knew about the programme of tutorials on their course attended one or more sessions.

The second common measure of attendance is the *rate of attendance at each tutorial* during a particular course presentation period, often presented as an average for the period as a whole. *Rates of tutorial attendance* measure different things from the *student user rate*—estimates of the proportion of students who use tutorials—and there are important implications for the way these two indicators are used. If, for example, the 60 per cent of students who stated they had attended one or more tutorials, only ever attended one, and that the first scheduled tutorial for the course, this would be vital information for those organising the tutorial programme—and for the tutor. The only way of checking this out is to measure attendance at each tutorial, using attendance records.

	Col. 1 % aware of tutorial programme	Col. 2 ¹ % using the mode	Col. 3 ² % taking up option
<i>Types of Tuition:</i>	%	%	%
Day/half day schools	53	33	62
Evening (or Saturday equivalent) face-to-face tutorials	83	62	75
Individual face-to-face tutorials	11	6	55
Group telephone tutorials	6	2	33
Individual telephone tutorials	26	12	46

¹ base = all respondents
² base = all in column 1

Kelly and Swift (1983)

Table 4.8 Student reported usage of tutorials

A number of such studies has been done by OU regional staff, who organise tutorial programmes annually and therefore need to monitor the extent to which a cohort of students is being 'reached' by their allocation of tutorial resources. These rates of tutorial attendance vary widely by course/faculty, by tutor and even by different years. The attendance rate also varies during the year and the first tutorial may often produce 90–100 per cent attendance, with another peak before the examination being a common pattern. Again, the drop in attendance does vary by course, being noticeably less for example on some third level maths courses known to be very difficult. Overall averages of attendance for the whole year have been found of around 30 per cent going up to 60 per cent—the higher figure taking into account dropout during course study. (Thorpe, 1983.)

Apart from the need for care in specifying what has been measured, and in clarifying terminology, there is the question of the accuracy of the base on which percentages are measured. If a learner has dropped out, or is not actively pursuing a particular course, it would seem reasonable to exclude them from the total number of those doing a course and therefore considered *eligible for tutorials*. Tutorial attendance rates appear higher where the base has been adjusted in this way to account for drop-out. However, it is not always easy to find out who is 'actively studying' and thus rates of attendance are best seen as approximations of more or less accuracy depending on how carefully they have been generated.

Apart from the difficulty of calculating accurate attendance rates, is the issue of how they are used as performance indicators.

While they may offer an indicator of the efficiency of resource allocation, can they tell us anything at all about the educational effectiveness of tutorials or workshops? Unfortunately the existence of data on attendance can encourage an over-simple interpretation of their meaning: 'high rates of attendance justify the provision of tuition, low rates justify cutting tuition'. Tutors themselves are likely to be very wary of these kinds of response, knowing as they do how many factors affect attendance on a specific occasion—only one of which, albeit important, is the quality of tuition they provide. And, if only five out of (say) 16 students attend a tutorial, but value what they get out of it, does that adequately justify provision? And what about the 11 non-attenders? Are they happy with the situation, or would they prefer some other kind of tutorial support?

There are no hard and fast rulings here; decisions can only be taken effectively in the light of local resources and learner needs. Now is it argued that attendance data, though difficult to interpret, are not worth having. It is now possible to see in the OU that the same tutor, on the same course, operating the same tutorial programme, can get very different attendance rates from one year to the next (Thorpe, 1983). This is one reason why surveys of the preferences of students for particular locations and times of the week for tutorials can offer misleading data for designing future programmes so as to maximise attendance rates.

However, collecting evidence of attendance over several years or several course presentations can be useful because it establishes at least the upper and lower parameters of what can be expected. A fall in attendance rates then is likely to indicate the need for further investigation. It may be that the distribution of tutorials throughout the course clashes with other demands, like the cut-off date for submission of an assignment, so that some students who would otherwise attend choose not to do so. By re-scheduling the times or locations of tutorials, it may be possible to increase attendance and thus use staff resources more efficiently.

The performance that attendance rates do not measure directly of course, is that of the tutor. This requires qualitative evidence from students or colleagues or both. On first appointment, new OU part-time tutors are usually observed during a tutorial by a member of full-time regional staff, and all those tutoring at summer school are observed, whether new or experienced. At the Social Science Foundation Course Summer School, students are asked to complete a questionnaire (anonymously) on the performance of tutors with whom they have worked during periods 9–12 hours each tutor. Tutor competences are listed (clarity of presentation, responsiveness to questions, handling discussion, and so on) and tutors are rated on a five point scale from 'excellent' to 'very weak'. Tutors are provided with the

feedback on their own performance before the end of the school, when there is some opportunity to make changes, and perhaps discuss any worrying results with the Course Director. However, the main benefits are seen to be in the longer term, for the tutor, and for the student, whose evaluation is seen as important and worth taking into account. It may also help some students with strong negative reactions to express their feelings and to learn from the experience. This is also a useful mechanism for identifying weaknesses in the design of the summer school, and thus improving it for future students. (Bradshaw, 1987.)

Tutor performance is one of the most difficult areas to evaluate and to develop subsequently, because the needs of learners are so varied and because the way one behaves as a tutor is so closely tied to personality factors. Any significant changes in behaviour require the tutor's voluntary commitment and a personal conviction that change is necessary. A positive step in that direction is the use by tutors themselves of some form of feedback from learners on the quality of tutorials they give, and if relevant, the helpfulness of their other functions, like assignment comments and telephone contact. Feedback forms can be handed out at the end of several sessions or when several assignments have been marked, and returned by learners anonymously. One format is to list a number of desirable characteristics of the tutoring concerned, and to ask the learner to rate the tutor against each one on a five point scale, as in figure 4.11. This example also includes a rating for the general importance of each item, so that the tutor can see how important a good or poor rating of one characteristic is likely to be to the learner.

It is also useful to ask learners to complete ratings of this kind *before* tuition starts, as an indication of their expectations. In this case, additional items exploring their perceptions of themselves in the group context might also be helpful: for example—

- 'I find it very difficult to speak out in a group'
- 'I prefer groups of three or four to bigger groups'
- 'I can speak more easily when the tutor isn't there'
- 'I tend to keep quiet not to show my ignorance'

— and so on.

Even if feedback forms are not used, it can still generate thought provoking comments from learners to ask them how helpful they are finding the tuition provided. Three questions which can be used in discussion to pick up most of the responses in this area are:

Learners can be asked to rate the importance of particular features of tuition in general, and the effectiveness of their tutor in relation to each one.

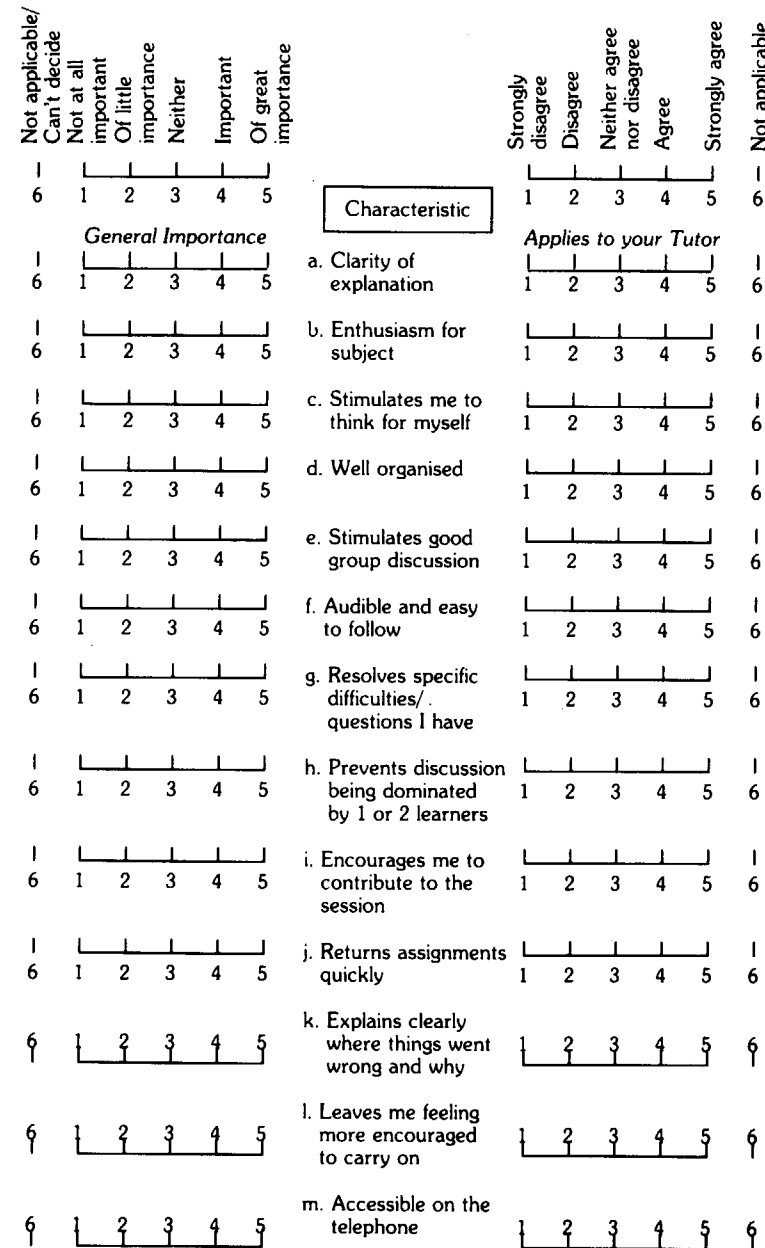


Figure 4.11 Learner ratings of tutor competences

'What did you find most useful?'

'What did you find least useful?'

'What changes would you like to make?'

OU students have also been asked why they attend tutorials in general and, of the reasons shown in table 4.9, 'to meet my tutor and discuss course study matters' was chosen by 63 per cent of all respondents. Of the reasons given for non-attendance, the 1983 survey notes the following:

The most common reasons respondents gave for not going to all the tutorial events for their course all related to personal factors: family, personal and work commitments. However, the second most frequent was distance/time spent getting there. Further, significant minorities did not attend because the potential value was too little relative to the time/money/effort involved or they preferred to spend their time on the units/assignments. Student decisions were also influenced by disappointing early tutorials on their course and by past experience of unhelpful tutorials.

Asked to assess their degree of satisfaction with the face-to-face tuition available to them on their course, 24 per cent of respondents reported being fully satisfied, 32 per cent satisfied but with reservations, 11 per cent fairly dissatisfied, and 5 per cent very dissatisfied. A further 23

	% for whom reason applied
To meet my tutor and discuss course/study matters	63
Help with difficult aspects of the course	51
To meet other students and discuss course/study related problems with them	50
To extend my understanding of the subject beyond the limits/scope of the units	45
Discussion and help with TMAs	44
To sustain my interest and motivation	40
Revision and preparation for exams	38
General support for studies	37
Experience of practical work/lab. sessions/computing	9*
Just because tutorials were provided	8

*These are a feature of only a small proportion of sessions.

Kelly and Swift (1983)

Table 4.9 Reasons for attending tutorials

per cent had not attended any tutorials and 5 per cent did not respond to the question.

Insufficient tutorials to cover the course adequately stood out as the most common cause for dissatisfaction with tutorials, 24 per cent giving this as a reason.

(Kelly and Swift, 1983)

Conclusion

This chapter has not provided a comprehensive account of all the media through which tuition can be provided; telephone tuition is especially important, audio tape can also be used, and computer conferencing offers an exciting technology which opens up the possibility of very much greater communication between learner and tutor (Ryan, 1987, and Kaye, 1987). However, all three can be evaluated by drawing on existing knowledge of learner perceptions and use of the core tutor functions of face to face and correspondence teaching. And some of the clearest messages in the evaluation of tuition derive from learner perceptions of the general role and value of the tutor, irrespective of the medium through which particular functions are carried out.

The effective evaluation of tuition requires, at minimum, regular monitoring of the quality of tuition offered all learners, and tutor evaluation of the quality of their own interaction with a particular group of learners. Direct tutor involvement in evaluation need not always require the tutor to invite written feedback from learners; it may take the form of meetings with learners to review their progress, or discussion with other tutors at staff development meetings. The essence of tuition should be its responsiveness to the learner, and that requires *tutor self-evaluation, as well as system evaluation.*

Further reading

Murgatroyd, S. (1980) What Actually Happens in Tutorials in *Teaching at a Distance* No. 18.

Summarises models of face to face teaching and presents analysis of tutor-student interaction in tutorials at the Open University.

Teaching at a distance: formerly published by the Open University and since 1986, replaced by *Open Learning*, published jointly with Longman. Both journals have many articles relevant to the tutor

role and its evaluation. Contact Regional Academic Services, the Open University, Milton Keynes.

Estell, G. R. (1986) *Staff Development for Open Learning Tutors*.

Harrogate College of Arts and Technology co-ordinates a particularly 'open' form of open learning. 'OWTLET' accepts all enquirers irrespective of their learning goal and the period they have available for study, providing a tutor can be found, who selects any materials used and negotiates a learning programme with the individual concerned. The report takes the form of a brief summary of evaluation of the staff development needs of open learning tutors, together with the staff development units produced out of the project: unit one—the concept of open learning, unit two—the initial meeting, and unit three—a continuing dialogue.

Clarke, A., Costello, M., Wright, T. (1984/5) *The Role of Tasks of Tutors in Open Learning Systems*. Industrial Training Research Unit, Cambridge.

A very useful typology of different systems for the provision of tuition and counselling, with detailed descriptions of the tutor role in particular. Twenty-seven open learning courses were surveyed, and five very different courses studied in depth.

5 Counselling and learner progress

Main themes: *What is counselling and its role in open learning? Core counselling functions. Issues in counselling evaluation: what is the need for counselling? How should it be provided? How much is it used, by whom? What are its outcomes? A framework for the evaluation of counselling. Examples of evaluation of the provider perspective and of the user perspective.*

Counselling and its role

It is more difficult in this chapter to be confident of identifying a core of common concerns because the extent to which learners are explicitly 'advised' or 'counselled' in open learning schemes varies widely. 'Counselling' is particularly difficult because there is, if anything, even less agreement about what it is than is the case with tuition. Very few open learning systems employ staff with the title of counsellor, and perhaps a number assume that any 'counselling' needs of learners will be handled by tutors. The list of tutor roles provided by Clark et al, for example, includes quite a few that would be seen as educational counselling by the Open University:

- 'developing study skills in people who left school early'
- 'being prepared to make some kind of constructive response when a student comes out with a personal problem over the phone'
- 'helping students with study methods at (a) start of course and (b) near exams.'

Clarke, Costello and Wright (1985)

Similarly, those that do use the counsellor title include different functions within the role, and mean different things in practice. The Mathematics Workshop at Bradford and Ilkley Community College for example, assigned learners to a mathemat-