SiSE-only tutor groups and the effect on SiSE students and tutors on S111

(SiSE = Students in Secure Environments, i.e. students in prisons and secure hospitals)

Executive Summary

Normally at the Open University Students in Secure Environments (SiSE) are allocated in small numbers to standard tutor groups to form mixed groups of 20 students, of whom 1 or 2 would typically be SiSE students. However, SiSE students generally have no internet access and have very different support needs to standard students, making such mixed groups complex to manage. In recent years the OU has sometimes struggled to find tutors willing to look after such mixed groups, with tutors citing difficulties with managing to meet the needs of all the students in the group as a key reason.

Due to a larger than normal number of SiSE students on S111 in 19J, the STEM Faculty decided to allocate groups of 10-12 SiSE students to form a number of SiSE only tutor groups, as well as having other SiSE students allocated to standard tutor groups. This situation provided an opportunity to compare and contrast the experience of tutors and SiSE students within these two sets.

Results relevant to SiSE team/Faculty
NB where Covid-19 is likely to have affected the conclusions, this is highlighted in the text

- SiSE-only tutor groups help tutors to become better at dealing with SiSE issues, and also create a resource of knowledge to advise the OU on policy.
- Facilitating getting alternative resources to prisons during this period was a major part of the SiSE tutor's job in 19J. Almost half (47%) of all the issues raised were around getting materials into prisons.
- Late or missing TMAs are a major difficulty for tutors. This delay causes significant problems for tutors trying to manage their workload, and justifies the smaller size of SiSE only tutor groups (10-12 students rather than 20)
- Student changes in circumstance and moves are not always dealt with well. Creating a procedure for students leaving prison, including maintaining contact, would improve student retention.
- There are multiple breaches of procedure highlighted, including one tutor being phoned directly by a SiSE student.
- The piecemeal allocation of SiSE students caused many problems, and tutors were very frustrated at the lack of joined up thinking. If all SiSE students on modules with high populations of SiSE students were in SiSE-only tutor groups, and allocated at one time in a sensible geographic manner, a far better student experience could be provided alongside considerable financial savings.
- To allocate students sensibly would require SiSE students to comply with the 'Final Enrolment Date' as all other OU students do. The current situation where most SiSE students register well after the Final Enrolment date means that students are allocated piecemeal, which is not in the student's best interest. If students do not meet the Final Enrolment Date, they can easily be allocated on the next presentation, and for most level 1 modules there are two presentations each year.
- The quality of the Education Officer and their willingness to build up a relationship with the tutor is key to student success. Again, only having one tutor for all the students on a particular module in a particular institution helps with this.

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- Lockdowns cause particular issues, and can occur for a number of reasons, not just Covid-19.
- Students really appreciate face to face tutorials when they are possible. Phone tutorials are frequently difficult due to poor phone lines.
- Many students could not access the Virtual Campus consistently, and when they could, the restrictions on internet use reduced its usefulness.
- Encouraging paper TMA submissions is better than electronically submitted scanned handwritten ones, provided the paper copies go to the tutor.

Results relevant to the S111 module team

- The S111 materials available to SiSE tutors are either incomplete or hard to find
- Pdf marking training and access to tools is needed for SiSE tutors on S111 (where pdf marking is not the norm). Due to lack of computer access many students submitted scans of handwritten TMAs via their Education Officer
- iCMAs cause particular issues on eg S111 in terms of procedures, both for prisons and for monitoring.
- More care needed around TMA questions which assume students have access to video content
- Making tutorial pdf slides sets part of supplied module materials would be helpful

Summary Recommendations

The single thing that the OU could do to improve the SiSE experience is to fix and enforce a Final Enrolment Date for SiSE students. This would:-

- Increase the likelihood that SiSE students receive their module materials in good time
- allow sensible geographic allocation of SiSE students to tutors, making some face to face tuition possible
- ensure that in each prison Education Officers only have to deal with one tutor per module, allowing tutors to build up relationships with the EOs and improving communication

For high population modules with more than say 10 SiSE students, SiSE only tutorgroups offer significant advantages as there is a considerable overhead for tutors in navigating module materials, SiSE procedures etc. It would also allow the SiSE only tutors to work more closely with the relevant module team to improve the resources available over time.

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Aims and scope of the project

The aim of the project was to determine the efficacy of using SiSE only tutor groups to support SiSE students on high population introductory Stage-1 modules (in this case S111) and gather information on the experience of tutors and students. We were particularly interested in exploring the dynamics within SiSE only tutor groups vs standard tutor group allocation, and discovering what challenges were faced by tutors of SiSE only tutor groups, as well as any advantages they perceived.

The Open University STEM faculty has recently changed its method of allocating SiSE (Students in Secure Environments) students to tutors for an introductory Stage-1 Science module, S111. Usually a small number of SiSE students are allocated to standard tutor groups to form mixed groups of 20 SiSE and non SiSE students. Partly due to a larger than normal number of SiSE students on S111 in 19J, the STEM Faculty decided to allocate 10-12 SiSE students to form a number of SiSE only tutor groups, as well as having other SiSE students allocated to standard tutor groups. The situation on S111 in 19J provided an opportunity to compare and contrast the experience of tutors and SiSE students within these two sets.

Activities

The three tutors with SiSE only tutor groups, and two tutors with SiSE students in a standard tutor group were recruited, and asked to keep a reflective diary, with entries each week throughout the S111 19J presentation. They were given a fairly loose format for the diary, essentially told they could write whatever they felt was relevant, but asked to highlight a success and a challenge each week if possible, and for interactions to indicate who they involved ie Students, Education Officers, OU SiSE Team, Module Team or Staff Tutors.

The presentation ran from October 2019 to June 2020. From March to June most SiSE students were in full lockdown due to Covid, with Education Officers working from home and so effectively no contact between students and their tutors. The impact of this has been highlighted where relevant in the analysis and discussion of results.

We had hoped to be able to compare and contrast SiSE student attainment and progression for the two sets, but due to Covid-19 that was not possible, as many SiSE students had to defer their studies after March 2020 and so were unable to complete the module. However there is scope to do this in a subsequent project, perhaps alongside investigating the student experience of being part of a SiSE only or standard tutor group.

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Data Analysis

Over a 37-week period between September 2019 and June 2020, five tutors kept records of their activities each week with respect to SiSE students. Two tutors (identified here as N1 and N2) had a small number of SiSE students as part of their ordinary tutor groups, while three tutors (SO1, SO2 and SO3) had SiSE-only tutor groups.

A qualitative thematic analysis of the data was conducted, as well as simple quantitative analyses comparing the frequency with which issues were reported. However, tutors' record-keeping behaviour varied considerably; for example, one tutor made 133 entries during the period, while another made just 28. The total number of entries made was 297; an average of 8 per week. Some tutors identified several issues per entry, while others made a new entry for each issue. Two of the SiSE-only tutors additionally provided summaries of how their time was spent, their main challenges over the year, and recommendations for change. Differences in reporting behaviour should therefore be taken into consideration while interpreting the results.

Figure 1 – Entries each week by tutor

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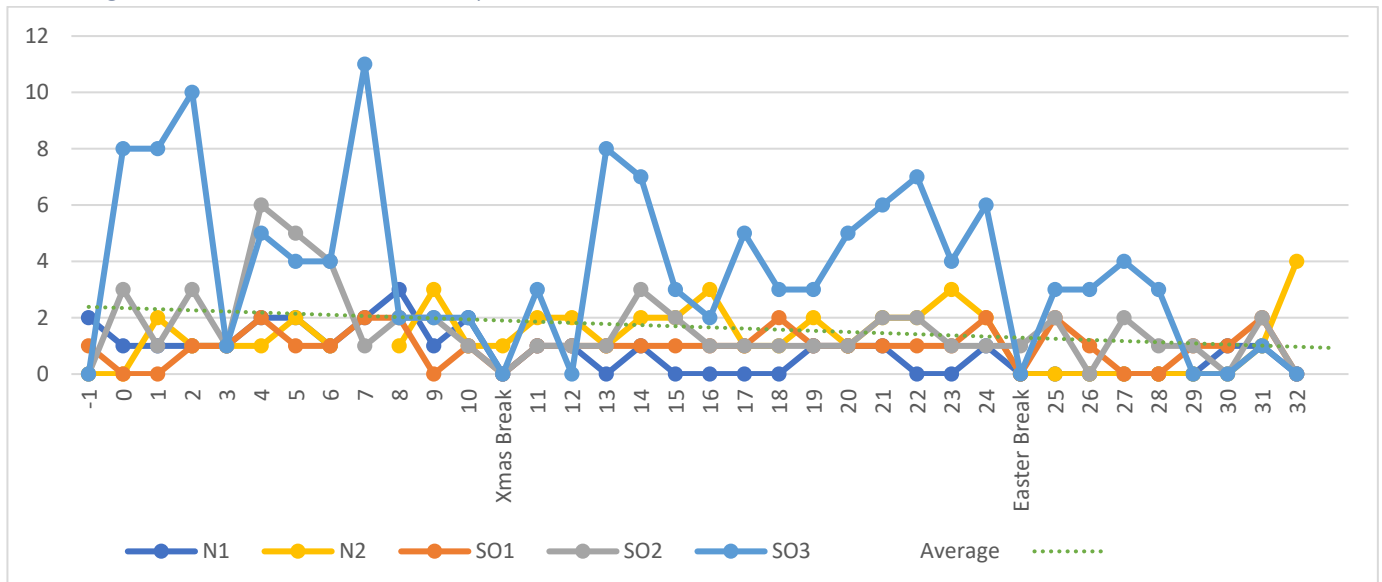
Results

Overall

Of the 297 diary entries, 74 did not indicate an issue, but instead reported on normal activities. For example, 13 entries discussed the arranging of tutorials, and 6 reported a tutorial that ran smoothly. Four stated that one or more TMAs had been received for marking, and 7 stated that TMAs had been marked and returned. Six entries described simple queries from the prison which the tutor had answered, and 15 dealt with routine admin such as establishing contact with Education Officers at the prisons. After COVID-19 hit, 21 entries reported information received from the OU or HMPs regarding policy during lockdown. Finally, 3 entries reported successes on the part of the OU. Two of these were praising the OU for allocating to the tutor a student from that tutor's previous S111 tutor group, thereby saving the tutor some work establishing contact and building relationships, and also allowing the tutor to combine dates so that tutorials for two different modules could be conducted in one prison visit. The final piece of praise was related to online sessions offered by the SiSE team for tutors to discuss issues and share approaches. The tutor stated this was 'well received'.

The remaining 223 entries were less positive, but may yield helpful information to enable future improvement. These were categorised according to the main cause of the issue, and frequencies are summarised in Table 1. Each issue is dealt with in more detail in its own section of this report.

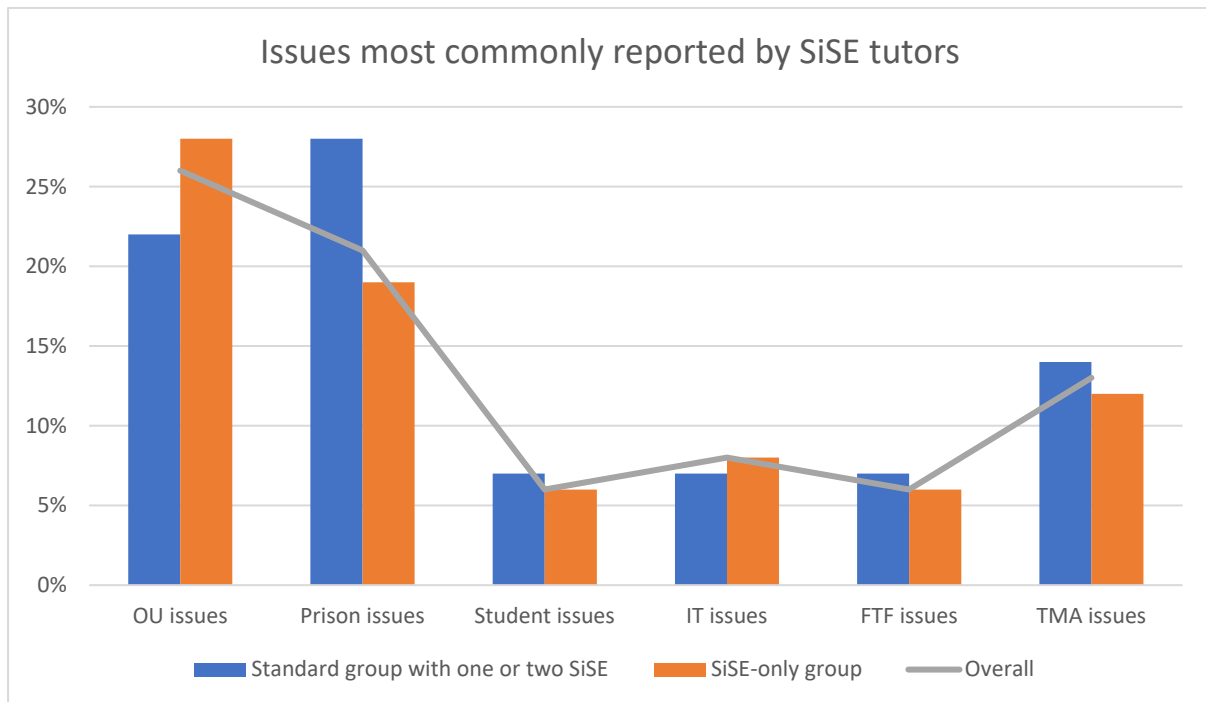Table 1 – Issues most commonly reported by tutors of SiSE

Tutor group	Total	OU issues	Prison issues	Student issues	IT issues	F2F issues	TMA issues
Normal	72(24%)	16(22%)	20(28%)	5(7%)	5(7%)	5(7%)	10(14%)
SiSE-only	225(76%)	62(28%)	43(19%)	14(6%)	19(8%)	13(6%)	28(12%)
Overall	297	78(26%)	63(21%)	19(6%)	24(8%)	18(6%)	38(13%)

*Percentage of total entries; 297. Percentage of normal tutors' entries; 72. Percentage of SiSE-only tutors' entries; 225.

OU issues are those caused primarily by OU policy or management, Prison issues are those due to prison policy or management, and Student issues are those affecting individual students, such as personal problems, not engaging with the module, or a student being transferred or released. TMA issues are those caused by late or missing TMAs. IT issues are those due to being unable to access technology required for the course, such as the Virtual Campus or OU Portal, or indeed word-processing software. F2F issues are difficulties surrounding conducting face-to-face tutorials in a secure environment.

The comparison between tutors with SiSE-only tutor groups and those who have only one or two SiSE is illustrated more clearly in Figure 2. The grey line shows the proportion of all entries which mention each issue, and the blue and orange bars indicate the proportion for 'SiSE only' and 'Standard plus 1-2 SiSE' groups separately.

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Figure 2 - Issues most commonly reported by SiSE tutors

Issues most commonly reported by SiSE tutors

It would seem that SiSE-only tutors are less likely to report issues with prison policy or management, possibly as a result of being more used to dealing with the prison environment. They are more likely to report issues with OU policy or management, possibly due also to having greater experience and being able to see ways that the OU could better support SiSE students (and indeed tutors). **This would seem to indicate that SiSE-only tutor groups help tutors to become better at dealing with SiSE issues, and also create a resource of knowledge to advise the OU on policy.**

Issues relating to OU policy or management

The 76 entries which mentioned an issue relating to OU policy or management are categorised in Figure 3. Many of the 19 entries mentioning an issue related to the administration of TMA marking are likely to be due to COVID-19, as lockdown had a huge impact on those processes. Three times tutors complained of not receiving TMAs which the prisons claimed had been submitted, but two of these were in weeks where the post room was in lockdown. Twice before lockdown and once after, tutors mentioned students not receiving their marked TMAs back in a timely fashion. Four times tutors pointed out that a score had not been recorded on the system, but all of these were during lockdown and as one tutor commented "*This is a problem with paper assignments - Covid-19*". Once the post room was opened up and the backlog of TMAs began to be scanned and emailed to the tutors for marking, 7 entries complained that marking scanned PDFs was very difficult, as there was little space available around the students work for comments to be inserted, and using PDF commenting software was frustrating. "*Submitted in pdf format by SiSE which means feed back is more limited*"... "*Hard to mark the document as a word document was used and the images had to be shrunk and feedback had to be given in text boxes. Takes longer to mark.*" Possibly a training session on PDF annotation, or a license for better annotating software, would help these tutors, as

marking PDFs is not an issue that is likely to be restricted to lockdown alone. Issues not related to lockdown included a complaint that it was hard to mark consistently as two different versions of a question had been completed by different students, and one SiSE-only tutor complained about the "*Time spent looking up scores*" for iCMAs in order to get them back to students through their TMA feedback, and said this was "*time consuming*".

Figure 3 – Issues relating to OU policy or management
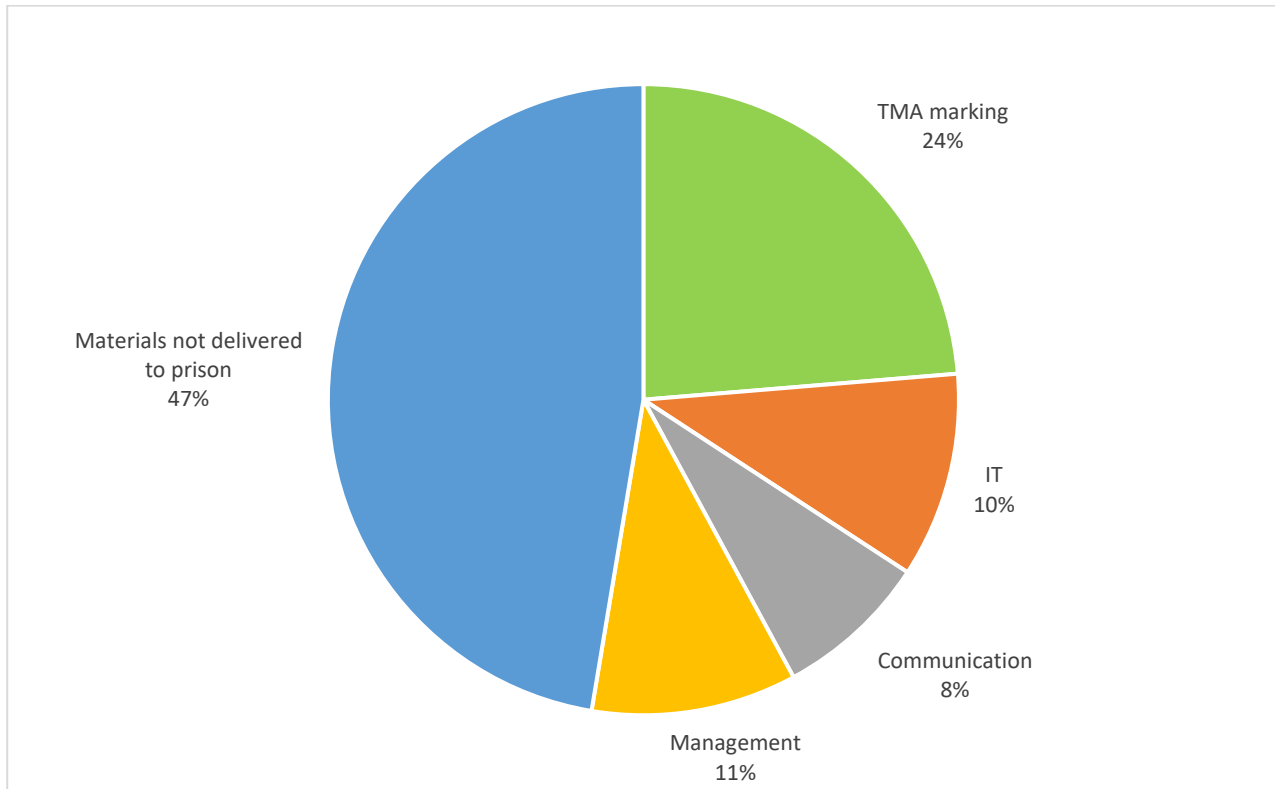
Eight diary entries mentioned technical issues on the OU side; in one case the Education Officer could not view the results of TMAs, but mostly the technical issues were to do with difficulty accessing alternative resources on the SiSE website. "*No article on SiSE resources page for the Science article. Had to go back to the module website to get the article details so I can use the details to locate the article on the library website.*"... "*Link to alternative SiSE resources from tutor page doesn't work had to use the link I have on my dashboard.*"... "*Resource not showing in SiSE resources. Found resource in the tutor forum - other tutors also unable to access the resource.*" One tutor pointed out that the format of the resource is important as well; "*Found data in SiSE resource. Data is in a PDF so not easy to work with. Would be good to have data available in an Excel spreadsheet*". One complained in general about *"Time spent looking for relevant alternative resources"*. These issues should be addressed by the module team/SiSE team, as appropriate, as if more than one tutor is unable to access the resource, it is inefficient that each tutor takes the time to obtain it by other means. It is worth pointing out here that **the forwarding of alternative resources to prisons is a major part of the SiSE tutor's job**; of the 122 diary entries which describe an action taken by the tutor, 77 of them (63%) report forwarding module materials or alternative TMA resources into

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prisons. A further 8 concern sending tutorial slides. Of the two tutors who wrote summaries of their activities over the year, one stated that she had three main challenges, the first of which being "*Finding the resources that the Education Officers request*". If these resources were more directly available to Education Officers, for example through automated timed emails, or sent out centrally by SiSE team members, tutors' workload could be significantly diminished.

Issues relating to communication resulted more from a lack of it. One tutor stated he had not been informed that his student had changed prisons; "*On checking student B's contact details, I discovered that he has been moved from HMP Brixton to HMP Ashfield.*" One tutor reported having received iCMA41 answers from a student and forwarded them to the module team, indicating that the prison had not been informed of the correct procedure, and another reported that the prison didn't have the address for posting TMAs, although the latter two issues may be due to error on the part of prison staff. One tutor had trouble finding out the funding arrangements for NI students, and this took "*Considerable to and fro emails*" to resolve, and it turned out the student in question was not even on the prison record, and had to be withdrawn. One Education Officer "*had no message from SiSE regarding suspension of studies*" during lockdown. Finally, one tutor reported that his marking monitor had not been informed that CMA scores were to be included in TMA feedback, and therefore questioned it; "*ALs were advised to explicitly include these marks in the PT3 feedback, although this message didn't get to the eTMA monitors!*".

In terms of poor management, some issues were simple mistakes such as sending the wrong question to some students for TMA02, or the wrong information to HMP Whatton so that it was unclear whether the student had in fact been assigned to the tutor or not. Some were unavoidable, such as "*UCU strike action directly impacting on providing the alternative resources for TMA1*". Some were due to policy or lack of it; a student had been released on probation and there was confusion over what would happen, as there was "*no procedure for students leaving prison*". In the end contact was lost and the student ceased studying. Another student had been transferred to a prison in a different region and was now too far away for face-to-face tutorials, and the OU decided to keep that student with their current tutor rather than move them to a tutor in the new region. The tutor complained about "*having to make contact with a new education department*", and not being able to give face-to-face tutorials, which the student would no doubt have preferred.

This was not the only student allocation decision to be criticised. One tutor said that when giving a face-to-face tutorial at HMP Usk he discovered that "*Rather frustratingly, another S111 student is at this prison but allocated to a separate S111 tutor. Perhaps students could be allocated more on a prison-by-prison and geographical basis?*" In his summary, he also states "*It became apparent that there were at least 2 SiSE at HMP Channings Wood and Usk who could have been allocated to my S111 SiSE-only tutor group and this could have facilitated group tutorials at less cost to the OU for expense claims.*" This makes sense, and would hopefully not be hard to implement. The amount of time and effort that could be saved is illustrated by yet another student allocation issue at HMP Ashfield involving two tutors in this project, who unfortunately never realised they were both tutoring students at the same prison, with the same Education Officer. Tutor SO3 had multiple students on different modules at HMP Ashfield, and had built a "*Relationship ... with Education Officer over previous years*", and discovered in week 1 that this officer was leaving in a few weeks and a new one would be taking over. In the meantime, Tutor N1 had discovered his student had been transferred to HMP Ashfield and had been trying to make contact but had "*No response from education department at HMP Ashfield.*" The OU decision was that the student should stay with

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Tutor N1 even though HMP Ashfield was too far for him to give face-to-face tutorials. Tutor N1 tried phoning, emailing, and even writing by post. In week 2, Tutor SO3 gave a two-hour face-to-face tutorial at HMP Ashfield, while Tutor N1 wasted more time trying to even make contact; "*Education officers do not have answerphones so I have to make repeated phone calls in the hope that one day he will answer his phone.*" Tutor N1 did not manage to get through on the phone until week 5, and spoke to the outgoing Education Officer, who promised to email him but did not. In week 6 he phoned again and "*was told he has 'moved on to better things' and given name of new contact*". Tutor SO3 had had this information for weeks at this point and had been teaching normally. Tutor N1's student ended up deferring in week 11, although it is unclear if the weeks with no contact affected this decision. If the student had been transferred to Tutor SO3 however, a lot of time and effort could have been saved. Tutor N1 had "*Contacted my staff tutor to find out if I will still be his tutor or if he will transfer to a tutor in his new region. She said to carry on*." **It is possible that if all SiSE students were in SiSE-only tutor groups, the person responsible for this decision would have had more experience with SiSE issues and more information, and would have reallocated the student**. Certainly it seems that student allocation could have been improved in at least 3 cases.

By far the most frequently-reported issue was that of materials not being delivered to the prisons. Both tutor summaries mentioned it. One stated "*The biggest challenges since October 2019 have been the serious delays in materials dispatch especially at the beginning of this presentation*". The other gave two recommendations, the first of which was "*Earlier delivery of module resources to prisons. If delays are due to mailing from OU, it would be good to have a 'heads up', so that tutors can email resources that may allow students to keep moving forward.*" The delivery delay issue was reported in 38 diary entries, comprising 49% of the issues that related to OU policy or management. Initial materials were not received by the prisons until many weeks into the course; for example, in week 4 one tutor reported "*Email received from one education officer HMP Long Lartin regarding erratic arrival of course materials. The student only received Mailing 81A Print Pack Part 01 on Tuesday*" while another reported in the same week that two prisons had not got the materials yet at all. Later mailings were also delayed; "*Request for extension due to late arrival of TMA03 materials to HMP Long Lartin*"... "*Student hadn't received alternative resources for TMA4*"... "*Perpetual problem*".

Effects - These "*serious delays to receiving module material*" had knock-on effects for a long time. **One student even had to withdraw due to lack of materials**, and concerns were expressed "*that [students] will be able to catch up". "Students receive study materials late, making it impossible to keep up with the study timetable*". Two tutors mentioned discussing the issue on the tutor forum, and one said that SiSE had stated they would not be sending out warning letters for late TMAs due to the delay. Two entries said that a face-to-face tutorial had to be adjusted because the student had not, or had only just, received the materials. One tutor printed and sent hard copies of the material to the prison himself, but the more common response (reported 17 times) was to email the material to the Education Officer for them to print. However, this places the burden of printing costs on an already over-burdened prison budget, and is not ideal; "*PDFs of material emailed to Education Officer, seriously impacting on her printing budget, but willingly done for student's benefit.*" Finally, tutors mentioned 8 times that they had to grant extensions due to the delays; for example "*Put extensions into system for TMA01, as it is unlikely that students will have received start-of-module study materials*". Relatedly, tutors mentioned that their marking was affected by the delays; for example "*Some students still not receiving essential documents in a timely manner causing a*

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protracted marking period". This delay in tutors receiving TMAs was an issue in itself, with its own consequences, and this is discussed in the next section.

Issues relating to late or missing TMAs.

Late or missing TMAs were a major difficulty for tutors, mentioned in 39 diary entries. The extent of the problem is exemplified by one tutor's report that for TMAs 01-05, he gave respectively 8, 7, 5, 4 and 7 extensions, while 2, 5, 2, 4 and 0 TMAs were submitted before the deadline. One tutor said "*some TMAs have been received up to two months after the published TMA cut-off date*".

Causes - The cause was overwhelmingly reported as being the delayed receipt of module materials, but other causes were mentioned, including "*internal issues at the prisons*" such as problems with accessing the Virtual Campus or software, lack of time or conditions conducive to study, or the Education Officer being on leave, working from home, or otherwise unavailable to submit the TMA or pass on materials to the student. COVID-19 lockdown of course exacerbated all these issues, though interestingly one tutor reported that a lockdown in January due to an "*incident at HMP Whitemoor, terrorist related*" in fact gave a student more study time; "*Ironically the "lockdown" has allowed him time to catch up*".

Effects - As to the effects of late TMAs, there was a difference in the types of comment made by tutors depending on whether they had SiSE-only groups or not. The challenges resulting from late TMAs reported by tutors with only one or two SiSE students tended to be student-focussed, while the challenges pointed out by SiSE-only tutors were more often tutor-focussed. Tutors with only one or two SiSE students pointed out 6 times the difficulty for the student in catching up, for example because the later the TMA, the later the student receives feedback and is able to act on it. One tutor mentioned that "*missing TMA deadlines was making the student feel anxious*", and the student in question deferred**.** Finally, some tutors were concerned that late marks would not be recorded or included in the student's overall mark. Of the SiSE-only tutors, however, all but one of the comments were to do with the "*protracted marking period".* One said they were "*constantly 'mopping up' late TMAs. Extends the marking period*." Some went on to explain that the longer marking period made it harder to mark consistently, as; "*marking period extended and overlaps with other TMAs"... "Now marking TMA03 in TMA04 marking period. Some SiSE students an assignment behind."* One SiSE-only tutor made a point about the eTMA extensions system which could potentially result in positive changes being made; "*Extension to TMA5 requested for a week beyond 20th May. eTMA system precludes this increase to the extension".* Possibly a solution would be to make it possible for SiSE-only tutors to authorise longer extensions, as their students are more likely to need them.

Issues relating to HMP policies or management

Whether or not teaching SiSE students runs smoothly depends to a huge extent on the Education Officers at the prisons, without whom no materials can reach students; "*Education officer on leave for 1 week so student did not receive new copy of Q4 before submitting assignment."* Unfortunately there seems to be great variety in Education Officers at the prisons. At one end of the scale, 9 diary entries report being unable to contact an Education Officer at all. Sometimes contact details are incomplete "*It would help if we were provided with email addresses in the initial contact details*." and sometimes the Education Officer does not respond to contact efforts "*No reply from education*

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officer and no other way of contacting student". When contact is established, some Education Officers seem poorly informed *"He was not able to tell me if student had received materials." ... "EOs don't always know what alternative resources the students request." ... "staff unsure of the situation and will check with the student".* At the other end of the scale, some Education Officers are over-careful; *"Email from ... proactive education officer stating that student's TMA01 has just been submitted",* emailing copies of TMAs *"as a back-up to the eTMA submission"*, emailing for *"confirmation of eTMA submission"*, or double-checking that the delay in delivery of materials would not affect the student's mark; *"concern expressed at potential penalising for late submission of TMA2".* Their job is complicated, and they do sometimes make mistakes *"Received a TMA04 via eTMA system. On opening the TMA found that only the odd pages had been sent. Deadline for TMA04 was due 14 March"* but seem to go to great lengths to ensure that the student's mark doesn't suffer as a result; *"Education Officer HMP Oakwood emailed as sent incorrect TMA02. Requested a remark of Q4c - diagram - original TMA didn't show image." ... "Checking whether additional pages to a TMA which were not scanned would affect the marked score" ... "3/6 Thameside to try and track missing TMA pages"*.

The degree to which teaching depends on Education Officers is illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a much greater effect on SiSE students and their tutors than on ordinary students and tutors. Tutors mentioned prison-wide issues relating to COVID-19 in 14 diary entries, and 10 of these pointed out that with Education Officers working from home, all support for students had ceased; *"HMP Oakwood Education Officer is in Covid-19 isolation, so no support for students for next 2 weeks."* .. *"EO HMP Oakwood sent email to say that she is on restricted access to prison, so further delays to TMA submission"* ... *"Education Officer at HMP YOI Swinfen Hall emailed to let me know that he is working at home due to Covid 19 and students will need extensions".* The issues with late TMAs (see earlier section) were *"further compounded by 'lockdown'.",* as *"most assignments were sent via mail. This became very challenging when Covid-19 prevented the Education Officers accessing the prisons."* A very few were still managing to support students in spite of the difficulties; *"Education Office HMP Stafford has sent scanned copy of TMA05 via eTMA system. EO still working from home." ... "Another scanned TMA04 received. EO emailed to say that TMA05 is being completed. Still a challenge for EOs as they are still working from home."*

While the COVID-19 crisis is hopefully a one-off, the experience is relevant for SiSE students and their tutors, as lockdowns happen at prisons from time to time unrelated to global pandemics; a terrorist incident locked down HMP Whitemoor for a week in January 2020. It is worth looking into the effect of lockdown therefore, as a prison-related issue. The effect of Education Officers having no access to students has already been shown, but even once Education Officers were able to access prisons, lockdown still affected students; *"Education Officer back to HMP ... SiSE no longer have access to PCs".* While face-to-face tutorials were cancelled for all OU students, ordinary students could still access online tutorials These were not available to SiSE students, and 3 tutors reported that even phone tutorials had to be cancelled; *"Reply from HMP Whitemoor that neither face to face or phone tutorials will be permissible."* Tutors had to find ways around the restrictions *"to continue supporting SiSE learners during current crisis"*, for example asking prisons *"if I can pass any materials onto them to get to learners"* and *"Will have to try to get email conversation going".* One tutor mentioned that when students or Education Officers were unable to use the eTMA system during lockdown, TMAs had to be "*scanned in by the AL, marked and returned to the HMP and to Assignment Handling via the e-mail system ... although this relied upon the AL concerned having access to a printer/scanner and the time to do this from home.*" This is another example of SiSE tutors going the extra mile during lockdown.

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"*Staff turnover in prisons*" was reported as a challenge 8 times. Building and maintaining a relationship with Education Officers is an added aspect of SiSE teaching, and as already shown, it can be difficult. This makes it more frustrating when they leave their position and the tutor has to start again with a new Education Officer. Other prison-wide issues include different policies and arrangements being necessary in different prisons; "*Category A prison*" ... "*the prison doesn't offer telephone tutorials*" ... "*email from HMP Ashfield requesting ID. Previous visitor details had been deleted from the SERCO system; ID required*" as well as times when procedures are not followed, such as when one tutor was sent an iCMA due to a misunderstanding, and another tutor received a phonecall direct from a prisoner; "*22/10 Call direct from JR(!) HMP Thameside informed.*"

Issues relating to technology access

Of course, issues relating to technology access are an unavoidable part of the secure environment. Students' time on computers is restricted, and when computers are available the software and internet access is restricted. One tutor discussed with a student during a phone tutorial the "*difficulty to access materials in a Category A prison.*" Another reported that a student was unable to fully understand a question on TMA03 as they could not watch the video, and without images the transcript was not very helpful. "*Transcript describes a titration. Student thought that there should have been some images*". Many students could not access the Virtual Campus consistently, and when they could, the restrictions on internet use reduced its usefulness; "*the student has limited access to the VC but isn't finding it very helpful as anything that links to the OU website (e.g. interactive models and virtual microscope) is blocked and the videos are unplayable due to buffering.*" Once lockdown started, these issues got much worse; most students had no access to computers at all, due to Education Officers working from home or otherwise unable to help students; "*Message from ... HMP The Mount about the education officer not having access to students at this time and to await further communications*"

Figure 4 – Issues relating to technology access
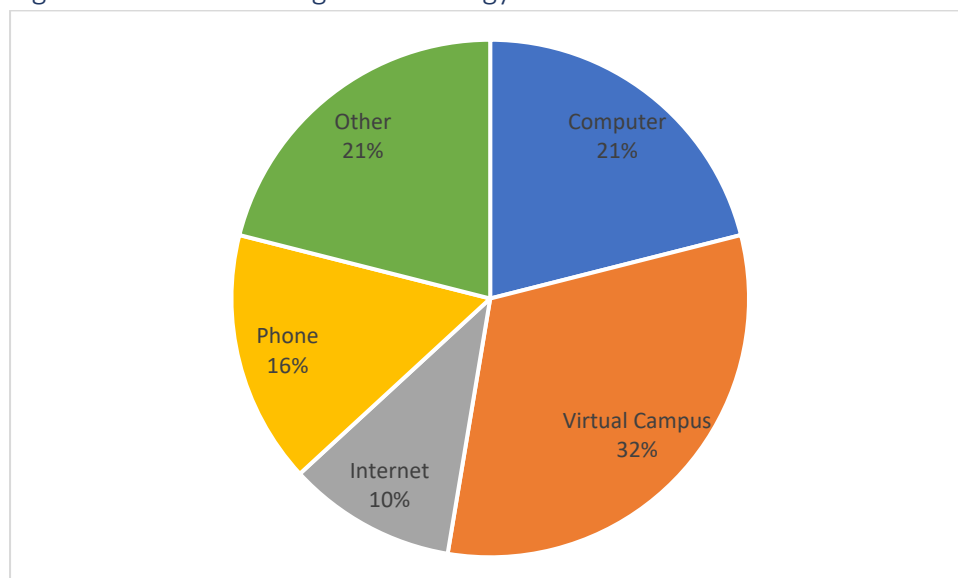
Some phone connections were not consistent. One tutor reported having to rearrange a phone tutorial due to "*Issues with phone lines; unable to make external calls*" while others managed to

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conduct the tutorial but mentioned a *"difficult phone connection"* or *"Crackling phone line making communication difficult."*

As many students had *"Limited time to type up TMAs on computer"*, handwritten and scanned TMAs were not infrequent. Some tutors found this difficult, as the students tend not to leave enough space around their work for feedback. *"Whilst TMA was submitted electronically, it was effectively handwritten and scanned. This made inserting comments difficult. I have asked for him to word process or post his future TMAs."* This particular student apparently tried to word-process his next TMA, but asked for an extension as he was *"typing the TMA as agreed, and has had trouble accessing computers, expects to submit through eTMA system by end of the week"*. However, he ended up submitting another handwritten scanned TMA. He did not manage to word-process his third TMA either, and instead the tutor received a *"Request to send xxxxx's TMA03 by post ... Also request for extension to allow this. Will delay marking but improve being able to mark on the script as previous ones were images not typed"*. This shows how difficult it is for students to get enough time on computers. For some, this is a real problem; *"For student B, hand writing is not possible (disability). It would be good if students were given more dedicated study time by their institutions."*

Issues relating to individual students

Student B's disability is an example of an issue affecting an individual student rather than a whole prison or module. Other examples include issues like *"struggling with a loud cellmate"*, or *"lack of light in cell"*, which would not affect students in normal environments. Students in normal environments do not often change location during a module either; 4 diary entries reported students being transferred to another prison, and 3 reported students being released. Contact was lost with all but one of the students who transferred, in spite of efforts to keep supporting them; *"Difficult for students who have moved on to receive resources." ... "Did not hear again"*. Contact was lost with all students who were released; *"No procedure for students leaving prison. Website access needed to access resources."* It would appear that some procedure for retaining SiSE students who are released would be beneficial. Retaining students who are transferred seems to depend on the situation at the new prison, in terms of how pro-active the Education Officer is, and how conducive the new environment is for studying. For example, Student B's tutor reports that he *"has had little time to study since moving to a new prison. He works all day in a workshop and his cellmate does not want the light on in the evenings."* His aforementioned disability prevented him from hand-writing his TMAs, and without time during the day to type them, Student B sadly had to defer his studies until his expected release from prison. He was one of two who deferred during the period of data collection; the other due to the delay in receiving materials, and having no access to the OU portal.

In 5 cases contact could not be established with a student who was neither transferred nor released, but simply not engaging, though in one of those cases the student did not even appear on the prison record, and it is unclear what occurred. In each case the tutor submitted an eSRF. Other problems reported by tutors could have occurred to any student, rather than just those in secure environments. These included ordinary issues such as *"unable to attend f2f tutorial"* and *"Alternative version of TMA01 question mislaid by student, as they have a large number of separate documents. Alternative TMA question not bound with rest of TMA, so easily gets separated, or not recognised."* as well as minor mental health issues such as *"Feels rushed and not learning everything"* ... *"still*

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having personal issues, not sure he can continue" and "*missing deadlines was making student feel anxious".*
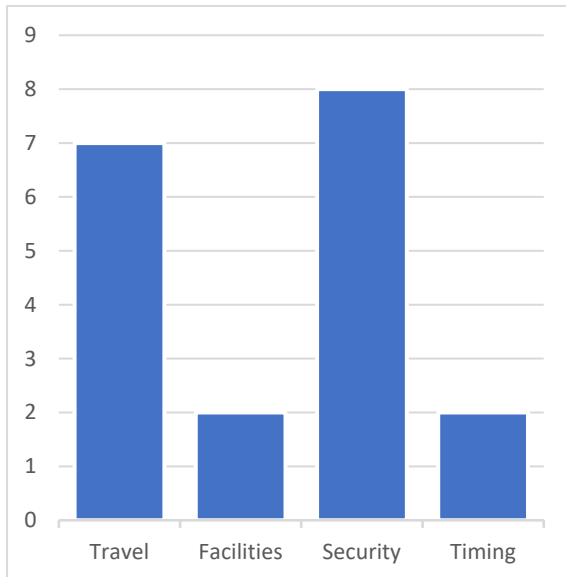
Issues relating to face-to-face tutorials

As might be expected, most of the issues relating to face-to-face tutorials were due to the amount of time they require. Partly this is due to distance; "*Difficult to arrange F2F tutorials due to distance*" ... "*HMP Whatton is a 6 hour round trip for a face to face tutorial... offered a telephone tutorial*", although this did not prevent some tutors from pressing on; "*journey was by car, involving 14 hour journey with many hold ups especially M1 M25. Will have to review transport method."*... "*Journey [to same prison] by train , much easier than by road about 12 hours all told*". (This tutor is certainly to be commended for their dedication!) Partly it is due to the time involved to obtain security clearance before even arranging a tutorial; *"Extra time taken in collating documentation, attending security check and completing online form." ... "copy of most recent DBS request by HMP The Verne ... email link provided to complete security check ... Quite time consuming!"* and partly the time involved once arrived at the prison, to pass through security and gain access to the students; "*Need to make sure that I arrive in good time as getting through the system can take quite a while." ... "High security status; all visitors subject to comprehensive searching."* However, a tutor who visits a prison multiple times in a year can sometimes speed up the process *"We had also arranged the documentation for security clearance as more than 3 visits for the year are expected".* **Multiple visits are more likely for tutors with more SiSE students, indicating a likely benefit of allocating these students to SiSE-only tutor groups.**

The two SiSE-only tutors who provided summaries of their teaching activity reported that after the initial attrition they had respectively 10 students in 8 secure units and 12 students in 9 secure units. Some combining of tutorials into one visit was therefore possible, which was not the case with tutors who had only one or two SiSE students.

Only two entries commented on less-than-ideal teaching facilities at the prisons, and the tutor in question was equal to the difficulties; *"Location of tutorial challenging ... took place in a communal area (lockdown as staff were doing fitness tests at the time)" "Some difficulties tutoring in a small room. From previous experience, I take in a small whiteboard along with some practical kit and not rely upon any overhead projector facilities."*

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Figure 5 - Issues relating to face-to-face tutorials

Other issues were related to having to rearrange tutorials; "*tutorial postponed due to incident... Education officer states the prison is in lock down for at least 1 week*" or to being unable to arrange any kind of tutorial at all. Sometimes it was impossible to arrange any kind of live tutorial, and a tutor had to send the slides to the student instead. *"Telephone and face to face tutorials were not deliverable" ... "Looked into the possibility of a f2f visit as the prison doesn't offer telephone tutorials. However 200 mile roundtrip. Also informed that there is now only one student at this prison as the other student has been released."* ... "*Arranged to send PDFs of tutorials in lieu of F2F tutorials*". In 8 diary entries, when live tutorials were not possible, tutors reported sending PDFs of the slides. Most complained about how convoluted this process was; "*Downloaded the slide set from the tutorial room, so slides are the same as those on recorded online tutorial." ... "Have to access tutorial room, download slide sets, remove personal data and convert to PDF before emailing to EOs."* It does not seem efficient for each tutor to individually find and download the powerpoint slides, remove any personal information and create PDFs. It is also concerning that only 2 of the 8 diary entries that describe the process mention removing personal information. If some tutors are unaware that personal information must be removed, or if any simply forget, then SiSE students could obtain personal information about whichever tutor created the powerpoint slides. This contradicts GDPR and would probably worry the tutors who post their slides on the website for other tutors to download. It might be safer and more efficient to redact personal information and convert slides to PDF centrally, and make them available on the SiSE resources page. Indeed, one tutor recommends "*Provide a set of tutorial slides for each Topic within the resources sent to the students*".

Conclusions

Information for SiSE team/Faculty

SiSE-only tutor groups help tutors to become better at dealing with SiSE issues, and also create a resource of knowledge to advise the OU on policy. It would seem that SiSE-only tutors are less likely to report issues with prison policy or management, possibly as a result of being more used to dealing with the prison environment. They are more likely to report issues with OU policy or management, possibly due also to having greater experience and being able to see ways that the OU could better support SiSE students (and indeed tutors).

Facilitating getting alternative resources into prisons is a major part of the SiSE tutor's job. Almost half (47%) of all the issues raised were around getting materials into prisons. Of the 122 diary entries which describe an action taken by the tutor, 77 of them (63%) report forwarding module materials or alternative TMA resources into prisons. A further 8 concern sending tutorial slides. Of the two tutors who wrote summaries of their activities over the year, one stated that she had three main challenges, the first of which being "*Finding the resources that the Education Officers request*". If these resources were more directly available to Education Officers, for example through automated timed emails, or sent out centrally by SiSE team members, tutors' workload could be significantly diminished.

One tutor printed and sent hard copies of the material to the prison himself, but the more common response (reported 17 times) was to email the material to the Education Officer for them to print. However, this places the burden of printing costs on an already over-burdened prison budget, and is not ideal; "*PDFs of material emailed to Education Officer, seriously impacting on her printing budget, but willingly done for student's benefit.*"

Late or missing TMAs is a major difficulty for tutors, mentioned in 39 diary entries and primarily due to delays in module materials reaching students. The extent of the problem is exemplified by one tutor's report that for TMAs 01-05, he gave respectively 8, 7, 5, 4 and 7 extensions, while 2, 5, 2, 4 and 0 TMAs were submitted before the deadline. One tutor said "*some TMAs have been received up to two months after the published TMA cut-off date".*

This delay causes significant problems for tutors trying to manage their workload, and fully justifies the smaller size of SiSE only tutorgroups (10-12 students rather than 20) One said they were "*constantly 'mopping up' late TMAs. Extends the marking period.*" Some went on to explain that the longer marking period made it harder to mark consistently, as; "*marking period extended and overlaps with other TMAs"... "Now marking TMA03 in TMA04 marking period. Some SiSE students an assignment behind."*

Student changes in circumstance and moves are not dealt with well. For example, a student had been released on probation and there was confusion over what would happen, as there was "*no procedure for students leaving prison*". In the end contact was lost and the student ceased studying. This was not an isolated incident, and instigating a procedure for maintaining contact would improve student retention.

There are frequent breaches of procedure, **with one tutor being phoned directly by a SiSE student** (particularly worrying since we assure all SiSE tutors that their details will not be released to SiSE

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students). More frequently the issues are around where iCMAS and TMAs can/should be sent, and may arise partly due to well-meaning tutors sending materials directly to EOs because of issues with the supply of printed study material by the correct route.

The piecemeal allocation of SiSE students caused many problems, and tutors were very frustrated at the lack of joined up thinking, as the examples below illustrate. If all SiSE students on modules with high populations of SiSE students were in SiSE-only tutor groups, and allocated at one time in a sensible geographic manner, a far better student experience could be provided alongside considerable financial savings.

One tutor said that when giving a face-to-face tutorial at HMP Usk he discovered that "*Rather frustratingly, another S111 student is at this prison but allocated to a separate S111 tutor. Perhaps students could be allocated more on a prison-by-prison and geographical basis?"* In his summary, he also states "*It became apparent that there were at least 2 SiSE at HMP Channings Wood and Usk who could have been allocated to my S111 SiSE-only tutor group and this could have facilitated group tutorials at less cost to the OU for expense claims*." This makes sense, and would hopefully not be hard to implement.

This project identified another of these incidents, of which the tutors involved remain unaware. During data analysis it became clear that two tutors had students at HMP Ashfield, and one tutor had wasted at least 6 weeks trying to contact an Education Officer who was already in regular contact with the other tutor. This was a result of mismanagement on the part of the OU, as HMP Ashfield was too far away from the first tutor, who had "*Contacted my staff tutor to find out if I will still be his tutor or if he will transfer to a tutor in his new region. She said to carry on*." That student ended up deferring.

To allocate students sensibly would require SiSE students to comply with the 'Final Enrolment Date' as all other OU students do. The current situation where most SiSE students register well after the Final Enrolment date means that students are allocated piecemeal, which is not in the student's best interest. If students do not meet the Final Enrolment Date, they can easily be allocated on the next presentation, and for most level 1 modules there are two presentations each year.

The quality of the Education Officer and their willingness to build up a relationship with the tutor is key to student success. Having SiSE only groups allocated at FED in a sensible geographic manner would make a big difference to this, meaning EOs were not being expected to deal with multiple tutors on the same module at the same prison. Some EOs are excellent, others are very hard to contact and clearly lack capacity to keep track of multiple OU contacts.

Lockdowns cause particular issues, and can occur for a number of reasons, not just Covid-19. Students lose access to phone tutorials, to computers and to education officers. For example, 3 tutors reported that even phone tutorials had to be cancelled; "*Reply from HMP Whitemoor that neither face to face or phone tutorials will be permissible."* Tutors had to find ways around the restrictions "*to continue supporting SiSE learners during current crisis*", for example asking prisons "*if I can pass any materials onto them to get to learners*" and "*Will have to try to get email conversation going*".

Students really appreciate face to face tutorials when they are possible. Many of the barriers would be reduced by have a fixed Final Enrolment Date for SiSE students allowing a more

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geographically sensible allocation of tutors to SiSE students, and making better use of SiSE-only tutorgroups, so that all the SiSE students on a particular module in a prison have the same tutor.

Problems include students being allocated to tutors who live a considerable distance from the prison, "*HMP Whatton is a 6 hour round trip for a face to face tutorial... offered a telephone tutorial*", and the time involved to obtain security clearance before even arranging a tutorial; "*Extra time taken in collating documentation, attending security check and completing online form.*" ... "*copy of most recent DBS request by HMP The Verne ... email link provided to complete security check ... Quite time consuming!*" and partly the time involved once arrived at the prison, to pass through security and gain access to the students; "*Need to make sure that I arrive in good time as getting through the system can take quite a while.*" ... "*High security status; all visitors subject to comprehensive searching.*" However, a tutor who visits a prison multiple times in a year can sometimes speed up the process, as procedures exist at some (if not all) prisons for fast-tracking regular visitors.

There are often significant problems with phone tutorials too. One tutor reported having to rearrange a phone tutorial due to "*Issues with phone lines; unable to make external calls*" while others managed to conduct the tutorial but mentioned a "*difficult phone connection*" or "C*rackling phone line making communication difficult.*" Some prisons do not allow phone tutorials as a matter of policy. Face-to-face tutorials are even more important for students at these prisons.

Many students could not access the Virtual Campus consistently, and when they could, the restrictions on internet use reduced its usefulness; "*the student has limited access to the VC but isn't finding it very helpful as anything that links to the OU website (e.g. interactive models and virtual microscope) is blocked and the videos are unplayable due to buffering.*"

Encouraging paper TMA submissions are better than electronically submitted scanned handwritten ones, provided the paper copies go to the tutor. As many students had "*Limited time to type up TMAs on computer*", handwritten and scanned TMAs were not infrequent. Some tutors found this difficult, as the students tend not to leave enough space around their work for feedback. Eg tutor received a "*Request to send xxxxx's TMA03 by post ... Also request for extension to allow this. Will delay marking but improve being able to mark on the script as previous ones were images not typed*".

Information for the S111 module team

The S111 materials available to SiSE tutors are either incomplete or hard to find

Mostly the technical issues were to do with difficulty accessing alternative resources on the SiSE website. "*No article on SiSE resources page for the Science article. Had to go back to the module website to get the article details so I can use the details to locate the article on the library website.*"... "*Link to alternative SiSE resources from tutor page doesn't work had to use the link I have on my dashboard.*"... "*Resource not showing in SiSE resources. Found resource in the tutor forum - other tutors also unable to access the resource.*" One tutor pointed out that the format of the resource is important as well; "*Found data in SiSE resource. Data is in a PDF so not easy to work with. Would be*

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good to have data available in an Excel spreadsheet". One complained in general about *"Time spent looking for relevant alternative resources".*

Pdf marking training and access to tools needed for SiSE tutors on S111 (where pdf marking is not the norm)

Due to lack of computer access many students submitted scans of handwritten TMAs via their EO

iCMAs cause particular issues on S111 in terms of procedures, both for prisons and for monitoring.

One tutor reported having received iCMA41 answers from a student and forwarded them to the module team, indicating that the prison had not been informed of the correct procedure, and another reported that the prison didn't have the address for posting TMAs, although the latter two issues may be due to error on the part of prison staff. One tutor reported that his marking monitor had not been informed that CMA scores were to be included in TMA feedback, and therefore questioned it; *"ALs were advised to explicitly include these marks in the PT3 feedback, although this message didn't get to the eTMA monitors!".*

More care needed around TMA questions which assume students have access to video content

Even without Covid-19 students' time on computers is restricted, and when computers are available the software and internet access is restricted. One tutor discussed with a student during a phone tutorial the *"difficulty to access materials in a Category A prison."* Another reported that a student was unable to fully understand a question on TMA03 as they could not watch the video, and without images the transcript was not very helpful. *"Transcript describes a titration. Student thought that there should have been some images".* Many students could not access the Virtual Campus consistently, and when they could, the restrictions on internet use reduced its usefulness; *"the student has limited access to the VC but isn't finding it very helpful as anything that links to the OU website (e.g. interactive models and virtual microscope) is blocked and the videos are unplayable due to buffering."*

Making tutorial pdf slides sets part of supplied module materials would be helpful

In 8 diary entries, when live tutorials were not possible, tutors reported sending PDFs of the slides. Most complained about how convoluted this process was; *"Downloaded the slide set from the tutorial room, so slides are the same as those on recorded online tutorial." ... "Have to access tutorial room, download slide sets, remove personal data and convert to PDF before emailing to EOs."* It does not seem efficient for each tutor to individually find and download the powerpoint slides, remove any personal information and create PDFs. It is also concerning that only 2 of the 8 diary entries that describe the process mention removing personal information. If some tutors are unaware that personal information must be removed, or if any simply forget, then SiSE students could obtain personal information about whichever tutor created the powerpoint slides. This contradicts GDPR and would probably worry the tutors who post their slides on the website for other tutors to download. It might be safer and more efficient to redact personal information and convert slides to PDF centrally, and make them available on the SiSE resources page. Indeed, one tutor recommends *"Provide a set of tutorial slides for each Topic within the resources sent to the students".*

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Recommendations

The single thing that the OU could do to improve the SiSE experience is to fix and enforce a Final Enrolment Date for SiSE students. This would:-

1. Increase the likelihood that SiSE students receive their module materials in good time
2. allow sensible geographic allocation of SiSE students to tutors, making some face to face tuition possible
3. ensure that in each prison Education Officers only have to deal with one tutor per module, allowing tutors to build up relationships with the EOs and improving communication

For high population modules with more than say 10 SiSE students, SiSE only tutorgroups offer significant advantages as there is a considerable overhead for tutors in navigating module materials, SiSE procedures etc. It also allows the SiSE only tutors to work more closely with the relevant module team to improve the resources available over time.

Dissemination of Findings and Impact

An early draft of the data analysis, conclusions and recommendations was circulated to the OU SiSE team in August, to allow the results to be factored into any decisions for 20J.

Within STEM, a useful meeting was held in August 2020 attended by the AD Student Experience, Staff Tutors in STEM responsible for level 1 modules with large numbers of SiSE students and a number of SiSE team members, including the AD WASS and the deputy AD WASS (who is the acting head of the SiSE team). The reasons for late registration of SiSE students were discussed, and it was agreed that FED (Final Enrolment Date, ie the date by which students have to reserve on a module) and FRD (Final Registration Date, ie the date by which reserved students have to have completed registration) should apply to SiSE students in the same way as it does to all other students in the university. It was agreed that it is in the best interests of students who are trying to register after FRD to be deferred to the next presentation in February. This meets points 1 and 2 of the recommendations.

It was also agreed that on S111 we would plan to have up to 4 SiSE only tutor groups on 20J, and only allocate SiSE students to standard tutor groups if we had more than 48 of them. This would mean we could wait to allocate these students until we knew how many students there were from each institution, and so hopefully allocate all the students from one institution to the same tutor, meeting points 2 and 3 of the recommendations.

The report has been circulated to the S111 module team, followed by a presentation to the module team on the findings. The aim is to build up the relationship between the tutors of SiSE only tutor groups and the module team to improve the experience for SiSE students by developing additional resources and improving processes.

It is also planned that we will present our findings at the eSTEeM conference next April.

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