

MSQ funding for an early start MU123 18J

Summary

A flexible start programme was introduced in July- September 2018 for the MU123 18J presentation. There was a high take up from students with just under 200 students participating, which was 43% of those offered a place, and this meant that the programme was full to capacity. Funding meant that the opportunity was only offered to those who registered early and were studying more than 30 credits in the academic year.

The flexible start programme was fully tutor supported with online tutorials and students allocated to named tutors in groups of 40. Materials were available online for the first five units and this included screencasts, computer simulations, the software for the module, student discussion forums and online tutorials and recordings of online tutorials.

Students answered questionnaires on their view of the flexible start programmes, and this included a “hindsight” survey around 3 months into their actual module study. Students were very appreciative of the Early Start opportunity and tutorials/tutor support were the most frequently flagged area the students asked us to keep unchanged. The most frequent request for change was to make the printed materials available.

The 18J project had an MSQ funding of £7,000 and MSQ funding for a 19J pilot of £7,000 has been agreed. To date there is minimal detectable difference in terms of retention for those who took part in the early start programme. This is in contrast with M140 and suggests that the choice of students offered an early start opportunity is critical.

Retention

It is still very early to detect any change in the retention of students and there are many caveats to be made. However, rather simplistically, for those students offered a place on the early start scheme Table 1 shows the percentages of those still present at module start and fee points. The percentage of those who did not take up an offered place, and who are still present at the 50% fee point, (end December) is 78%. For those who did take up an offered place it is 83%. In terms of numbers though this represents just 10 more students.

Table 1: Students registered by 6th July	Still present at MU123 start	Still present at 25% fee point	Still present at 50% fee point
Offered an early start place but did not take up place (n=279)	89%	83%	78%
Offered a place and did take it up place (n=195)	92%	89%	83%

Figure 1 also shows the minimal impact on MU123 data for students studying more than 30 credits in 2017J and 2018J. The numbers “ever registered” on MU123 J are scaled to 100 (this is to avoid any potential confusion with actual numbers for all students on MU123). Data for TMA02 has been excluded there are possibly still many late submissions still to be received. Similarly, numbers at the 50% fee point are excluded as these will decrease slightly as late withdrawals are processed. Any difference, for the group not offered the early start, between 2017 and 2018 are just the usually year on year variation.

Table 2 similarly show that 2018 numbers are no different to 2017 ones and that shows that 2017 students who registered early tend to have a higher pass rate that those who do not.

Figure 1: MU123 students registered for more than 30 credits before 6th July (early) or on/after 6th July (not early)

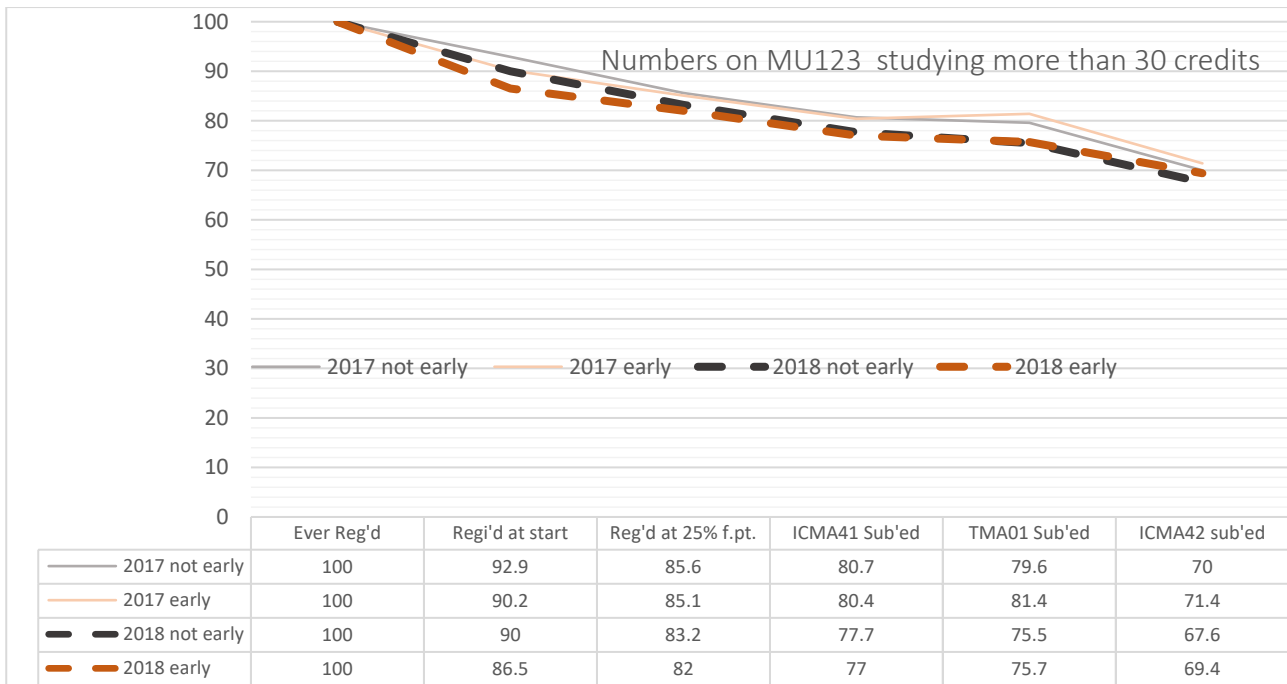


Table 2: Numbers MU123 17J and 18J

	EARLY REGISTERED			NOT EARLY REGISTERED		
	Number ever registered before 6 th July	Number and percentage of these still present at 50% fee point	Number and percentage of these passing	Number ever registered on or later than 6 th July	Number and percentage of these still present at 50% fee point	Number and percentage of these passing
All MU123: 17J	714	79% - 562	64% - 454	1735	78% - 1356	58% - 999
MU123: 17J studying more than 30 credits	542	79% - 427	64% - 349	1225	77% - 939	56% - 688
MU123: 18J studying more than 30 credits	540	78% - 419		1195	77% - 920	

Student feedback: This has been extremely positive with comments including

“The early start has allowed me to focus on my other module, making my start at the OU a lot less intensive. It was a good introduction in to how the OU works- forums, tutorials and what is required in the assignments. It also helped me to get into a routine of balancing full-time work with study so that the October start did not come as a shock.” – from the “hindsight” survey

“Most of all it has given me a good feel for how the 'real module' will be. Not just for MU123 but for other OU modules as well. I'm more confident as a result of this.”

“I’ve found it helpful in assessing where I am, what my workload will be so I know how to manage my time and outside responsibilities.”

“I’ve enjoyed it and has given me confidence that I won’t be facing too much too soon as a consequence of doing two modules. Please do send out materials to those who have expressed an interest in starting early. This would have been very helpful.” – from the survey whilst the early start was running

Associate Lecturer feedback: Tutors were enthusiastic about their contact with students over the summer. There was some frustration that more students didn’t take advantage of the practice tasks by submitting tasks for comment. It was noted that some confusion arose because the flexible start site was open to all. Students finding the site by accident felt that they had been ‘overlooked’ and were not clear why some were receiving tutorial support.

Options for MU123 19J pilot

We can select students to be offered an early start place using any reasonable criteria. The findings from the 18J pilot and the M140 early start findings suggest that it is critical to focus on groups where there are sufficient numbers who register early; where historical data suggests there is scope to improve retention; and to actively promote the benefits of an early start. Obvious possibilities would be to consider the qualification students are registered on, their previous education level and whether the student was new or continuing. Table 3 summarises the 2017 position for these options with the numbers in first two rows identical to Table 2

Table: Historical data for MU123 2017 by subgroups of students

Table 3	EARLY REGISTERED			NOT EARLY REGISTERED		
	Number ever registered before 6 th July	Number and percentage of these still present at 50% fee point	Number and percentage of these passing	Number ever registered on or later than 6 th July	Number and percentage of these still present at 50% fee point	Number and percentage of these passing
All MU123: 17J	714	79% - 562	64% - 454	1735	78% - 1356	58% - 999
Studying more than 30 credits	542	79% - 427	64% - 349	1225	77% - 939	56% - 688
New students	196	69% - 135	52% - 101	767	77% - 594	59% - 451
Highest qual. on entry less than 2 A levels (equivalence)	295	74% - 219	58% - 172	595	71% - 418	47% - 277
Qual. intention						
QD	28	82% - 23	61% - 61%	90	81% - 73	57% - 51
Q62	367	90% - 332	71% - 17	618	83% - 515	59% - 366
None	133	29% - 33	17% - 19	331	49% - 162	34% - 114

Next steps

Table 3, and the knowledge that just under 50% of students offered a place will take up place, suggest that for 19J we offer all early registered new students a place and all students with lower entry qualifications. That would be around 416 students. The apparent low pass rate for students not linked to a qualification is partially due to students becoming linked during the year. We could include this group of students on the basis that guidance may be appropriate for them but that require marginally more funding of around £500.

Issues

TM111. TM111 expressed concerned that the introduction of an early start for students studying TM111 might adversely affect performance on TM111. An additional set of analysis was undertaken and supplied to TM111 and the key elements were

- There were 128 students registered for both TM111 and MU123 who were offered a place on the early start programme and 45 took up the offer. This take up figure of 35% was substantially lower than overall take up of 43%.
- Of those 45 students registered on both TM111 and MU123 there were 42 were still registered on TM111 at module start. There were 40 still registered on MU123 at module start .

TM111 have been asked if they wish any student registered on TM111 and MU123 to be excluded from the Early Start programme. However any student requesting information as to why they were excluded would need to be referred to the TM111 for reasons .

Already studying other modules: No other modules have raised concerns but we will explicitly say in any offer for 19J that if the student is already studying another module they do need to prioritise their study on that / those module (s) .

New students: two major concerns were raised by tutors. Firstly that the student might believe the early start offering was the same as the full module offering. The invitation letter will be strengthened to make this clear and perhaps a tutorial session linking to the B presentation full site maybe introduced. Secondly there was a concern that new students might feel they have been studying MU123 for a long time given the TMAs and EMA dates remain unchanged. This is true but equally they may decide to pick up study at the B presentation or already be studying more than one module. There is no scope to change assessment dates. Neither concerns are sufficiently strong to argue against offer places to all new students