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KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome to the Student Hub Live. This is our freshers week, or as we like to call it, a (re)freshers week, because it's for all Open University students, whether you're just beginning your new study journey with the Open University or you're a regular student.

My name's Karen Foley. I'm a tutorer and a lecturer at the Open University, and I'll be your host for the next two days, where we have a jam-packed programme that will include everything you need to know about the Open University, hopefully, a chance to ask any questions you have about the OU study, and a chance, most importantly, to network with other students, join in some of our discussions, have a go at our quiz, which is coming up later today, and generally have fun as being part of an academic community.

Now there are some people here who are regular Student Hub Live attenders, welcome. You'll notice that there are some widgets coming up on your screen, so we'd like to know if you've been before, where you are, how you're feeling, which level you're studying, and whether you've been to one of these events beforehand. So you can click those. They'll appear on your screen if you're in the Watch and Engage function.

Just select the widget, click your entry, and if it's one of the things like how you're feeling right now, you need to put three things in there for that to register and send. So if you can't think of any, just put a full stop in, and then it should submit your answers. If you can't see any of these widgets, you're probably in the watch only, which is absolutely fine, but you are going to miss out on all of the chat that's going on in the chat room and the chance to vote using our widgets.

So if that's you, you can go back to the website, which is studenthublive.kmi.open.ac.uk, click on the Watch and Engage, and then put in your student details or your staff details. And if you don't have those, you can create an Open University user account so you can then access that. It's very quick and easy to do, and you can find out how to do that on the FAQ section of the website.

So, as I said, we've got a very varied programme, but how does it all work? Well, you'll see the programme on the website, and that will tell you what we've got on during the day. We've got live sessions until about 3 o'clock this afternoon. And then we're going to be replaying some of our skills boot camp so you can still chat and watch all of those as we're going on into the evening, when we'll be live again at 6 o'clock tonight right through until 8:00.

So a lot to get through, but you can come and go as you choose. There is the catch-up available very soon after the programmes have ended, so you can always go and re-watch anything you may have missed. But let me tell you who's going to represent your voice, and this is where I welcome our hot desk. We have Sophia and HJ on the hot desk today. Welcome, Sophie and HJ.

SOPHIE: Hi. Morning, everyone.

HJ: Morning, thank you.

[LAUGHTER]

KAREN FOLEY: This is the thing with students. Now, our students, Sophie and HJ, are representing your voice at home. So, Sophie and HJ, tell us how everyone can interact with you and what sort of things you're expecting from the day.

SOPHIE: Well, it's very busy in there already, so lots of nice chat going on, lots of welcoming, which is lovely. So you can get us through Twitter, with our Twitter handle.

HJ: Yes, @studenthublive, and we're also using the hashtag #studenthublive17. So if you want to tweet us there, I know some people have already been tweeting at us, which is fantastic. But yeah, like Karen said, we're just here to put your thoughts and comments and questions in studio. And we've got lots of great sessions, so if there's anything you really want to ask or really want to know, just let us know and we'll put it to the studio.

And don't be afraid to say hi as well. There's lots of lovely people in there today. Lots of A100 students, which is the arts module, which is very nice. Any politics students out there? That would be nice to hear from.

SOPHIE: The maths, if there are any.

HJ: Maths is up.

SOPHIE: Any math students? But if we do miss anything, the chat is going quite quickly. And there is the Pin button at the top, and so if you press that, that means you can scroll through the chats as you like. And also do feel free to email us, studenthub@open.ac.uk. So if we do miss anything, let us know, and we'll try and get back to you there.

KAREN FOLEY: Wonderful, thank you. We'd also like to see where you are, because this is an online event. So if you'd like to send us a picture of your study space, your study buddy, or anything that you think is interesting to other OU students, you can send that to us on our email, which is studenthub@open.ac.uk, and we'll then get that through our posts and pin it up on the board as we're working through the two days' programme.

OK, so I think that's everything for now. Do ask any questions, though, as we're going through. I'm going to introduce my first guest, Lorraine Gregory. Thank you for coming along. And we're going to be doing a session about support for you during your studies, which is so, so important, partly I think because so many students aren't aware of the multitude of support that's there.

And also sometimes they can think, well, I've got a tutor. I've got all of these things. Who do I go to for support? So I'm hoping you can fill us in on some of these answers. Now you're an educational adviser here at the Open University. What's that role all about, and how are you supporting students?

LORRAINE GREGORY: Well basically, an educational adviser, there's several of them sit within each of the faculties. So whatever subject you are doing, there are advisers available. And we're there to guide students through their study journey, basically. Anything a tutor

can't help with, your Student Support Team will be able to help with. So we're able to be contacted by phone or by email, and there is a web chat as well for the student recruitment side.

So you can contact us with your queries, and we'll try and support you and give you any guidance for qualification choice, study choice, any study difficulties that you might be having. If it's not us, it will be the tutor, and we'll happily tell you who would be the right person to talk to as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Now we've got some widgets for this session, which we're going to change, which is about finding your study calendar. And we've also got a balance scale asking are you clear when to contact your tutor or your Student Support Team. Now Lorraine, students can find this a case of anxiety and sometimes do nothing because they're not sure who to contact.

And when I'm tutoring, I'll often get students talking to me about things that I'm not really able to answer, and I'll refer them on, which I love, because I'd rather people ask things. But do students have anxiety about thinking, oh, well I don't know which one to do, and I don't want to offend anybody?

LORRAINE GREGORY: They seem to, yes, but we would always say the Student Support Team details and the tutor contact details are all available on StudentHome. If the query or concern is module-related, so particularly about study, say, how to reference, understanding of modules, assignment question, or something, then speak to your tutor, because that's what the tutor is there for.

If it's about anything else to do with study support, whether you're having difficulties fitting study around your work life or family life, whether you have any health conditions that are affecting your abilities to study, anything else that's not specific to the module that you're studying, then contact the Student Support Team. The contact details are there, and that's what we're there for.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, so basically anything academic-related you'd go to your tutor about, and then everything else pretty much the Student Support Team. And it's really nice. You've outlined some of the issues there that students might be facing. I mean, things like what to do, how to get started, how to access things. That can be quite challenging for students, especially when they're new to OU study.

LORRAINE GREGORY: Absolutely, it's quite overwhelming the amount of information there is available. So we'd always encourage students new and old to get to know their StudentHome page really well. There's an online induction that they can do. And really explore everything the StudentHome page has to offer. It's got a great Help Centre as well. So any questions you don't feel able to phone up and ask or anything, you can try the Help Centre first.

And also, you can go into your module website and look at the study planner. But basically we'd encourage them to explore everything as much as possible up front, because StudentHome is the basis for everything you'll be doing.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. We've got some sessions as well that I'd just like to plug. Tonight we're going to be taking you through the module websites as well, so I've got some colleagues here who are going to show you step by step how to access everything you need to know. And we've also got some sessions with some tutors, Georgina Blakeley and Jonquil Lowe, who'll be talking about getting the most from your tutor during your studies. So do check those out on the programme later.

So the things to do in terms of getting started, then, and really checking out your module website and your StudentHome page.

LORRAINE GREGORY: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: The module website is to do with the course that people are doing, and the StudentHome is a wealth of support and things. What sorts of things might students find there that might be useful in terms of accessing their SST?

LORRAINE GREGORY: The contact details are all there on the StudentHome page. There's a link there to your Student Support Team, and that Student Support Team consists of a web form so you can email us, and the phone number, and the opening hours. There's also the Help Centre. There's also specific links for support for students with disabilities.

There's also links to academic help as well. So you can go onto our Help Centre and find questions and answers about how to write academically, and how to write academic English, and how to basically plan your study as well. So there is some really good information about getting started as well. But it will always encourage you to make early contact with your tutor if you possibly can, if your tutor hasn't already contacted you.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes, absolutely, and that will all be happening very soon. I'm pleased to say, Lorraine, that 80 of our students are very clear on when to contact their Student Support Team, and 20 are not, 80%, sorry. Now do tell us, then, if there are any questions that you'd like Lorraine to answer if you selected no, and we'll feed those into the chat. Sophie and HJ, how is everything going?

SOPHIE: Catch.

HJ: All go well, yes, we're just chatting to everyone and clicking on all the widgets that are about everywhere. We're talking about forums, so Tomare says, my husband's starting the OU, and he's struggling to understand the point of having to use forums as part of the activities. They can be a bit, I think, daunting at first is probably part of it as well.

SOPHIE: Yeah, I mean, I never used the forums, and I regretted that. Level one, I found it so easy, I was like, oh, I don't need to use the forums. I've got all this. And then level two, and I was like, oh, I really should have used the forums. Because then you get into a habit of doing it, so it is a really good habit to get into, because then you don't forget that you're not the only one struggling through.

So it is something to just get into the habit of doing every now and then, I think. But I think it's a personal thing as well. Some people necessarily don't like the forums, but I do think they help.

HJ: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: And they can be a really useful source of information. Often tutors will put notes up on tutorials there, and that is a really good thing if you've missed any or you'd like the handouts from that particular tutorial session. So they're a must for that. But, like Sophie says, some people find them a must to visit and chat along with other students in your tutor group or your cluster group. But for other students, they're really focusing on their own individual study.

And either is fine. It's important to find your own way. But that issue about keeping up with things, Lorraine, I wanted to ask you about that. Because so many OU students are fitting study in with such a packed schedule of things, and with the best will in the world, sometimes it doesn't always go to plan. What sorts of things could the Student Support Team do, then, if students were struggling to keep up?

LORRAINE GREGORY: Well, we can have discussions with students who are having some difficulty keeping up and explore the sort of things that's going on for them. Their tutor is available, obviously, to give study support and some strategies for keeping on track. But it may be that the tutor can't do everything that they need.

And the Student Support Team can give them advice on whether they're taking on too much study, whether now is even the right time for them to be studying. And it may be that they've got health conditions or specific requirements that need some extra support that we can probably help with.

KAREN FOLEY: So they would contact the SST through a variety of ways and then really discuss what was right for them and their studies. And I guess knowing that there are so many different options make it a really nice sort of opportunity to have that discussion and think about the best thing for the students.

LORRAINE GREGORY: Yes, absolutely, we would encourage them to have the conversation, because they may think there's nothing can be done. But we would explore all the options with them and try and come to the best possible course of action for them at that time.

KAREN FOLEY: What about students who are suffering from anxiety? So some students, I mean, we know that a lot of students choose to study with the Open University for a variety of reasons, some including disabilities. And often anxiety can be fairly common.

I think for us all anyway, going to a tutorial and not quite knowing what to expect or contacting a tutor, and this whole idea of distance can sometimes have a little bit of unfamiliarity. But for students where anxiety becomes problematic and prevents them from doing things, what sorts of things could they do, or how could they, again, use the SST to support them in their studies?

LORRAINE GREGORY: If someone suffers from anxiety as a long-term health condition, for example, obviously hopefully they'd be getting some medical or some kind of support. But for anxiety amongst all other disabilities, we would encourage them to contact us and declare that they have this particular condition or whatever it might be.

We'd actually instigate a profile to be written for them so that there's something on their record that anyone who actually personally deals with them is aware of so that they can lessen the anxiety for each of their contacts, and maybe be able to put in place things like being able to take a friend along to your particular tutorials, for example. Lots of people aren't aware that's possible if it's something that's deemed to be necessary for that student.

And we'll always take care in how we contact them. If they're uncomfortable about even being contacted, they can nominate an advocate so that someone can speak on their behalf. So there are various things that can be put in place to support students with anxiety, amongst many other conditions.

KAREN FOLEY: And what about in exam situations and disabled students? Are there other areas of support that we offer?

LORRAINE GREGORY: Absolutely, we have a special arrangements team for exams, so anyone that has anxiety or specific requirements for exams would be contacted, had they declared that to us. They'd be contacted prior to an exam to put in place any special arrangements they may need. And obviously that can vary from one person to another what that arrangement might need to be.

KAREN FOLEY: And we've got a session later from the disabled students group, which we're going to cover areas of support. But in terms of support from the Student Support Team, you've mentioned this idea of a profile. And I wanted to ask you briefly, for people who may have a disability that may or may not be declared with the Open University, what's the process of sort of registering something like that?

LORRAINE GREGORY: Well, they just, first of all, tell us they have the problem and discuss it with an adviser. And the adviser would tell them how to find a particular form or forward it to them, whichever is most appropriate. And there's a form they can simply fill in that just asks them to tell us about what their problems are and how it may affect their study.

And once we have that information from them, our disability support team would take the information and have a chat to them. And as a combination of that chat and the form, they'd write up a profile that would be on the student's record to be accessed to provide the best resources and information for that student.

KAREN FOLEY: And there are a variety of ways in which people can get support with technical aspects and all sorts of things.

LORRAINE GREGORY: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: So that's a really good idea. I wanted to return to the idea of all students and think about what people might need right now, and your advice. What sorts of things do people most commonly ask you right at the stage of just beginning a module?

LORRAINE GREGORY: What do I do?

KAREN FOLEY: What do you do?

LORRAINE GREGORY: What do you do? Many students, obviously, particularly before a module starts, they may have received materials, but they don't know who their tutor is. They don't know whether they should contact the tutor. And ideally, they'd have their materials by now. The tutor will have contacted them. They will have looked at the study planner and explored StudentHome.

So there are the things they should be doing so that they feel comfortable in what their next step is. So they can really lower their own anxiety by doing a lot of research if they possibly can. But if you're in any doubt at all, if they haven't already spoken to their tutor or emailed their tutor, I would recommend that they do that, because tutors are fantastic at setting their minds at rest and encouraging them to start their first module or assignment, whatever it might be.

KAREN FOLEY: And so whilst the Student Support Team are in charge of all of this other area, the tutor is a really important bond for students in their studies.

LORRAINE GREGORY: Oh yes, yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Why would you say it's so important that students make that contact with their tutor early days?

LORRAINE GREGORY: Well, the tutor is going to be there for them throughout the life of the module they're studying. And quite often, if they don't get in touch with anyone else in the university, the tutor is the only Open University member of staff that they will speak to, communicate with at all. So I think it's important that they get in touch early and get a full understanding of what's required of them.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Lorraine, thank you so much for coming in, and I hope that you at home have an idea about when to speak to your tutor, what the Student Support Teams can actually offer. And there is so much support out there, so if you're stuck, do ask. No one's going to be offended if you field things to the wrong place.

But the most important thing is to reach out and make sure that you are supported in your OU studies, whatever that support looks like for you. So Lorraine, thank you very much. I'm sure you'll be getting lots of phone calls from people very soon.

We're now going to have a short video break, and we're going to show you a video which is all about new students and what do I do first? So this should give you some tips, and then we'll be back in five minutes for our next session. See you soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]