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HOST: Hello, and welcome back to *The Student Hub Live*. Well, this is our Re-Freshers week. And it wouldn't be Freshers without the OU Students Association. And I'm joined by Nicola Simpson and Stephanie Stubbins. Thank you both for coming along to the studio and to tell us about the OU Students Association. Because whilst you're very prominent, and it's the Freshers week, and we've got lots of new students, some people may not be aware of all the fabulous stuff that you do. So I'm hoping you're going to fill us in.

NICOLA SIMPSON: Yeah, absolutely. So every student, when they join the OU, automatically becomes a member of the OU Student Association. And sometimes it takes a while for students to realise that.

HOST: Yeah. Because a lot of universities-- you might have to pay a fee, or opt in. So it's a brilliant benefit that students are automatically a member.

NICOLA SIMPSON: Absolutely. Yeah, they are. And essentially, I suppose we do three different things in the association. We offer support to students. We build community. And we also represent student views to the university, through our Student Voice Programme.

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: And student support.

NICOLA SIMPSON: Yeah.

HOST: A lot of things to keep you busy. You're both volunteers. And Nicki, you've joined fairly recently. Although it's probably not that recent, actually, is it?

NICOLA SIMPSON: Steph and I were both elected. And we started in August, this-- I was going to say this year. But no, 2016. So I think we're just hitting seven months now.

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: Yeah, but we have been involved in Students Association in other roles, previously. So I've been involved for two years. And you've been involved a lot longer.

HOST: So Nicki, tell us what you're doing.

NICOLA SIMPSON: So I'm deputy president of the Student Association. So my remit involves supporting all the volunteers in their roles. I'm looking at things like student consultation, making sure that students' voices are heard at the highest levels in the university, so that what we experience as students is actually changing and shaping what the university do in the future.

HOST: And Steph, you did a lovely session with us recently, which you can catch up on if you've missed, about the Disabled Students Group. But you also have another role.

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: I am also vice president community. So within my remit, I cover representation at award ceremonies-- so that's degree ceremonies-- residential schools. I help to organise our side of the Freshers. I also give support to local volunteering. And there's loads of other things in my remit, all to do with community-- but basically, helping to facilitate students meeting up through their local communities.

HOST: Wonderful. Now we've got some widgets, or interactive tools, that we'd like to know your thoughts on. We'd like to know how you're feeling about your studies. So there are three things that you can fill in. If you can only think of one or two, just put a full stop in the other ones. Otherwise, the results won't submit. We'd also like to know whether or not you would like to meet other OU students face-to-face. So the choices there are yes, no, or I'm not sure, which I think is really good. Because it's not always a binary category.

We're also thinking about what is more successful to a study session-- or sorry, what is more important to a successful study session? Is it good snacks or good stationary? Now that's a continuum. So you need to make a judgement call on where you think that dot should be, bearing in mind that for most OU students, they're fairly equally important. So we're going to see what the results from that are.

NICOLA SIMPSON: Well for me, it's definitely good snacks. We were talking about this before and Steph's at the absolute opposite.

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: And I am all the way stationary-- a stationary addict. I already like collecting stationary anyway. It's just essential for my studies.

HOST: I've just been talking to Meg John about self care. Do you think that buying nice stationary is a good way that you can care for yourself in your studies?

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: Oh, definitely. It makes me feel better.

HOST: It does. It's nice having nice things that can only be yours for study.

STEPHANIE I tell my husband that as well, when he's paying for it. But it also helps to get me organised.

STUBBINS: And it makes me feel good that I'm moving on to the next module with new stationary.

NICOLA A lot of students treat themselves to new stationary when they do a TMA or do an exam. And it

SIMPSON: just gives them that little boost to say, oh, this is my nice thing, and supports them a little bit.

HOST: Brilliant idea. So everybody at home can do that.

NICOLA The chocolate does the same thing for me.

SIMPSON:

HOST: Oh, right.

NICOLA So that's why I'm [INAUDIBLE] snacks.

SIMPSON:

HOST: So what are some of your self-care snacks, then?

NICOLA Well actually, I try to be really healthy when I'm studying. So my last TMA, I prepared a whole

SIMPSON: lot of salad boxes in advance. Because I knew I'd left my TMA to the last minute. And I was going to have to do one really, really big, long study session to get through it. So I had my salad boxes prepared, to keep me going throughout the day, with a few bits of chocolate thrown in for good measure.

HOST: But what a lovely idea. Because that is so self caring, actually, to think, I need these things, when it could be easier just to grab a sandwich or something.

NICOLA It's OK to binge, if that's what you need to do. And people will say, that's take away night, if I

SIMPSON: have a TMA due. It's easier for feed the family.

STEPHANIE Or if you're studying through the night, and you've had your meals during the day, if you need

STUBBINS: something to eat at night time, because you're trying to get that TMA finished, then--

HOST: It can feel very luxurious, making yourself a smoothie, or something nice and healthy, that may take a little bit of time and effort, but that will help you.

NICOLA We sound like saints, don't we Steph.

SIMPSON:

HOST: Oh, well, yeah. It's not all like that.

So you're both students. You're both studying. What is it like, then, to be a new student? This is a time of year where we reflect on this. Because we're welcoming some new students into the university. And about half our audience are new students. Half are existing students, sharing their tips and advice about what it feels like. How did you both experience this?

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: I think at first it was quite overwhelming, mainly because you don't know any other students when you join up. So I think it's important to look for that support in the forums, the virtual learning environment, and also on Facebook. There's loads of support groups for-- not just for modules, but for community support, anyway.

HOST: Can that be daunting, though, being a new student?

NICOLA SIMPSON: It is quite daunting. And I think we all know it's exciting. You've started something for a really good reason. And there are all sorts of different reasons people start. But it can be quite intimidating. You don't know what a TMA, maybe. You're thinking, what are all these acronyms? Is that the right word?

HOST: It is, yeah.

NICOLA SIMPSON: You don't know what it's going to be like to find the time and you're awake. You don't know what the impact is going to be on your family.

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: Time management is important. So I found it useful, at beginning of my studies, to make myself up a time table. And although you've got the OU study planner, I spaced out time through my week, so I knew that I would do some of the work at certain parts of the week. And I also knew when I had to finish that work in that week. So managing your time is important.

NICOLA SIMPSON: I actually saw a student post something on Facebook in the last week or so. And they had a jar filled with marbles and an empty jar. And each time they did an hour of study, they took one marble out of their fill jar and put it into the completed time.

HOST: I saw that. That was a lovely idea.

NICOLA SIMPSON: I really liked that idea.

HOST: Yeah, because it gives you a tangible link, I guess, of how far you're doing-- much nicer than a progress bar, although those can be very handy. But yeah, give you some sense of time.

NICOLA SIMPSON: Just a visual reminder of what you've done and how far you've come throughout the week.

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: I think some students also need to consider their study area. A lot of students can just study anywhere-- in a library, in a coffee, in bed, in the living room with books in their lap. But some students need that little bit more focus. They might need a quiet space. Or in my instant, I've got a study area in part of my living room. And I know that when I sit at that desk, that is what I do. I study. And my husband knows to leave me alone whilst I'm studying.

HOST: But this is a really, really important point. Because I think a lot of students-- and we see these pictures-- I think we've got some on the Hot Desk, haven't we-- of some beautiful, well-organized study spaces.

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: We call them deskies.

HOST: Deskies. But some people-- that's their bed. And their things are portable. For some people, it's the train. It's their daily commute. It's their mobile phone, et cetera. People have got different ideas. And I don't know-- some of my students have said to me, I study on my bed. And I study really late at night. And I'm not really a proper student. Because I'm not really properly studying. Because I don't have all of these nice things around me and areas.

NICOLA SIMPSON: To any student who feels like that, I would say probably 80% of my study was done in bed. And I graduated. So I'm a proper student. I was a proper student. So don't feel like that. You're still going through the work. You're still going through all that knowledge development, skills development. It doesn't matter where you do it.

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: And I would say, study when you find the time that's right for you. So if it's in the middle of the evening, then go for it. If it's on the way to work, and you've got that quiet time on your journey, then go for it.

HOST: Now you must know a lot of OU students in your various roles. And one of the things that people can find difficult is to conceptualise these. Because often you think, well, I'm an OU student. But I don't know what the rest of them are like. They're probably doing really well.

They probably have got all these study planners, and are super organised, and are succeeding, and doing much better than I am. So I wanted to talk about this idea about how you bring the students together in community, and sharing things, and being supportive to each other. Because the one common thing I think about OU students is that they're incredibly resourceful. They're often studying around other things, fitting in life and all sorts of unplanned, unforeseen events into quite a rigorous schedule. So can you give us an idea about what OU students are like as a whole group, and some of the things that are going on, and how they can support each other?

**STEPHANIE
STUBBINS:**

Well some students are creating meet ups, all over the UK and beyond. Some are virtual--online. And some are face-to-face. They get support through the Students Association. They can contact the association directly. And they will get guidelines. They get goody bags. They get a table sign, and badges, and balloons. We've got to have the balloons. It's a support pack. But they've also got each other, to mentor each other, and other Student Association volunteers to help them. We're actually doing a big event next month. It's called the Big February Meet up, on the 25th of February. So if anybody would like to create a meet up, anywhere that they are, if they would like help to promote it, to find out how to set one up, it's on the 25th of February. Please get in touch with us.

HOST:

Well 85% of students watching now said that they would like to meet others face-to-face.

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:**

[INAUDIBLE]

HOST:

And 8% said no. And 8% said they're not sure.

**STEPHANIE
STUBBINS:**

That's good.

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:**

Yeah. I think for people who said no, and who aren't sure, they can find support online, if they still want to make connections with other OU students. We have our Twitter and social media, Facebook, and all these places. And that's really helpful if you only have a small amount of time, but you want to connect with somebody. So we see really effective communication for students, where they have an immediate problem, and they want an answer straight away, where they just send a tweet-- hashtag OU students. And other students will come back and suggest how they've dealt with that problem, or where they can go for help.

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: But even in Europe, we've got an area association rep who looks after Europe. Obviously, she's looking after countries, rather just areas of a country. So she's doing monthly OU live meet ups. So they're virtual. And they're going really well.

HOST: So is this something that you have to get involved with? Do you have to choose now, if you're at the start of your study journey, am I going to be someone who's involved or not involved?

NICOLA SIMPSON: No.

HOST: Or can you just go through, and then all of a sudden, after year three, day 28, suddenly realise that you need another student's advice?

NICOLA SIMPSON: Absolutely. People can get involved at any point throughout their studies. I probably didn't get involved with the Student Association until quite late on in my studies. And when I did, that was when I really started to make connections with other people and feel much more part of an OU student community.

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: Whereas I, as a new fresher, wanted to meet other students straight away. So I joined my local association group, in the Southeast, and I met Cherry Day. And from there, I've gone through and started volunteering as well as meeting other students.

HOST: Simon says, he really enjoys *The Student Hub Live*, as well. Because he would really like to meet other students. And this is a way of doing that. Thank you, Simon. That's a lovely thing to say.

NICOLA SIMPSON: It is. It's a really great event. I love watching them. And I love the diversity of people who come onto the show. Because you might have an interest in your own faculty. But it's really nice to hear those little snippets from other faculties, just to see what's going on in the university.

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: I particularly like the chat area. So since being on OU student, I've been on the *Student Hub Live*, in the chat box, sending messages in and talking with other students. It's been a really good experience for me.

HOST: Now it's a really nice communal area. And there are different ways and levels. For some students, like those 8%, they don't want to have interaction. And that's absolutely fine. Because some people choose the Open University because they don't want that. But for other students who do, they may have different levels at how they want to do it. They might be

happy on Twitter, or Facebook, and their various things.

NICOLA Absolutely.

SIMPSON:

HOST: You even offer peer-to-peer student support, which I know has been really useful for some students. So can you tell us-- you've talked about some of the meet ups that are happening on the 25th of February. But what are some of the other ways that people can get peer-to-peer support from the Students Association?

NICOLA Well we have a specific group of volunteers, who are actually called Peer Supporters. And it's
SIMPSON: an anonymous service where students who want to chat to another student about any of the problems that they're having, they can get in touch, and just have one-to-one support. And it just reassures students that they're on the right track, and that there's somebody listening to them. Our students also have access to a listening service, which is called Nightline, which is a telephone helpline. All the details are on our website. And that's open in the evenings. And quite often, students are feeling lonely, and stressed, and quite isolated. And any problems become bigger problems, or they can seem really big. So that's the time that you might want to pick up the phone and just talk about what you're experiencing.

STEPHANIE There's also societies, which are individual groups-- well, societies-- that have been created,
STUBBINS: either OU module based or interest based. And you can find out about them on our association website. But that is a way of following your interests, supplementing your student experience, and, again, meeting OU students, but in a different way.

NICOLA So there's all sorts of different ways that people can get involved. It's really down to personal
SIMPSON: preferences. What people want to join in with.

HOST: Evaghn and HJ, on the Hot Desk, what are people saying are some of their ways of getting involved?

HJ: I think some of the other ways people are saying then is attending tutorials. That's a big one. So a lot people like the online tutorials and day schools. Because it's a bit of a chance to chat to other students, and find out how other people are getting on, and share perhaps some worries about TMAs. I know I've gone to them. And I've been stressed out. And I thought, oh, no one else is going to be stuck like me. This is just me.

And actually, a few other people have gone, no, actually, I'm struggling too. And the tutors sort

us out. But I know there's lots of OUSA societies as well. So I've been involved in a little bit with some of them. So there's ones like the Computer Club. And there's one for gardening and lots of different things as well. So we posted some links as well, if anyone would like to find out about those.

EVAGHN: Yeah, I was going to say, I think it's quite important meeting other students. I think you may not get the chance to, if you're living far away from them. So even the stuff that you're talking about-- talking to other students is brilliant. Because that's the next best thing from seeing them.

I've got Daven, who says that he plays World of Warcraft with OU students, which I guess is one way to get to know them.

HJ: I think the main thing, as well is there's not really just one way. There's lots of different options. So if you can't go face-to-face, there's these sorts of things. There's online events that I used to do, like the meet ups as well, which is really good.

EVAGHN: Yeah. Just get involved, I think.

HOST: And Evaghn, you're doing post-graduate studies. So there's an alumni community, as well. Have you tapped into that?

EVAGHN: Just put me on the spot here.

HOST: Yes!

EVAGHN: Yes. No, I haven't actually, if I'm honest. I think probably will, particularly once I get to the end. But at the moment, I've got a few people in my course who live near MK. And the rest are in Oxford. So we meet up when it's time to do exams. We have study groups for a day. And then we just thrash out all the topics. And we make notes. So I think yeah, I haven't got involved in alumni yet. But I definitely make use of meeting people that are close to me.

HOST: Is this coffee shop meetings? And is cake important in those?

EVAGHN: Yeah. I was just looking at the widget, actually. Because I think as long as I've got a pen and paper, everything else is fine. As long as the food-- we need food. That's the important thing. Pen and paper for stationary-- that's all I need and more food, really.

HOST: Well let's see the results of that widget. OK, well, it's spot on in the middle, but I think veering towards the good stationary end. More people have said-- it's not a case of winning and losing.

NICOLA No competition going on here.

SIMPSON:

HOST: But yes, people are prioritising their stationary above their cakes and things.

OK, so we've talked about some of the clubs, and some of the societies, and some of the meet ups and things that people can do. But also, you mentioned another side, very early on, about Student Voice, and representing those opinions at various levels of the institution. That's a really important thing. So whilst a lot of students would want to get involved in the more community-based areas as well, it's important for students to be able to articulate and have their voice heard. And the university really, really do listen to that, don't they?

NICOLA Yeah, it's so important. Because I'm forever telling students, you're the expert in being a student. And you know what that lived experience is like. You know where the problems are in your modules. You know what the problems are in all sorts of ways that staff might not be so aware of, if they haven't been studying for a while. So we try to capture those views from students, through all sorts of mediums-- through the social media, through some of our volunteers who feed through into the officer team. And then we take those issues back to the university. We also have a team of volunteers who are involved in university committees, where they actually come here to campus and [INAUDIBLE], and they go to committees, and they're full members of those committees, and they're speaking from their own experiences as students as to high decisions that are being made and just to encourage the university to think about the student when they're making those decisions.

HOST: And what's been the most enjoyable part of being a representative and feeding into those sides of things, specifically for you?

NICOLA For me, I think it's actually seeing people-- students come on board with us and get engaged.
SIMPSON: And maybe they're initially quite worried and they think, oh, can I really sit in this committee? Can I raise my voice? Will they listen to me? But from being quite nervous in that process to becoming really [INAUDIBLE] and developing lots of skills, being able to speak out in front of other people-- which they might never have done before. But then the flip side, obviously, is that you then see the changes coming, further down the line. And it's just effecting so many

people that their learning experience is becoming better because of those volunteers that get involved with us. And is there a variety of ways that people can start feeding, if they're interested in feeding into institutional side of things? Can they give reviews on models and do things at quite a small scale? Or do they have to be a faculty committee representative?

**STEPHANIE
STUBBINS:**

There's a new volunteering role at the moment called Learning Experience Reporters. And they're just starting with the roles. They're creating them, really. And you can speak to them. They're on social media. They're in module forums. They have been announcing themselves. And they're there for you to talk about any problems, any issues, the good and the bad side, and bring it back to the association, to feed back to the OU.

HOST:

So you don't even have to be a representative. You can just feed into those people. And they'll collate represent the views of the students where appropriate.

**STEPHANIE
STUBBINS:**

So if anybody's interested in doing that role, just get in touch with us again. There's loads of opportunities for volunteering.

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:**

The other way, of course, is that we also have surveys that go out to students for them to share their experiences with us. And so when we do send survey links, we really want students to fill those in. Because we really make our decisions based on what students are telling us.

HOST:

Can you tell us about the NSS, the National Student Satisfaction survey?

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:**

Sure. The NSS survey is a survey which goes out to students, usually towards the end of their studies. And students across all universities are invited to participate in that. And it's a useful way for students to actually give feedback to the university, who then look at the results, analyse the results to see what changes they need to make, to make the university experience better.

HOST:

And it really matters, doesn't it? Because not everybody gets given a chance. Because it's all representative. So I guess some computer's sending out some of these invitations. So not everyone's going to have a chance to feed in. Although, of course, there are various ways to have your views expressed, if you're not invited to that survey. But it really is important to complete it, isn't it?

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:**

It is very important. Because it's one of the few times that we really can capture a lot of data about what the experience is at the university. And there's also questions that are relevant to

the [INAUDIBLE] association in how we're doing. And that really helps us shape what we can do for students. But as well as NSS, there's also the SEAM survey, which are surveys that are sent to students towards the end of a module, to find out specifically about your experience during that module. So there are opportunities for students to give that feedback.

HOST: And also, they can give feedback at any time. It's quite nice for students to feed back on I particular liked this, or that, or whatever. It can give you--

NICOLA It's really nice to give the positive things, too.

SIMPSON:

HOST: Yeah, exactly. I always appreciate that from my students, if they take the time to let me know things that they find useful and helpful in their study journey.

Now it's Freshers Fair for the Students Association. And you've been doing a lot of activities and things. And we've been talking about the big meet up. But can you tell us about some of the things that people can catch up on, and the things that you've had going of late, for new students, and also about the website, where people might be able to find more information. And also, I'd like you to tell people about the NUS card as well, which I think is top money bargain thing.

NICOLA So you want to take that?

SIMPSON:

STEPHANIE STUBBINS: Well, Freshers is within my remit, so I'll start it off. We've had Facebook events every evening, which is a live event chat. They can be caught up. If you go into the Open University students Facebook page, the links that are on there. We've also done a radio show last Monday, which was my first experience. And there's also been a few videos being posted of interviews. And there's been lots of chatter online.

NICOLA SIMPSON: Yeah, I think just to try and reassure people that there is a community of students out there, and help students understand that they're not doing it on their own-- you might be alone in your home or your workplace studying and feel like there's nobody else out there. So just trying to bring those people together is what we do.

HOST: And what about the website then? You've mentioned some of the things, like Nightline and peer support, and also the clubs and societies. And I guess the website's housing a lot of that information.

NICOLA Absolutely, yeah.

SIMPSON:

HOST: But there's other stuff there too.

NICOLA Yeah, there's lots of information on the website. And you can find a link to the website from
SIMPSON: your student homepage. Or you can also find it just by giving the extension after the open.ac.uk/ousa. And that takes you to our website.

STEPHANIE There's a page specifically for meeting other students, finding out more information about
STUBBINS: what is already out there, and how to set up your own meet ups. There's also a page specifically for volunteering. It will show you all the roles that are up for grabs, if anybody is interested. And there's also a resources page, which will show you a lot of information, guidelines, and also a lot of committee papers. So if you want to find out what your volunteers are doing in their areas, you can catch up by going through that.

HOST: And we've been talking a lot about shoes, and bargains, and volume of shoes, amongst other things earlier. And the NUS card, I'm told, can give some students money off at the places like Top Shop and loads of High Street stores. But not everyone knows that you can get one if you're an Open University student.

NICOLA You can indeed get one. And if you go through our websites, to the OU Student Shop, there's
SIMPSON: a link and information about how you can get your student card. I actually got mine for three years. So it's really nice. You don't have to renew it every year.

HOST: [INAUDIBLE]

STEPHANIE And I love going to places and flashing my NUS card and saying, yes, I am a student at my
STUBBINS: age.

[LAUGHING]

HOST: Excellent. And there's lots and lots of other useful things and resources for that card. One of the things I particularly like that you've done lately is the previous exam papers. Those can be such a useful study tool for people when revising for exams, to know the structure, and just seeing exam papers as well. And they're available on the OUSA website, aren't they?

HOST: Yeah, they are. They're freely available. So where past exam papers have been made available to us from the different faculties, they're all up there.

HOST: And HJ's just put the link through in the chat. So you can go through and click through now if you'd like to find some past exam papers there also.

Well, thank you both. We've been campaigning at *The Student Hub Live* for new stationary for some time. And now the Open University has been giving that to some new students, which is great in terms of study calendars, et cetera. But Davin says that all students starting an OU degree should be given a free pack of Hobnobs. What do you think?

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:** Ooh, well, I--

**STEPHANIE
STUBBINS:** If they're free.

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:** Yeah.

HOST: Every module, he goes on to say.

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:** I wouldn't mind a packet of biscuits with every module.

**STEPHANIE
STUBBINS:** I think every TMA, maybe.

HOST: Always pushing.

**STEPHANIE
STUBBINS:** Got to do it.

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:** You might demolish at least one packet for one TMA.

HOST: Excellent. Have we covered everything that you wanted to cover, before we show our big meet up video?

NICOLA Well there's so many things that we do. We could probably talk for hours and hours and hours.

SIMPSON:

HOST: But you're not allowed to.

NICOLA We're not allowed to.

SIMPSON:

STEPHANIE I think we should mention the OU shop, where--

STUBBINS:

NICOLA Where you can buy stationary.

SIMPSON:

STEPHANIE You can buy stationary. There's logo clothes. There's other bits and pieces. But that raises
STUBBINS: money for OUSETS, which is the--

NICOLA OU Student's Educational Trust, which is a fund for students who are in financial hardship. And
SIMPSON: students can find the information about that on our website. If you have difficulties meeting your study cost because of financial problems, it can be a really scary and horrible situation to be in. So there is more support out there for you.

HOST: OK, that's really good to know. Because that has been a concern for people. Excellent.

Well, Nicki and Steph, thank you so much for coming and being the friendly face of the association. And don't forget, you can find out more by visiting the website, and engage with all those activities and events. We're going to show you now a video of the big meet up so that you can find out more about that. Because as we've mentioned, that's coming up very, very soon.

And then we're going to have a break where we're going to talk about another popular thing that Steph raised, which is time management. So we'll be showing you one of the replays from that session. But the chat will still be open. So you can talk to each other before we have a discussion about America and Trump and what all of this means.

NICOLA Ooh.

SIMPSON:

HOST: Yes, indeed. So we'll be back in half an hour for that session. Grab some lunch. Refresh yourselves. And we will see you very soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]