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KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to the Student Hub Live. There's so much love and the chat. And I'm so delighted how well everyone's getting on. If you are in the watch-only box, come into the watch-and-engage. You can sign in using your student or staff ID, and if you don't have one of those, you can create an Open University user account.

We've been talking about lots and lots of things and Jordan said that they feel so spoiled as part of this. Son And we were saying, well, this is just something that we do at the Open University. It's a nice way of welcoming you, and it's a nice opportunity to chat. Lots of ideas coming through about careers that we've just been talking about.

And Stuart will be delighted because I'm joined by Peter Horrocks and Hazel Rymer. And Hazel is vulcanologist, so she can fill you in, Stuart, on some of those aspirations of yours to be a vulcanologist. Now, it's very rare that we have a live, interactive session with two very important members of the Open University. So this is your chance to ask them any questions that you've got.

But in the session, I wanted to find out about what's happening at the Open University, but most importantly, what impact there is in terms of you being a student. So if you've got any questions about all of those things, then you can put those to Peter and Hazel. And we'll do our best to get those answered for you.

Thank you for joining me today in this session. And I wanted to sort of touch on a few things because the higher education sector is changing so massively at the moment. There are so many things going on. And you know, of course, we need to adapt with that. And I wanted to have a session to update students on some of those changes, and some of the thinking behind those changes, and why they're going to benefit students in the long term.

So Peter, could I start by asking you then about some of your ideas about some of these challenges and what you're doing to address those at the Open University?

PETER HORROCKS: One of the big focuses for the government, but also for the university relates to what was being discussed over the break around employability. So the government is introducing apprenticeship levy. And that's going to be something which is a really a big opportunity for the university to be able to serve the needs of employers and students.

And so, that focus on careers, really understanding what people, students, are looking for from their studies with us is something that we're focusing particularly closely. So it's really understanding what students are looking for and making sure that we're providing meets their needs. And then ensuring that they have the right support.

So we've been introducing, for instance, new joint teams between our advisors who are helping with recruitment and those who are supporting students through their studies, focused on the subjects around which everything is organised, our faculties, and really improving the quality of that service to students.

KAREN FOLEY: Peter, we were having a couple of issues with your mic. And what you were saying was so interesting, I want to just see if we've got any questions for you right now so that we can get you loud and clear for our audience at home. Evaghn and HJ, what are, oh, and welcome Evaghn. Where have you been? Sorry, you slipped in there.

EVAGHN: I've just been in the back. Yeah, I switched, had to kick Sophie out.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, what's Sophie doing then now?

EVAGHN: I'm not sure. I think she might be looking at the quiz questions actually.

KAREN FOLEY: She might,

EVAGHN: But we'll see.

KAREN FOLEY: She might be looking at the quiz questions. I've got them in a box backstage.

EVAGHN: Oh, have you?

KAREN FOLEY: Yes.

EVAGHN: Well I don't know. I don't know what she did.

KAREN FOLEY: HJ, do you have any ideas when she left?

HJ: I'm not too sure. I'm not getting on with this quiz thing. But I've heard some people are sending us in some selfies as well. So if you want to send us in, you can see us. And we'd love to see your lovely faces, or receive some pictures of study materials as well, which is great. Some people starting this month, which is very exciting.

But yeah, send them in to us using @studenthublive or studenthub@open.ac.uk. But I think one big question is, and people aren't too sure what a vice chancellor actually does, what your day-to-day role is, which might help them a bit.

KAREN FOLEY: Thank you. Well, Sophie, go and get some selfies and send those in to us so we can see your study space, your study buddy, and/or a picture of you. Peter, this is a good question about what the VC role entails.

PETER HORROCKS: It's helping the university to run. It's helping everyone to give it their best to make sure that we're doing the right thing for the students. It's thinking ahead, thinking about what might happen in the future, making sure that the university is strong to be able to deliver for our students. Putting students first is the way we describe it.

KAREN FOLEY: And I'd like to come back to you in a minute about apprenticeships. But before that, Hazel, apart from being a volcanologist, you're the pro- vice chancellor of Learning and Teaching Innovation. What's that all about then?

HAZEL RYMER: What is that all about? Well, it's looking to the future and seeing what sort of learning and teaching materials we need to be preparing now so that students in coming

years can engage with them. Because we can't just say, gosh, we need to teach, let's take a random example, vulcanology, and put that out to students. It takes a certain amount of time to prepare the teaching materials, get them ready, and to get them out to students.

And that's what my area look after. So HJ was just talking about people tweeting already their learning materials. And that's what my area put together. So sometimes that's a great big box of books and other bits and bobs. There are all sorts of learning materials that students receive. We used to call them home experiment kits when we used to be able to send a lot of chemicals and other things out.

But we do still send quite a few things out to students. And it's quite amazing. Might be interesting to hear if they can compare what's in their boxes. But I did just want to say that the other thing that we are working away at, and this is perhaps less visible because it's less tangible. You don't get a box, but it's those websites that students are working with.

And your modules site is actually what we've spent a huge amount of time making sure that it's intuitive, and easy, and it works, and all of those things. And I would say, don't forget. It's not just what's in the box. Have a look on the screen as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Thank you. And we've got a session from our colleagues at TEL tonight. And that's going to be navigating the whole of your module website. So if you are new to the Open University and you'd like a tour around the module website, join us at 7 o'clock for that session tonight. So in addition to a lot of this, Hazel, you're doing some very exciting things with, the Open University, like you say, isn't just teaching materials.

We've got things like digital microscopes and various ways of actually connecting students that are very, very exciting and very innovative.

HAZEL RYMER: Well, they are indeed. They are part of the teaching materials, though. And so, some of this is freely available to everybody. Most of it is just for Open University students. So that's really cool. And there is a huge amount of material that students couldn't possibly engage with if they were at one of those other institutions where you have to go full-time face-to-face.

So exciting things, such as, operating a telescope yourself. This is obviously for the physics and astronomy students. Operating a telescope yourself, and collecting real data, not pretend data, not noddy stuff that nobody's going to take any notice of ever again. Real data, which our researchers then, in some cases working with the students, can then go on and publish and actually push back the forefronts of science itself.

So there were some fantastic opportunities. That's just in one area. I can go on if you like.

KAREN FOLEY: That's OK, because Nick Braithwait's coming on tomorrow night. And he's going to show us all about these sorts of things.

HAZEL RYMER: Please tune in to listen to him, because was fantastic.

KAREN FOLEY: No, he is, isn't he? That will be a very good session. So check the programme out. I think that's at 7 o'clock tomorrow evening. Peter, you were talking about apprenticeships, which is a really sort of buzz thing at the moment. And I don't think we got

all of that. So I could I ask you in terms of the higher education sector, why is this such an important thing? And how is this impacting in terms of Open University study and changes in terms of the things we're trying to deliver for students?

PETER HORROCKS: Lots of the learning that we provide has always been about supporting people in their career goals. And we've had people who've been supported by their employers, paying for them or giving them time to be able to study with us. So it's always been an important part of a large number of our subject areas.

But what's happening, which is meaning that it's going to increase further, is the government's asking all big employers to pay a tax to help create a fund of money to be able to support apprenticeships. And not just apprenticeships that are kind of trade and craft apprenticeships, but degree apprenticeships so people can be supported in their learning to be able to get honours qualification. And the great thing about it from a student point of view, or an employee point of view, is that that's going to be free.

And we know that quite a lot of people haven't been able to study with us because they've been concerned about them taking on the extra debt that comes with the higher fees that came in a few years ago, in England this is. And so, degree apprenticeships are going to provide people with the opportunity to study for those vocational type degrees without having to pay. And we think that's going to be a very exciting opportunity for many of the students who the OU wants to be able to serve.

KAREN FOLEY: Such an attractive idea for people, especially people who are wanting to change vocations. But a lot of people may not know. I mean, the Open University has already been doing a lot of vocational support, and social work, and nursing for example, at the moment. So it's something that's quite at the heart of what we're doing anyway. But this is quite a new offering in terms of some of the packages that are available for students.

PETER HORROCKS: It is. So there are three degree apprenticeships that we are going to be offering in this calendar year. And then, there'll be more that will come. So there's a digital one, a health care one, and a technology one, the computing one. They're not going to necessarily be right for people who are moving jobs, or they will have to have a job to go to. Because you've got to be in employment, obviously, to do an apprenticeship.

But it could be someone who's starting in a new job. Or it could be someone who's wanting to increase their level of skill within a field that they're already working in. So these will be really exciting opportunities.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Thank you for filling us in on all of that. You've mentioned some of the other areas beforehand about funding changes and things like that. How are those sorts of things affecting Open University students?

PETER HORROCKS: Well there are new loans that, again, this is largely about in England. There are different mechanisms in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. So for instance, next year in 2018, new loans for maintenance come in. So part-time students, up until now, have never been able to get any support with living costs. Whereas, full-time students have had access either to loans, or in some cases to grants.

And that's going to change and be available for part-time students. Later this year, we also see the availability of loans for all of the STEM subjects, all of the science, technology, engineering, and math subjects. So that's going to be another real boost for people who've already got another degree but want to be able to study a STEM subject. They'll be able to get loans from the government to be able to support their study. So a number of areas where new things are coming in, which will increase the opportunities that are available.

KAREN FOLEY: And you are a very active campaigner in a lot of, and I guess part of your role as VC, all jokes aside with regards to what you do, is campaigning for some of these issues in terms of funding and things with government.

PETER HORROCKS: I was at Westminster yesterday talking to one of the key ministers to help make sure the policies are in place and the promotion of those policies is in place to be able to support part-time and lifelong learning students.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, what's interesting about you, Peter, is that not only are you the Vice Chancellor, but you recently were studying with the Open University. And so, you know what it's like to be a new student. And we've got lots of very excited students out there. So I'd like to ask both of you about this. And I'd like to ask Peter about your experience and Hazel about how students might make the most of that.

So when you started, you obviously knew the Open University. But how did you sort of start navigating things? And what advice would you give to students who do have very busy jobs, who are trying to fit it in and navigate quite a different world from what they might be used to?

PETER HORROCKS: Well first of all, be aware that there's a lot of support that's there. It can feel quite scary. And it felt quite scary for me as Vice Chancellor. I thought, oh good, if I'm not going to be able cope with this, what's that going to look like that to the university and the fellow students? So, no..

KAREN FOLEY: You got all the support you could

PETER HORROCKS: No pressure. But there's brilliant materials online. There's lots of introductory materials that give you advice about setting up your study space, how you need to be, can be very disciplined and plan your hours out. But also, to work out what works for you. Some people like to study a little and often. And others like to do it in concentrated bursts.

And that was the way that I did it, to really kind of cram for a couple of days, and then maybe take the foot off the pedal a bit. So whichever way you're going to do it, plan ahead, think ahead, and prepare. And use other students. There's a huge amount of help that's out there with the online forums, or other ways in which you can meet students. Obviously, if you go to face-to-face tutorials, you get the chance to meet other people who can be very supportive.

And of course, you tutor, absolutely crucial. And our student support services, by phone or by web chat, or by email. So if you're worried, that's natural. But reach out for help, and there's all kinds of different help that's available.

KAREN FOLEY: Before I come to you Hazel, I just want to turn to HJ and Evaghn and see if students have any questions.

EVAGHN: No, no questions as such at the moment. Petra says that she's happy to be heard, or she's happy to hear that the government support part-time students because finance is a big issue for her. So I think just some happy, happy students in there.

HJ: I did manage to pick up on a couple though. Davin, actually was saying earlier that he used the telescope for doing OU MOOC on Orion on Future Learn, which was very interesting, and said that was a great experience. And Petra is happy to hear about the government's supporting part time students. And there is a really big campaign behind it because finance can be a big issue when studying part-time.

But we were wondering on the chat, as well, what your study space was actually like, Peter. Because I remember, I liked to study a lot on the bus. That's how half my degree was done I reckon. But yeah, we're wondering what yours was like. Was it organised or,

PETER HORROCKS: It was a bit messy to be actually honest, but it was a desk piled high with stuff.

KAREN FOLEY: Certainly lots of stuff. And Noel is worried about money too. I think it's a common concern, isn't it? Very difficult. But you know, sometimes when you're investing into things it can make it a lot better longer term because it is worth it in the end after all that time. Hazel, your side of things is not the paper piled high. It's the internet. And you'd mentioned the module website.

And there are lots of innovative ways that students can access study through their tutor, through OU Live, and how to use the online environment. Can you tell us about how students might be able to make the most of some of those opportunities to enhance their teaching, and how there are different sorts of things that might suit different students?

HAZEL RYMER: Well yeah. I mean, I was really interested to pick up that Peter is clearly a binge learner. And some students are bingers. So they really study very, very hard for a period of time. And that just fits their life better. And for whatever reason, they can't study then for another couple of weeks. And that is where the OU really should be able to support students like that.

But the point is, you are never alone. Even when you're binging in your room, you are not alone. There are others binging too. So talk to them. And that is the power of the internet. You don't just have to have your nose in the books. Those students are online and will chat to you. And actually, just try it. You'll see that on your module forums, for example, there will be other students studying that module at the same time.

And you know what? They're probably stuck on the same bit as you are. So why not chat to them. I think that's the biggest message. You're not alone. There are other students who will be there and help and support you. And there's a whole infrastructure of the rest of the university there to support you. And do look at the module website.

Because even if your materials aren't all delivered that way, if you've got a great big couple books been sent to you with lots of learning materials in there, even if your module is like

that, there will be a huge number of resources there for you on the module website, which will have your forums, and details for your associate lecture, and so on. You've got a named person who is there to help you through the module. And they're there for you from the beginning to the end of the module.

Don't feel that it's just at the tutorials, if you're able to go to those. And I would say please do go to the tutorials, the online ones or the face-to-face ones. Do try to go to those if you possibly can. So we provide a huge number of resources. The library is there online 24/7 for you to access other resources if you want to.

There's a lot of material there. It's all accessible there through your module website. Go play.

KAREN FOLEY: So would you say you're more a planned learner? Because I mean, Noel, I'm with you and Peter actually. I'm more of a binge type person. I like doing something and then getting out of it for a bit. And you are more considered because you would suit that study planner. But for some students, I can imagine that the idea of having things broken down each week in a nice ordered format might be quite terrifying.

HAZEL RYMER: Well, I think the point is that it, I think I like organised chaos. So I like some grand plan, and that's the point about an OU course, isn't it? There were set deadlines. There were set hurdles that you've got to get over. And how you get to those, and what exact route you take, and the rate at which you study in order to get there is entirely up to you.

So I think we're all bingers in our own way. It's a bit like fractals. It's the size of the binging. So the way the OU materials are delivered and supported suits all of those styles of learning.

KAREN FOLEY: Peter, you went to some tutorials.

KAREN FOLEY: How were they?

HAZEL RYMER: Yes I did? They were great. And in there were relatively small numbers of students. So we got very close relationship between each other, and also support from the tutor. And has that real sense of other people who were exactly as Hazel said. They were finding a particular step difficult. And sometimes there was something which I was finding difficult that they were more advanced on. And that helped me, and then the other way around.

So it's that sense of everyone finds something tricky, but you can support each other. And you get through more effectively that way.

KAREN FOLEY: They do, don't they? I was at an online tutorial the other night. And some of the students were saying I'm really, really struggling with this. And this was in a cluster tutorial. And some of them were my students. And I looked them up afterwards and thought, because I was sure their grades were brilliant. And they were saying how anxious they felt. And they weren't sure that they were doing the right things.

And I got a sense that sometimes even though your performance can be really good, by being alone sometimes it can be quite isolating. And that may prevent people from going to tutorials. But you say, it can be a nice space to see what you know and test those things out, as well as get support from other people.

PETER HORROCKS: Absolutely, and I think that that, one of the interesting things is that because we are organising materials in a slightly different way so that people have got their sort of home tutorial, but then there's also a sort of wider cluster as we sometimes describe it. You've got a wider variety of people with whom you can interact and who can then form part of a kind of a network of support.

HAZEL RYMER: You're never alone when you're studying with the OU. I mean, I think that's the really important thing. It was a long time ago that I was at face-to-face university, but there was one module I did, I was the only student. It was horrible. It was absolutely horrible. And so, I had nobody to talk to about except for the lecturer. And in those days they sat behind a big wooden bench and you couldn't ask anything. At the OU, you will never be alone.

KAREN FOLEY: No, that's absolutely right. There's so many ways of accessing things. And students can take advantage of so many different things. You can go to the face-to-face and the online tutorials, and many of them as well, if you want to. So that's a good thing to get engaged and be active in. Hazel, I've got a question for you from Stuart about vulcanology specifically.

And I think one of the interesting things about so many of the people who come to the Student Hub Live is that, aside from their day jobs, they also have very, very other interesting things. And you're one of those people. He wants to know, I don't know anything about this Stuart. I hope you're not going to embarrass me. He wants to know if LADAR is being used in vulcanology.

HAZEL RYMER: LIDAR.

KAREN FOLEY: LIDAR. Sorry. There we go, see?

HAZEL RYMER: Well, don't ask me the acronym. But it's long range infra, anyway, it's a monitoring technique. Yes it is. Yeah, as are several other satellite-based and ground-based monitoring systems. Absolutely. Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: So that's a yes Stuart.

HAZEL RYMER: But we aren't at the Open University using that. But many of our colleagues around the world are. Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: And research. I mean, this is such an important area for any university. And it's something that the Open University are very involved with, which some people don't know about some of groundbreaking stuff that we're doing, particularly in planetary science at the moment. Peter, that research is a really core part of the university. Is there anything you'd like to add in terms of some of the stuff that we're working on around that?

PETER HORROCKS: Well, I think the important thing is doing that in a way that really communicates itself to students, and whether they're potential students, or whether they're our current students. So I think particularly in areas where the field is moving fast in terms of the way that technology is automating jobs. In those kinds of areas, it's really important that our research is looking over the horizon and understanding how things are going to change in

terms of society, in terms of work, and really being able to make sure that the learning that we're providing for students reflects those changes.

There are other subject areas where things don't move quite as fast. But it's important we're as up to date as we possibly can be.

KAREN FOLEY: And it's interesting as well, I think, that not only are we researching academic areas, but also how people learn and how to make the most of our online environment better for students. And that's a real way of actually bringing our learning into teaching directly, isn't it.

HAZEL RYMER: Absolutely. And we have many, many academics engaged with that. And that is their full-time job, monitoring how students are relating to the module websites, for example. Which parts people are looking at, what they're using and what they're not using, so that we can improve those for the future. And the wonderful thing about being able to deliver these materials, increasingly, online or on screen let's say, is that we can improve them on the fly so we no longer have to print something off and wait until all of the books have been used up before we can say, gosh, we should have rewritten that section.

It was way too hard. It was too complicated. Now we can improve it on the fly, listening to students, so students can say, that just doesn't work for me. It makes no sense. We can fix that. So that's wonderful. So we can move the pedagogy on very rapidly now.

KAREN FOLEY: And indeed, there are so many ways that students can get involved with things like being a faculty representative and feeding back on module materials and all of that we'd love to hear without murdering lots of trees in the process. There's a lot of love for the study planner. So back to this idea to end with about how we learn. Peter, you've probably got some very good ideas about how people can catch up if they fall behind.

What would your advice be to students who may be feeling daunted by the study planner, and how could they catch up with a burst of activity? What are your top tips?

PETER HORROCKS: Or get ahead. That's the other thing to do, to kind of get something in the bank. And that's how I use that the binge learning. I think if you start to fall behind, then you are creating extra pressure on your self. In that situation, it's really important to not just keep the problem to yourself. Reach out for those other sources of support. But of course, to be able to talk to your tutor and to be able to talk to your student support because you might need to defer.

Or you might need to have permission to be able to delay a... an assignment or something like that. So I'd say the critical thing is to make sure that if you are starting to fall into that position that you talk to other people about it and you get the right support. But as far as possible, try and make sure that you do stay on course. And if you can, spend that little bit of extra time to get ahead of yourself so you've got something in the bank so if something happens in your life you've got a little bit of flexibility built in.

KAREN FOLEY: And I'm going to be talking to Jonquil Lowe about that at another time in the programme. And we're going to be talking about how things like substitution can be used to catch up, and how you can use your tutor to make the most of this study plan. And that's going to be tomorrow evening. Hazel, what would your advice be to students?

HAZEL RYMER: I think that that's absolutely right, to communicate it as soon as possible. If you are worried there are lots and lots of resources. Don't bottle it up. Just talk to somebody. Because Peter's right. Ideally, of course, you get ahead. But then the danger is that you're actually following the study planner, and then you look on the student forum and you see all these people who are ahead of you. And you're, oh no, I should be three weeks ahead!

No you shouldn't. You should be where it works for you. And there are going to be other parts of the course that you'll go a lot faster through. So sometimes it's the first few weeks of that great big hump. You've got to learn how to get into the routine of study and so on. So don't bottle it up. Don't worry about it.

Talk to somebody. There's always going to be somebody that's further behind. And you can do it.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Now, thank you so much for your advice and support with all of that. And I think the take home message is finding out what the right sort of study is for people and getting into grips with how that can fit in with your life, and how you can do that most effectively.

PETER HORROCKS: [INAUDIBLE] everything has to be the same. But actually, being able to do it in your way whilst meeting the academic standards, that's the joy of the flexibility of the OU system.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. Hazel and Peter, thank you so much for coming along today. And thank you everyone for your questions. We're going to have a short ad break now of about five minutes. We're going to show you one of the Open University's ads, Dream, Believe, Succeed. And I'll be back in about five minutes. Keep the chat coming.

And hopefully, Sophie will have some selfies to bring into the studio. So if you haven't sent us your study space, your study buddy, or indeed a picture of you, or your box of exciting OU materials, then do send that to us, studenthub@open.ac.uk. You can just send a picture of that taken from your phone. Or you can use our hashtag, which is [studenthublive17](#). See you soon.

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