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KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to the Student Hub Live. In this session, we are going to take a look at the virtual learning environment, in particular, module website, something that for new students is a wealth of opportunity to explore and get very, very immersed in, but sometimes it's important to know which bits we should be looking at first. So I am joined by Sharon Monie and Tammy Alexander from the Technology Enhanced Learning Department here at the Open University. And thank you for coming along, because you've agreed to give us a showcase around the module websites and Student Home.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: OK.

KAREN FOLEY: Lovely. So let's make a start. Oh, by the way, any questions that you've got in particular, do put those into the chat and Sophie and Evaghn will be feeding those into us. And let us know if you've already looked at your module website if you're a new student, and if you're a current student, you might have some tips of the best spaces or best links and things to go to that you've found on either your Student Home page or your module website also.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: OK, so this is Student Home and this is probably what you would see the first time that you log in. And what you've got here is you've got information, all your core information that you need while you study. So you'll probably find along the left-hand side here you've got all your profile information, so you're able to edit your profile information. You've got shortcuts to tools and stuff. But the main area that you need to worry about is over here in the central bit over here, where you've got access to your qualification website, you've got your information about tutorials and events, and this bit over here gives you all your links to your module websites, so Module Website Record, access to tutorial dates, and if you wanted to go onto your module websites, you would just click this link here and I'm going to do a bit of blue Peter-ish bits over here.

KAREN FOLEY: Lovely.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: Here, and if you click that, you would end up on your module website, which looks like this. So what you've got is you've got top level navigation here, which gives you access to your core areas of the module website, so you've got access to assessment, where all your TMA questions would be, all your assignments. You've got access to tutorials, forums, resources and news, and then you've also got access to house. Now, this would take you to our computing guide, which would give you all the access and information on how to use the website, how to use forums, and stuff to help you while you're working through your website. It's also content-sensitive, so on the home page it would give you all your basic help and guidance of the home page, but for example, if you were in a blog or a wiki or a forum, if you went to help, the information there would be more specific to that tool that you were in.

KAREN FOLEY: So our Student Home is very generic, that's how you get to the library, the career service, and all of those other areas of support, but this is more specific to your module.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: Yeah, and then along the top here you've got access to your core links, which persist throughout their life, so you can always get back to Student Home.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: You can always get back to your profile information, you can always edit your profile information, and that will give you access back to updating all your contact details. You've got access to the library, Careers Community, and the Help Centre over here on this top level navigation over here, is more generic. That's more your help information across the whole university and across your whole studies, whereas help over here is more specific to your module website itself.

KAREN FOLEY: And students who are just starting studying, so the B here, the 17 B, that's just the new presentation that's coming in in February.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: How quickly would we be expecting them to start accessing the module website?

TAMMY ALEXANDER: I think your module website opens, like, your first week.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah?

TAMMY ALEXANDER: So it depends on the module and the type of content you get, because sometimes you get books, some modules are all online. I think the best thing to do is to go into there as soon as you can, because there will be information, your tutor information will be there. There will also be all the welcome forums and everything else available for your tutor group in order to speak to other students and engage on the forums and stuff like that.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, I was talking to Peter Horrocks and Hazel Rymer earlier and they were saying about the study planner, and we were talking about this being a really brilliant source of support for some students who like to group everything together and who like to take things off and see their progress. And we were also talking about other students who can get behind or, as Peter suggested, getting even ahead of yourself in your studies if things come up. Could you talk us through how students might actually work with this in terms of the study planner and how it all links to what content they've got in the module?

TAMMY ALEXANDER: So the first time you come onto this, if I just scroll down a little bit so we've got a bit more of the study planner, what you see when you come onto the website is you see a three-week view as a standard. The current week that you're on, so the week that you need to focus on at this moment in time, is always highlighted and it's open. You've got the previous week, so it will move as you're going through it and you've also got the upcoming week, and that's to give you a short snapshot of the stuff that you need to focus on at this moment in time. But if I just move over here and I click on the all week view, I can then see everything in my module. So you can then scan quickly through everything that you need to do throughout the course of the module and you could get quite a clear idea of what's there.

Now, you were saying about students being able to take off, being able to manage their studies. If I move just back down here, I'll show you. What we've got, and this is purely your own hut to manage your studies in your own way, so you can take it or leave it, you can use it how you want to. We have tick boxes against everything, so you can tick off your content as you're going along. You can see it starts to add on the progress by here, so you can see how you're moving through your content, and also it gives you a snapshot here as to on a week by week basis.

If I go into the next week, I won't move up, I can click off content here. And if I scroll back up, you can see how that's generated a log there, so you can keep an overview as to how far you've gotten. If you want to, you can go back. You can then remind yourself what you need to come back to at a later stage if you need to. It's purely optional, it's up to you how you want to use it. It is really just there to help you plan your studies as you need to go through your content.

KAREN FOLEY: And of course, whilst this is a brilliant tool, it's really important to keep vaguely up to date with the study planner as you're working along. I would always encourage my students, if they've missed certain things, to prioritise those tasks. And what's so neat about this is you've got your access to the links and you can then see, what do I need to go to, what could I miss out on if I've got an assignment coming up and I might need to prioritise and focus my time on that?

TAMMY ALEXANDER: So like here, you can see in this first week, it's telling you you've got an assignment due and the assignment's open, but it's telling you that it's open this week and as you work through it, you can start to see all the various, so it will flag to you when it's open, when it's closing and when it's cutting off. So there's all those sort of prompts as you're going through the study planner to help you remember what you need to do. So this is core in terms of studying to help you move through your content, and it's also been designed that way by the module team. You'll notice also here on the side here, people might be wondering what this "recent activity" block is over here.

KAREN FOLEY: Coffee bars, that's what you've been doing. Now we see.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: So if you've got your study planner here, alongside here you've got all your tutor information, you've got all your news. So it's all the stuff that's changing regularly, things that you need to be aware of. So if your module team are putting up, on here they're telling students to remind them to book their residential school, that their materials are coming out. So these are the things that you need to be aware of that come up quickly, the things that you need to engage with now. And also, we've got this recent activity block here, and what this does is it flags where you've got unread forums, and if I scroll down just a little bit here, on this module here, students are working collaboratively in a wiki, so it tells them here that the wiki has been updated and they should go and have a look at it. So there are various tools here. If you engage in the working with other students, you'll get little messages here telling you that something's popped up.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And tutor details are also able to be accessed from here, which is really important, because we've been talking about the importance of contacting your tutor, especially if you've just started studying.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: So this will take you through to a forum that will allow you to contact your tutor. It will have all your tutor contact details there. I mean, obviously this is a demo site, so it says "Anonymous." We don't have a tutor called "Anonymous."

[LAUGHTER]

You could get the idea as to how you would work through it. So that's the home page, to an extent, and when it comes through to navigating through content, I knew that was going to happen.

KAREN FOLEY: That's all right, because I know that there are lots of questions on the hot desk, so Evaghn and Sophie, tell us some of the questions and we can either feed those into things we're going to talk about or we can maybe try and answer them now.

SOPHIE: So we have got some questions and I'm not quite sure if you will be able to answer them, though we're going to go ahead and ask anyway.

[LAUGHTER]

Because we have a test. And so we had your questions around the email and your OU email account and things like that, and if we can access it through the VLE, how they go about getting on and accessing it and things like that. There's quite a few different questions about that. Adele says she has a link to her OU email on her Student Home,

KAREN FOLEY: Yes.

SOPHIE: How do they go about getting one in general? Is that something that they need to speak to maybe their SST about or,

TAMMY ALEXANDER: We don't look after the email system, but your SST would definitely be able to help you, or the Computing Help Desk if you're really stuck and you're not getting technical support. So obviously if you need to get access to, on the bottom of all websites, I'm going to scroll down here. If you don't know how to find the Computing Help Desk, the link's on the bottom footer. So over here, there will be links directing you to the Computing Help Desk, who will be able to talk you through that and be able to give you more, a better support option than probably either Sharon and I would be able to give you.

KAREN FOLEY: The Computing Help Desk is brilliant, I know. So open quite late and early and also on the weekends, and they're really good if you're having problems with TMAs. We're going to find out about the OU email and I'll let you know tomorrow, we're back on at 10:30, because having an OU email means that sometimes you can get cheaper Microsoft packages and things, so you can get student accounts for things. Not only is it useful for your email, but it's a very good thing to have to get your money off.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: Amazon have a student account.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, do they?

TAMMY ALEXANDER: As well, yes, so with an OU email, your Amazon Prime, you can get that on a good discount.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, top tip! Thank you! That's wonderful. OK, so right at the bottom of every page, then again, navigation, so that's a nice way of holding everything around the module. So at the top, you've got the sort of critical areas, and then at the bottom it's the other links into the opening.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: The support, and this will be here all the time, so if you ever get lost or you need quick access to something, you've got support information there. So if I scroll back up here, and I'm not going to go to another page, fingers crossed, so, for example, if now you wanted to start studying your content and you were in Weeks 2 to 6, and probably the first thing that you would do is you would click on your study guide information, because you wanted to know something about that. If I click on this, then you go to a page with content. Now again, depending on your module, this will either be alongside print material or it could be that this is everything's online and everything would be delivered in this way here. So there are a number of different ways that you can navigate through this content. So you've got tabs here along the top, which will take you through all the various items in the week, so you don't need to go back to the home page, you can just click along all the items here on the top and it's all that week's information is contained in this area, including say, for example, if you had any forums that you needed to engage with in this week. The module team may put them in here, so you don't need to go jump all over the place.

KAREN FOLEY: And the study planner's brilliant because it gives you a step by step guide, but also if you get these links to these TMAs, you can have a little bit more of a focused effort in your readings, can't you, so you can pay attention to the areas that you're going to be assessed on and read those a little bit more closely than the other bits.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: Yeah. So your study guide is your general overview and what you need to do, and over here, this is where you would spend more time, and this is probably where you would engage in your content. So if I go back to your study guide here, you can see there's navigation here on the side that you can click on and work through, or you could just scroll through the material and there's things like, depending on the content, we've got an audio clip here, we've got an interactive activity over here, and if I scroll down, the easiest way is just click on Next and it will take you to your next page and you can just slowly work through the content in your own time.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Thank you very much for talking us through that. We'd like to focus on assessment next, because I know that's an issue that a lot of students want to focus on. So Sharon, you're going to take us through that, but before we start looking at that in detail, Sophie and Evaghn, have people accessed their module website and are they starting to engage with some of this?

EVAGHN: Yeah, I think so. A few people who say that they always tend to look at the study planner and take things off so that it seems that they're achieving things. They can see that they're accomplishing things as they go. So I think people do like the study planner.

SOPHIE: Yeah, definitely It seems that it helps to sort of like, say, take things off your to-do list is always good. HJ's actually asked where he can find the tutorial finder. Is that something you can find on the VLE or,

KAREN FOLEY: Where can we find HJ? Where is he? It's a very good thing, and actually, it's a really important thing to start planning in, because with life and study, the tutorials are

such a valuable source of support, so really good idea to get those in your calendar and to book on them as soon as you possibly can when you're on the module. Can either of you tell us about how students might go about booking on to tutorials and planning their time with that?

SHARON MONIE: Yes, absolutely. On the main website across the top navigation, as Tammy said, there's assessment, which we'll be coming back to shortly. You have access to tutorials page. Now this will house everything you need for your online tutorials and to manage your tutorials. Now, as a member of staff, I can see that this module has online rooms, so your online tutorials you attend in these rooms. Now, as a student, you will be booking on to your tutorials, so what you will actually see, in the study planner, when you book tutorials, in the same way that the assessment dates are flagged in the planner, you also get a flag for your tutorial dates,

KAREN FOLEY: So you remember.

SHARON MONIE: And these links will take you to the relevant area. So if I clicked on the link there, it would actually take me through to the tutorials page. So as a student who's actually booked to attend some of the modules, your event calendar is at the top of the page. If the tutorial is online, the location will actually tell you which online room. So some modules have one online room, others have more, it's going to be dependent on what is offered for you, but everything will be available on that page. So all of that is within your module websites. To actually manage the bookings, there is a link on your tutorials page. This takes you back out of the module website into really the Student Home environment. And these links are available on Student Home, so whether you're in the module website and you want to book, or you've logged onto Student Home, you end up in the same place. So this is a typical tutorials and study events page. This example is a student on two modules where they can book and cancel, they can check through the available tutorials, see what they want to attend. You can also see the events just for one module and you'll see this matches the information that is actually being displayed in the VLE.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. While you get that link up for assessment, it's so important to book on to tutorials. You can, of course, just turn up to them, but it's really helpful for tutors to know who's coming, in particular if you've got additional requirements, as tutor will be able to see if there are any access issues and may be able to get in contact with you. They may even email you before the tutorial. So it's a really, really good idea to book on and also to be able to let the tutor know if your plans change. You can always just update those, book on to another tutorial at a time that fits you better. So it is a really, really good idea to keep up to date with those and really will help you.

SHARON MONIE: Excellent. So back to assessment. As Tammy's already shown on the study planner, within the first two weeks of this module there were clearly marked labels, as we're calling them, these orange areas here telling you that one assessment had an open date, one has a cut-off date, and you can actually also see TMA 01, so TMA, we do have acronyms, Tutor Marked Assignment, that's the first one for the module. It's actually a piece of content in the week, so what you'll find throughout the module is you should see your assessment material, so the questions or the interactive quizzes, depending on the assignment type, and also these labels.

Now those labels take you to one of the key areas, assessment. This is really a one-stop shop for the module, so if you're working through the study planner week by week, reading your assessment materials, ticking things off as you go, seeing the cutoff dates, if you're just focusing on assessment and you don't want to scroll through the planner to see everything, this is the best page for you. Again, the amount of information on this page will be module-dependent, but what you will see is key documents at the top of the page, so assessment guide, additional files and readings that you need. Key area is this assessment table. I will say this is example data, so I'm not looking at anybody's scores.

KAREN FOLEY: My scores, yeah.

SHARON MONIE: Especially when the assessment is not due, that would be quite good. So this is example data so you can see what it would look like. So this is showing you the order of the assessments as they are in the planner and their type, so interactive computer-marked assignments, end of module assignments. The day that they're due when the assessment is available for you to look at, so to read the questions or to actually complete it online, you will see the view links. These view links will take you to the same information you saw in the planner, so the information isn't duplicated, it's repeated so you can access it from the planner week or from the assessment page.

KAREN FOLEY: Definitely it's the same thing.

SHARON MONIE: But it takes you to the same information, which is very important to know that you're not seeing two different things.

KAREN FOLEY: And that assessment guide is not to be missed, because that's often got really crucial information that's important throughout the whole module, things like referencing is often in there and all those things that should be read in addition to all these other areas.

SHARON MONIE: Yes. I think definitely read everything on the assessment page. Not all in the first week, not all in one go, we don't want you to overwhelm yourself, but certainly the assessment guide and the guidance at the top of the page will be relevant to the assessment throughout your module. There's also some other links that are provided automatically on the website around copyright and plagiarism, again, not to read all on your first day or your first week, but will support you as you're writing your assignments throughout the module, so the generic links are going to be available here.

KAREN FOLEY: And it's very important to be aware of the assessment strategy as well, you know. Some modules will have assignments that are substitutable, some will matter more than others in terms of the weighting, and that assessment guide as well will sort of give you a steer on where those things are. So nice just to sort of skim through that first so that people get a vague sense of how everything's looking.

SHARON MONIE: Yes, yes, certainly. I mean, the assessment guide is specific to the module. The assessment strategy will be module-specific or subject-specific, depending on the module, but both of those are key to completing all of your assignments.

KAREN FOLEY: Lovely. Now, I wanted to talk about forums also, because these are a really important part of OU study. We've mentioned how tutors can put notes on there from tutorials and things. How do students access the forums?

SHARON MONIE: OK. As Tammy demonstrated on the home page, there was the recent activity block that shows you everything that's new. That isn't necessarily all of the forums and activities that are on the website. Some modules may put forums in weeks, but again, our one-stop shop. So we've had tutorials, assessment, now forums. This area will list all of the forums that are available on this module. Some of them may be available throughout the life of the module, so your tutor group forum, the coffee bar forum that we saw in the recent activity, discussion forums. If your module has other forums on the site relating to assessment or, for example, a seminar forum in Week 7, those links would be repeated here, so that if you're thinking forums and you're thinking, I want to talk to people, your one-stop shop will show you those that are active when they were last updated, how much information is in there. So it's a very easy way to kind of check and find out what you're interested in.

KAREN FOLEY: And we've heard the forums are very, very helpful, and indeed you can subscribe to those as well, so you can get the email alerts. I want to finally talk about the resources, because as always, we're very short of time and I appreciate this can't be a completely exhaustive run-through on things, but these resources are very important to support students in their studies.

SHARON MONIE: Absolutely. So nearly the final area on the site, the resources. In addition to the material that's in your study planner, which you can work through in the order it's provided is generally the best way to tackle that, you may have an additional resources. Now, how many and what they are will be absolutely dependent on your module. It could be online content, it could be readings, it could be collaborative activities, but they will be on this page so you can easily find them. You will find some items such as the module guide, accessibility guide, assessment guide, are also repeated in the study planner, so you're introduced to them, but then you can find them here any time. Library-specific resources are very clearly visible and easy to find. In addition to the general library resources, these are module-specific. One key area, because I know we are short of time so I'm going to click through while I'm talking, is the downloads area.

KAREN FOLEY: This is critical if you're on the move a lot, isn't it? This is a really good thing for students to know about.

SHARON MONIE: So one thing we haven't had the opportunity to show you today is that all websites are mobile-responsive, you don't need to worry about that. What it means is whether you're on a laptop, a desktop, a tablet, or a phone, our websites adjust in their style to fit. Downloads are particularly useful if you use a variety of devices. So a very popular one I'm aware of is the Kindle. So depending on your module, you'll have different types of files available, so there are Kindle versions, for example, of the module guide, the TMA study guides. Now, on a desktop or a laptop, I have the ability to click on them all and download them, but if you're quickly on the go and you knew you were about to lose your 4G or your wi-fi, whatever you were using, you can actually use "Save this directly to your device." You can download it in the same way you download things off the internet and use them offline.

KAREN FOLEY: How about videos and things as well as the books?

SHARON MONIE: There's a range of resources that are available to download. So again, depending on the module, the audio files, the video files, there may be Word versions, PDF versions. If you're unsure of what's available, check the downloads page, see what's listed for your particular module. I think there are up to eight file types that are available and we're seeing the most common ones available here. And really, as you're going back to the beginning where you're asking what people can do at the start, obviously reading the materials, but see what's available and see what you think will be useful for you, because then you'll know where it is. So if you are short for time or on the go, you won't spend time looking for something. You can think, I'll download that PDF to read on the train.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, it's perfect. And I've had students coming to tutorials online as well from their mobile phones and tablets, and it's brilliant how, you know, you can literally pick up your OU studies and whilst there are books, which we all know and love, it's so handy to be able to get on your phone and be able to do a bit of studying when you get the time.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: Karen, if I do this sort of blue Peter-ish style like we've had,

KAREN FOLEY: Ah.

SHARON MONIE: Thank you, Tammy.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: That's how the module websites work on the mobile phones, if you can see.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: So like Sharon said, I'm trying to work this upside down.

SHARON MONIE: Do you want me to help?

KAREN FOLEY: You know what people, I think, would do with this, when you get that email saying your assignment is back and your score is available, I can imagine that people would be going, right, I'm on my phone and doing that. So it's so great to be able to access those things also.

TAMMY ALEXANDER: Everything that we've shown here today will work on your mobile phone and all respond to different tablet sizes as well, so it should make it easy for people to access on the move and then download the resources as they need them.

KAREN FOLEY: Sharon and Tammy, thank you so much for coming and showing us around. I appreciate we can't go through everything, but you've given us a really nice overall view of what is on these module websites and talked about where to go. So I'm sure that everybody will be taking their time finding all their TMAs and going through that assessment guidance as well, which will be critical in doing well. Thank you both for coming along to this session tonight.

And thank you for watching. We're going to have a short video break now, where we're going to look at the Open Programme, top tips for choosing your module, and then we're going to be joined by the Open Programme, where we're going to have a session with Helen Cooke

and Peter Taylor about making the most of your Open degree. We'll see you in about five minutes.