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KAREN FOLEY: Hello. And welcome back to the Student Hub Live. This session is all about making the most of your Open degree. Now, the Open Programme is one where students can select modules and pick things that will be tailored to suit their individual needs. It's absolutely brilliant. And some students on named qualifications might start studying thinking, I'm definitely going to be doing this, and then, all of a sudden say, oh, look at languages, look at this, that, and the other, and pick out modules that they might feel are better suited for their employment needs or indeed their individual circumstances.

So I'm joined by Helen Cook and Peter Taylor. Thank you, for coming along to talk to us about this. And we've got some widgets that we're going to ask you to vote on. So we'd like to know, how many subjects you're studying or intend to study, if indeed you are doing an Open degree. And we'd also like to know which subjects you're currently studying as part of your Open degree. Or if you aren't doing an Open degree, you can let us know which subject you're studying, as well, in the chats.

And then, we've got a word cloud, which is about which skills you're studying and multi-disciplinary Open degrees demonstrate for employers. And we've been talking a lot about employability skills and the importance of being able to identify those to employers, both in your current roles and also in future ones. So could you get people an outline? We've got lots of new students here who may not know what an Open degree is all about.

PETER TAYLOR: So an Open degree was the original degree that the Open University started off with, back in 1969. And back then, you could take whatever modules you wanted to and put them together to create a degree. And it was known as the General BA.

25 years later, we introduced the General BSc. And then, kind of around 2000 or so, the named degrees were brought in. But the Open degree was then the general degree continued as the Open Programme. And so there is a BSc Open and a BA Open. That's also a certificate or a diploma within the programme.

And it's for students who really want to choose a range of different modules from anything within the curriculum. So you don't need to kind of, oh well, I must study this, or I must study that, because I've done that before. Now, you can choose whatever you want, providing you're prepared for it. And you kind of tailor the degree to meet your needs. And it's probably the most flexible degree in the country, so no other university...

KAREN FOLEY: And what proportion of students at the Open University are doing an Open degree?

PETER TAYLOR: Helen?

HELEN COOK: So it makes up about 20% of the university student population.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh. So one in five people might be doing this. And we have a lot about being together, the psychologists, the scientists, the math students. Open programmes

students, do they feel a sense of belonging in the same way as other students belong? How do they get together? And what do they feel in terms of community?

HELEN COOK: So obviously, Open degree students will be studying modules alongside students on other qualifications. But a lot of the resources that we're talking about this evening are available via, what we call, our Open Qualifications website. And all Open degree students can access that via Student Home, from their home page on Student Home.

And within there, we have forums where students can get together. They can ask each other which modules they're studying, you know, if you've had a good experience with this one, and what should I combine with X? And we do find that students really value that peer-to-peer support. And they like asking each other those questions. So as well as the resources, we have some forums where students can chat as well.

KAREN FOLEY: And why might students choose an Open degree?

PETER TAYLOR: Well, the main reason is because you can choose what subjects fit your needs. So you might want to study a particular set of modules because out of interest. You might want to study them for vocational reasons, or you might want to mix it, so do some for vocational, some for general interest. It's up to you to choose.

I think that Open Programme students are brave learners. They are prepared to go off on a journey of discovery and do a wide range of different subjects, not named degrees. When you're following a particular pathway in the Open Programme, you create your own pathway. And one of the criticisms from outside is, oh well, this looks like a rag bag of modules that make no sense. But for each individual student, those modules make perfect sense. And when you look at the whole student, about their interests, their work, et cetera, you can see why they've chosen that particular range of modules.

KAREN FOLEY: And this whole idea of interdisciplinary learning is something that has become so popular right now. One of the things that I'm always struck by when I'm in, for example, a psychology tutorial, is students who are doing Open degrees will often come in with a very different background. They might have been doing some human biology, for example. And they'll come in with a completely different perspective, which is so refreshing, because we all come at things from different angles. And there are different ways of viewing things. I really like hearing from them.

HELEN COOK: Yeah. And students have different experiences from their personal life and their career, you know, from their jobs as well. So they bring that with them to the module as well and put a different perspective on it.

KAREN FOLEY: It all sounds a bit too good. There must be some rules and regulations, because I can't imagine that some people are going to be allowed to third level chemistry without any training beforehand. So how does the structure support things, so that students don't get completely out of their depth?

PETER TAYLOR: Well I think each of the subjects have a slightly different discourse. And so bringing it all together, making sense of that, it's up to the student. And so if you want to do third level chemistry, having done nothing before, then you're going to be at risk, unless you've done some other reading around the subject to prepare yourself for that study. So one

of the things is that, when students are choosing their modules, that they're thinking about what it might be about, what they might need to study before, and how they're going to prepare themselves.

But what we've done in the Open Programme is to try and provide some advice and guidance to help students through the complexity of choosing all of those modules. And it's a bit like going out for dinner. We were talking about this earlier. I'm feeling fairly hungry, and excuse me if my stomach rumbles in a minute. But you know, when you go out for dinner, you can go to a restaurant, and you can have a set menu where you're following a particular series of dishes, or you can a la carte.

And I think that's the difference between the named degrees and the Open Programme. The Open Programme is an a la carte. You create something for yourself, but you still need to do it in a particular order. So you'd still need to have your starter first, and then your main course, and then your pudding. So you need to study it at level 1, and complete level 1 first, so 120 credits of study at level 1. And then, you move on to level 2. And then, you move on to level 3.

KAREN FOLEY: You're absolutely right. Every meal needs pudding. I bet that's something that people are talking about in the chat. Sophie and Evaghn, is everyone hungry? And has Everyone had their dinner?

SOPHIE: Stewart has asked for dinner. Unfortunately we're locked in here, Stewart, But if anyone else would like to offer, I mean, I'm certainly very hungry.

EVAGHN: Yeah. I could eat, so yeah.

SOPHIE: We've got quite a few people studying Open degrees. So we've got Heather and Anka both studying. Anka is doing a mixture of IT, chemistry, and potentially math, so all interlinked, but quite a lot going on there.

EVAGHN: Yeah. And I've got a question from, [INAUDIBLE], actually. So he said that he did a multi-subject degree, politics, philosophy, and economics. Do employees see him as unfocused? He just did what he was interested in.

PETER TAYLOR: That's a really good question.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

PETER TAYLOR: And it's something we always get asked. So what do employers think about an Open degree? And the first thing to remember is that 2/3 of jobs don't ask for a particular named degree. They're just looking for a bachelor's degree, an honour's bachelor's degree.

So a lot of jobs are out there, but one of the things that employers are often looking for is flexibility, the ability to be able to move from one area to another. So you're not pigeonholed in one particular niche of study. And I think that's what an Open Programme student brings. They show that, as well as being able to study to a degree level, they're able to study at degree level across a range of different subjects, have a range of different skills.

And that's something that they need to really make the most of when they're applying for jobs. So when they're putting their CV together, thinking about how they're going to tell the story of the skills that they've developed, and why they've studied each of these modules, and how that has reinforced various experiences or interests they have within their life, and why it makes sense. And so I think that's what the Open Programme is about. It's about students who are flexible, have a range of skills, but still can study at the degree level.

KAREN FOLEY: I mean, it must be the ultimate opportunity just to demonstrate first-hand transferable skills. What might be some of those things then that employers are looking for? I mean, you've mentioned some of the softer skills. But moving, say, from something like a language to the science subject would involve quite a different negotiation of skills. What are some of the things that students find particularly useful to tell employers about?

HELEN COOK: I think transferring knowledge between subjects. So we've talked a little bit about that already. You mentioned students in psychology modules bringing an element of human biology. And I think, in the workplace these days, you know, my job certainly involves a whole range of different subjects and different skills. So there's some finance, and there's some marketing, you know? And there are a lot of jobs that are not necessarily focused on one discipline. So I think being able to demonstrate that you can do that through your studies, then, when you explain that to an employer, I think that's quite powerful.

KAREN FOLEY: We've had some wonderful words included in our word cloud. And if you haven't already had time to do this, you can put things in, things like determination, understanding the big picture, motivation, breadth of skills, time management. I think time management must be a fairly critical one, because a lot of these modules will have very different forms and patterns of assessment, different ways of manipulating data, et cetera. So you're having to work in very different environments.

HELEN COOK: Yeah. And I think having to access information and data from lots of different sources, as well, and answer exam questions in very different ways, if you're doing math or science, they might be very numeric exam questions. If you're studying arts or English language, for example, then it's more essay writing. And again, in the workplace, many jobs demand a whole range of those kind of skills and being able to apply yourself in different ways.

PETER TAYLOR: I think you make an important point about the modules may not always fit together in quite the same way as they do in a named degree, so within a named degree where there's a particular pathway. And some modules are designed to be studied together. Things like cut-off dates, things like workload, is kind of managed through the year.

Where if you're studying the Open degree, because you're taking a pair of modules from very different areas that may not and probably won't match, then it's up to you. You have a greater responsibility to kind of manage your timings, managing the workloads, and thinking about how different subjects kind of match in with each other. Because for me, that's the great thing about multi-disciplinarity. It's about being able to take ideas and discourse from one area and applying them in a different area and creating something new.

KAREN FOLEY: And so important in the workplace, as well, to be able to do that also.

PETER TAYLOR: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: We asked our students about some of the subjects that they're studying as part of their Open degree. Sarah Smith is on her main meal of social work, health care, and psychology and is choosing a desert of psychology. What a wonderful idea, a desert of psychology.

[LAUGHTER]

HELEN COOK: Interesting.

KAREN FOLEY: Also, we were talking about subjects people are studying as part of their Open degree, so choice one, choice two, choice three, choice four, and choice five. Four are choosing choice three. So that's interesting.

And in terms of subjects that people are intending to study, 83% are saying two. And 17% are saying three. So it seems to be that people are sort of merging, almost, two key areas. Is that quite common? I mean, we've been talking about quite a broad offering. But can students say, I'm really not sure about these two things, so I'm going to pick them up and then perhaps, for my master, specialise in something around those? Is that another option?

PETER TAYLOR: I think studying in two areas is probably an easier option than trying to do three or four, because the two areas, if you're studying two areas at level one, at level 2, level three, they are feeding into each other and supporting each other. And taking our eating analogy further, I mean, if you go out to a Chinese restaurant and you choose you're a la carte, then it's Chinese food. And similarly, you could study just within one faculty area. But it's a bit like fusion food where you can study across different faculties and the like. And so we get students who are doing not just two subjects that might be related to each other, but two subjects that are very diverse. And that's part of the challenge of making sense and making it work.

HELEN COOK: And we've got some examples.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, I was going to ask about what typical students might look like. Yes.

HELEN COOK: We'll kind of run through that. So these are just some examples of how students can build their Open degree. So the option at the top is across all three stages, choosing a combination of different subjects. So within that, they might choose three or four different subjects. The second option is focusing very much on one particular subject, and then combining it with the other half of your degree, just adding all modules as you like. And then, the third option is exactly what you've just said, is specialising in two different subjects. So we're not saying that students have to do it that way, but actually, that's one of the options that they can start to build their qualification.

And given that students on the Open degree, I think at last count study, over 300 different modules. So right across the whole of the university, we realised there's lots of choice available. So one of the things we've been working on is developing some advisory routes within certain subjects. So these form the half degree that we talked about in the previous slide. So I've just included a few here, but students can access this via Student Home.

And they're not compulsory modules in any way. They won't get this subject and the award title, but it just helps them navigate the curriculum and choose modules that work well

together, that the faculties have developed, that kind of link well together. So it's a good starting point, if nothing else. And then students can kind of mix and match modules as they go through that.

KAREN FOLEY: We were talking earlier today about students going into some of the national and regional centres to look at some of the modules materials. And somebody had said that they'd been to the Open University in Wales and started looking through things. And that had been really helpful for them in making their course choice.

HELEN COOK: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: And also, students can obviously look at some of the reviews of these online, to get an idea about how other students have found them.

HELEN COOK: Yeah, exactly. And so module reviews from other students, but also through the forums that I mentioned earlier, on our Open Qualifications website. And there's some other resources on that website, as well, around and where to go to kind of have a look and taste of material in different subjects. So yeah, it's just kind of a starting point, really, if students are interested in a particular subject.

KAREN FOLEY: Perfect. Can we talk, then, about this idea of advice and how people might go around structuring some of this? So they've got these ideas about things that could be nicely grouped together. If students start studying things, I mean, obviously, the level 1's are fairly broad. So you can't go too far on that level 1, because they're fairly inter- and multi-disciplinary anyway, covering quite a range of topics. And then, students can get an idea about how they're experiencing that, before moving on to the next level. How much flexibility is there? And how much support is there for students to get to just change as their module is developing?

HELEN COOK: Go on. [LAUGHS]

PETER TAYLOR: One for you to take on.

HELEN COOK: So Open degree students, like all students, are supported by a student support team. They can always contact their student support team for advice. We do recommend that, if you're picking up a different subject, stages 2, and particularly at stages 3, then it might be really useful to do some preparatory study, so using some of the free resources that the OU offers via Open Learn, for example, to bring you up to speed with, perhaps, where you should be if you haven't done those subjects at level 1. And that's the other reason for developing these advisory routes, is to kind of guide the student through those three stages. But there is nothing to stop them, if they've got experience of a particular subject through work, being able to pick that up at levels 2 or 3.

KAREN FOLEY: But great to know, if they want that support, in terms of gearing up.

HELEN COOK: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: And often, students have ideas in the summer about preparing for their module starts in the autumn. Sometimes, those work, sometimes, they don't, because the

summer can seem very long and short at the same time. But it's great to know there is that content there. So if people have a quiet time, they upscale.

HELEN COOK: That's right. Yeah.

PETER TAYLOR: And particularly, if you're not sure, then just ask someone. There are people around in the SSTs and the like. You can get some advice and guidance on what to choose.

And whilst an individual may not have the expertise, say, in art history, they probably know somebody who does. So your question would be, you can go and ask an art historian about what would be useful to do. So it's there, but try and make use of it, if possible.

HELEN COOK: And we're always keen to find out what students are studying, as well. So these events are great for finding out which modules students are combining, because there is no clear pattern, you know, that is right for that individual. And we've got a couple of examples, if you want to have a look at those.

KAREN FOLEY: Let's end with those, yes.

HELEN COOK: OK. So we've got a little bit of a game for you, Karen.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. It's not more maths, is it? [LAUGHS]

PETER TAYLOR: No. Much harder than that.

KAREN FOLEY: [LAUGHS]

HELEN COOK: So we've got a couple of case studies here of students. These are real case studies of students who have completed their Open degree and a list of the modules that they've studied. I should note that some of these smaller modules aren't available anymore, but it kind of shows the range of subjects. So we wondered if you could guess which career this student went on to.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, creative writing, interactions, I think I'd be looking for the level 3's in terms of where they were specialising. And they've got quite a broad range. What did they, entrepreneur, would they be running their own business doing something very creative?

HELEN COOK: Getting warm. Yes. Very warm. So this student went on to set up their own film production company. We've got a really nice case study of the student talking about the modules that they studied and why. So they picked, obviously, the creative stuff, in terms of the content.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

PETER TAYLOR: If you go back, you can see some of that creative, that creative writing.

KAREN FOLEY: And of course, it all makes sense then, doesn't it?

PETER TAYLOR: Yeah.

HELEN COOK: And the financial accounting, obviously, to help, and You My Digital Life. I'm not sure where the Writing Fiction comes in, but perhaps some of that being able to talk to customers at social media, that kind of thing as well.

So we've got one more. So we've got another student here who brought in 180 credits of credit transfer.

KAREN FOLEY: Wow. Very different.

HELEN COOK: We haven't talked about credit transfer today.

KAREN FOLEY: No.

HELEN COOK: But we know that some students come in with existing study from other universities and start studying at Levels 2 and 3. So again, if you want to take a little guess?

KAREN FOLEY: I wonder, did they go with the music or the geology. I don't know, because you can't be a musical geologist, can you?

HELEN COOK: I don't know. Maybe.

[LAUGHTER]

PETER TAYLOR: Why not?

KAREN FOLEY: OK. Musical geologist, then.

[LAUGHTER]

HELEN COOK: Any ideas from the people at home?

PETER TAYLOR: A geological musician, yeah.

HELEN COOK: So this student went on to do a research master's in vertebrate palaeontology. So they went down the geology route, but clearly had an interest in music as well and was able to study both of those things within a degree. And that enables him to go on to a further study as well, which we do find quite a lot of our students want to do.

PETER TAYLOR: Because it's a bit like a cheese course, really, going on to do your your masters degree.

KAREN FOLEY: [LAUGHS] I was going to suggest that it was more like writing a palaeontology rap.

[LAUGHTER]

HELEN COOK: So it was just to give a couple of examples of how diverse those module choices are. And like we've said, nothing is right or wrong, it's whatever is right for that individual. And as long as they can articulate that to employers, then, yeah, it's always good.

PETER TAYLOR: Part of the challenge is, part of that writing the CV, articulating that particular set of modules, and as I said, the skills and knowledge, et cetera, that it's actually given a student and helped them to be ideal for a particular job.

KAREN FOLEY: Wonderful. Helen and Peter, thank you, so much, for coming along and filling us in on the Open Programme and the Open degree that students can take advantage of. It's very nice to know as well that they've got a student support team and all of the different routes that they can take to get advice and think about which modules are suiting them. It sounds really, really flexible. And I think that will appeal to a lot of students.

HELEN COOK: Good. Thank you.

KAREN FOLEY: Thank you. Well, thank you very much, at home, for being with us this evening as well.

Sophie and Evaghn, we're going to go and have some dinner, I'm pleased to announce, because we're coming back tomorrow morning at 10:30 for a library hour and a whole day of fun programmes. How have you experienced the whole day, though? And how's everything been? Are there any concluding thoughts from you, before we wrap up for tonight? Excuse the pun.

[LAUGHTER]

SOPHIE: Yeah. People are really, really interested in the Open degree. I've put some links on there at the Open Degree's of course, website and the prospectus things, so people will want to go and have a look. There's plenty of information on there.

Stuart was asking about, like, a flow diagram of Open degree subjects, and if you have anything like that, how they link together. So I've just sent those links over. Is there anything on those websites that he might be able to have a look at?

HELEN COOK: The advisory routes are probably the closest thing we have to that, in terms of which subject, which modules, work within each subject.

PETER TAYLOR: But we have a degree builder tool that will be released in the near future.

HELEN COOK: Yeah. It's not launched yet.

PETER TAYLOR: Not yet.

HELEN COOK: But we are doing, thank you, Peter.

[LAUGHTER]

HELEN COOK: Yeah.

PETER TAYLOR: We've done most of the work.

HELEN COOK: It's very close. It's very close to being launched to students. But this is something where students will be able to record their module choices and be able to kind of

reflect on it, although it won't give them guidance, necessarily, about which modules work, work well together. So we'd recommend going on the forum, or speaking to an adviser on their student support team as well.

SOPHIE: Thank you, Helen. Yeah, everyone's been really pleasant. It looks really nice, really nice in the chat. And hopefully, tomorrow, everyone can come back, and we can do it all again.

EVAGHN: Yeah. Sounds good to me.

KAREN FOLEY: We're not doing the quiz again, that's for sure.

[LAUGHTER]

SOPHIE: No need to do it again.

EVAGHN: I might leave tomorrow.

KAREN FOLEY: No. No chance. Well, Sophie and Evaghn, thank you so much for feeding everything in from the hot desk. You've been absolutely fantastic. And I hope that you've all enjoyed taking part in this event. It's really nice to have an academic community, and I hope you feel welcomed to the Open University.

As I said, we have a ram-packed programme tomorrow. We'll be on air live, from 10:30 with a library hour where we'll be discussing some really interesting topics. We've got a whole host of things tomorrow. I think I'm most looking forward to the discussion with the Department of Politics and International Studies where we're going to be talking about Trump and America. Whether or not you're studying politics, that's surely something everyone's got an opinion on.

But we'll also be talking about religion and politics, how to make the most out of your tutor, how to really nurture that relationship. We've got various sessions from the Open University Students Association and much much much more. So check out the programme which is on the website, studenthub@open.ac.uk, sorry, studenthublive.kmi.open.ac.uk. And we will see you tomorrow at 10:30.

You can also tell us what you thought of this session, by clicking on the widgets, and also putting things in the chat. You can email us, studenthub@open.ac.uk. And there's a short feedback form, as well, on the website. So if you've got any suggestions about where we can improve, or there's something you'd like to tell us, then fill that in.

And if you like this event, we'll let you know when there are more of them. So select the Count Me In button, and give us your email. And we can add you to our mailing list and tell you when future events are on.

We're going to leave the chat open now for another half an hour or so, so that you can say your goodbyes until tomorrow. And then, we'll break the stream, and we'll be back in the morning. If you missed any of today, and there's been a lot going on today, the catch up will be available very, very shortly, so you can watch and enjoy that at your leisure.

Thank you, for joining us. And we will see you tomorrow. Bye, for now.

[MUSIC PLAYING]