

**KAREN FOLEY:** Good morning, and welcome to the Student Hub Live. Well, I'm very sorry we're a few minutes late, but I had to make a coffee. I popped into the chat, and you were all having such a good time with your coffee. So I've made one for myself. Thank you very much, Dee. It's been brought into the studio. So welcome to all of you regulars.

We've got Kate, Joanna, Thelma, Abby, Davin, Debbie, Ella, Chantelle, Stephanie, and Supernova. What's that all about?

I wonder if that's about last night because there's been a lot of talk about the Milky Way. But welcome also to our new students who are here. So you can watch this in the Watch and Engage option, which is the best way. And that way, you can talk to all our friendly, lovely people who are out there ready to chat to you and answer your questions. And generally, have a talk about cake and tea and biscuits as well as other things.

So select the Watch and Engage button and you can do that. If you're in the Watch Only, you won't be able to see any of the chat. And you won't be able to use our interactive widgets.

So as usual, we've got some widgets out there for you now. And we'd like to know what sort of thing you're studying, at what level, just to give us an idea about who is out there. But please, do come in and talk to each other. It really is a wonderful, welcoming community of students out there.

So feeding your advice and tips and information into the studio are the lovely Sophie and HJ. HJ is now back. And I'm very sorry about the biscuits. I was told off about all of that. But I have had a little tidy up, so I hope you'll find the desk is a little bit cleaner now and more organised.

**HJ:** It won't stay like that for long. Not when we're here. I do apologise.

**SOPHIE:** We did all right yesterday.

**HJ:** I did notice it was a lot more organised when I came in.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, Kate is very, very organised. Another Maths student.

**HJ:** We can't have too many of them around though, can we?

**KAREN FOLEY:** No.

**HJ:** Well, I had a good time chatting this morning. There were loads of great -

**SOPHIE:** Yes.

**HJ:** In the morning yesterday, loads of great sessions. We're really excited today. A lot of people are excited to see Cherry and talk about the DSG. And a lot of people are members, and want to find out more, which is really good.

We had people send us loads of great selfies today. I found the picture of Robert's Jaffa cakes that he sent in.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Oh, good. These are the ones he made?

**HJ:** These are his homemade Jaffa cakes.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Now I'm not being funny, but they look like, to me, very much like bought Jaffa cakes with something on top of them.

**HJ:** I'm not too sure. We'll ask him. I thought they looked quite good.

**KAREN FOLEY:** They're very symmetrical.

**HJ:** But yeah, if you want to send us in your Jaffa cakes. I heard we got a rhubarb crumble going on. So send them into [studenthub@open.ac.uk](mailto:studenthub@open.ac.uk), or on our Twitter [@studenthublive](https://twitter.com/studenthublive). And we picked out some great things to send you back today as well. We're really excited about these.

**SOPHIE:** So you've got a couple today. You've got "How Nature Works" booklet here. We've got this one.

**KAREN FOLEY:** How thick is that, Sophie? Because that's a very broad topic.

**SOPHIE:** Yes. There is. There's quite a lot of little bits in here. Little posters, quite a few, rather than one big one, this is lots of little things in there, which are all quite interesting, actually.

I picked out the digital one as well. I've been waiting for this one.

This is the same sort of, similar layout to the other one with "How Nature Works." It's all about the digital technology.

And the last one we have is a poster on Antarctica. Is it this one?

**HJ:** Yes. That's my favourite for today. I like this poster. But yeah, if you send us stuff, it's only fair that we send stuff back. So we picked out these great things. Remember to send us with your picture. If you let us know, direct message us on Twitter or in your email, put in your address and what poster you'd like as well. Because we definitely can send stuff back to you. But yes, we're all excited and ready to hear Cherry today.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Oh, good. Excellent.

Well, I hope you send your pictures in. It's nice to see selfies. We've been getting some great study buddies. And a rather alarming amount of cake and biscuits, but we won't go into that.

And Sylvia has been up since 4:40 in the morning. Well done, Sylvia. You're very dedicated. We do appreciate it. We've got a great lineup for you today.

Cherry, it's not many people who come to the Student Hub Live with a fan club. A remote fan club. But you are one. So welcome back again.

**CHERRY:** Thank you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Now, I wanted to talk to you. You're going to come on for two sessions today. And firstly, I wanted to talk to you about the Disabled Students Group because there's a lot of love for the DSG that I know that you've been involved with for many, many years.

But I see you also have a new badge. I don't have a badge. I think that's very unfair. But anyway, you've got a badge. You've got a new job, haven't you?

**CHERRY:** I have. I'm not the chair of the DSG anymore. The new chairperson is Sheila Cameron. She was chair a couple of years ago, and stepped in, bless her, when I got elected to my new role of VP Equal Opportunities. And she's now the acting chair until we have our elections at the end of November. So I know the group is in very safe hands.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Oh, excellent. But the Disabled Students Group is a wonderful support for people. And there are a large amount of students who choose to study with the Open University, perhaps because they have various disabilities.

Now, what's interesting I find about the Disabled Students Group is that it doesn't just cover physical disabilities. There's a broad range. And it's a very, very supportive environment. So can you tell us about that?

**CHERRY:**

I think the word "disability" is a bad word, quite honestly. Because it is an umbrella term for people with physical and mental health problems. The DSG is associated with the association as a group, and we give out help and support to anybody that is facing a health obstacle to studying via the mental health or physical. So we're always there.

And the DSG is a well-known brand, if you will, now. And people search us out. We're all over Facebook and on the VLE, on the Virtual Learning Environment. I think for new students especially, when you're inundated with all this information about your new modules and finding your way around the Student Hub page and looking at all these sites, if you go to the association, Student Association page, there's help and support there. There's links to people that can help you.

And if you do have a health issue, that feeling of isolation as a new student can be made even more prominent because you're struggling maybe with a health issue as well as feeling a bit alone, which a new student can do. I was housebound for five years when I first joined the OU. And my great support came from the OU, who are brilliant with students with health issues, and the association themselves, because the help and support is there. The community, the family, is the association is there as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

Excellent. I want to just focus on, whilst I appreciate the Disabled Student Group covers not only physical disabilities, we have some really great sessions later on today about mental health. And so I'd like to sort of park those for there right now because some of the issues that I know Disabled Students identify with is things like tutorials. How do I get there? How do I navigate the lift? Is there disabled parking?

And also, one thing I know that the Disabled Students Group do is share a lot of information and advice about using assistive technologies and really good work arounds so that they can make studying easier. So it's sharing knowledge.

Can you tell us a little bit firstly about going to tutorials? And what sorts of things may be considerations? And I guess you're a big fan of tutorials. So why are they useful actually working around and getting, enabling people to get to those?

**CHERRY:**

If your question is about the physical getting there or finding out about the venue, then that is through the new booking system, which I believe has been a little bit creaky to say the least up until now. There's lots of support and advice coming up in, and like grassroots support and

advice in the DSG Facebook group. But really, it is making sure you stay in touch with your tutor, in touch with your student support team, and let them know they're not mind readers. You've got to tell the student support team and your tutor that you have a problem.

So when you register and you get your tutor's name, what I have always done is send a nice hi/hello email to my tutor. And say, hi, I'm Cherry. I'm in the wheelchair. I rearrange furniture when I come into tutorials. And as long as your tutors know that you've got a difficulty, they hopefully will be able to be your, like eyes and ears in the tutor room.

Now, the venues are not within the tutor's room is. But as long as he or she knows they've got a student that will have a sight impairment, hearing impairment, anxiety problems with space and people, and whatever, they can help. Not saying they have to help. It's not in their remit to help. But every tutor I've had over the past eight years has been wonderful. They're used to me moving furniture around.

People in the OU aren't mind readers. You've got to tell them that you've got a problem.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I mean, for me when I'm teaching, I love as many students as possible to come to tutorials. And I know I'd do anything within my power to do that. And I've had quite a lot of emails because the tutors are just being allocated right now. So people are getting their tutors. They're getting their timetables. And it's a lovely idea to send your tutor an email. And I bet you that most tutors will acknowledge that.

But also, things like if you'd like printouts. I'll print out things for people if they're going. And as you say, every tutor is different and it's not always within their remit, but they are generally a helpful bunch who really want people to attend. OK. So that's good advice.

So find out, again, about the access and requirements and talk to your tutor is the main point for that. Now, returning to this idea then of assistive technology. How are the Disabled Students Group sort of sharing knowledge and advice? Because they do get a lot of support from the Student Support Teams and various forms of support through the OU. But the Disabled Students Group, what advice do you give each other online? You've got a Facebook group, haven't you?

**CHERRY:** We have. There's 1,150 people in there, and it's very busy. Again, I go back to the fact the OU aren't mind readers. You have to tell them that you have a problem, and they will make alternative formats available on your student home page.

There is some confusion about the print on demand service and alternative formats.

Alternative formats have to be supplied to students who have an obstacle to studying. There is an equal opportunity thing.

Print on demand is for students that choose to have print material. And there is a nominal payment for that. And it doesn't print out everything. But as a student with health issues, in your student home front page, there is an alternative formats under the resources there for you. Under your module resources. And alternative formats are there. Transcripts for videos. You can resize and reprint something yourself.

So again, if the OU know, they will supply you with comb bound books. So you can have a book flat on your desk rather than struggle. So again, you must tell the OU.

And the other thing is apply for your Disabled Student allowance. Because for assistive software and hardware, you fill out an application form, your details, some medical evidence. Which unfortunately, GPs tend to charge for. Mine charges 30 pounds for a letter.

But top tip. If you've got a consultant, a consultant will sign the letter for you free of charge. Mine doesn't. But again, it's just making sure everybody that needs to know knows that you are potentially, you potentially have a problem.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Thank you, Cherry. That's been so, so useful. So talking to people, being aware and mindful of the issues. And I guess the message that there was a lot that the Open University will do to make studying easier and more accessible for people out there. That's wonderful.

I know there have been a lot of people from the Disabled Students Group in the chat. So thank you. We don't have much time for this. And we're going to have a quick break now before we come back with the lovely Cherry again.

So we're going to show you a video about setting yourself up for study, and a brief bob video.

It's great to see some new people here today as well. We've got a slightly different audience. So 86% of you have been to a Student Hub Live event before, but 14% of you haven't. So please, do come into the chat and talk to everyone. Everyone's really, really friendly out there.

And we've got a lot of students doing arts and social sciences. Again, in the lead as usual. But we've got more level 3 students here than is normal today. So that's great. So welcome.

And please, do share advice with other students who are starting who are very excited and nervous. So share your information and advice. That is what makes the Student Hub Live special. We'll be back in a few minutes with Cherry and Nikki to talk about the Open University Students Association and what they can do for you.