

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome to the *Student Hub Live*. Well, it is the 27th of September, and this is our Freshers' Fair. We have a jam packed programme of activities for you today that I hope you had a chance to have a look through and I hope you enjoy. So some of you may have come to this event before. And as always, I just start the day by explaining how it all works and what to do.

So just for those of you who are new to this event, welcome. The best way to engage is through the Watch and Engage option. And if you aren't in that, you can go back to the website, studenthublive.kmi.open.ac.uk, and reconnect with Watch and Engage. If you just put in your normal student details, or if you're a member of staff you can use those, and your password, and you're in the room. There, you will be able to chat to other people, and you'll also be able to use our interactive widget.

So you'll be able to tell us where you are, how you're feeling right now, which level you're studying, which subject area you're studying, how you feel about starting your new module, and if you've been to one of these events before. And that's good for us to know so that we know how to pitch these sessions, because they're live and interactive and very dynamic. That means you can ask us questions as we're going through. You can talk about things that matter to you, and you can engage with our hot desk.

So I would like to welcome Sophie and HJ. How are you both?

SOPHIE: Hi, good morning. We're good. How are you?

KAREN FOLEY: Good. How are you?

HJ: I think we're very good. We're happy in the chat. And yeah, well, we're ready, again, for our normal thing today. So anything you want to ask, the guys in the studio, any thoughts, comments, questions. That's what we're here for, and we're really excited for that. And you've been sending us in stuff like selfies as well. So I've got just a couple from yesterday. Robert sent in Millie, which apparently Millie was very unhappy that he was paying us attention and not too much to her.

So we'll have to apologise to Millie. But yeah, we had a great day yesterday. If you want to

send us stuff too, and we got loads of our stuff up on the board, you can send in study buddies, and what the view is from where you are and selfies to studenthub@open.ac.uk, or on our Twitter @StudentHubLive. And we picked out some really cool things, didn't we, that we decided that we want to send back to you because it's only fair.

So I think one of the ones that I picked out was a nice poster of the hunt, which it all comes out and it's very good. And we've been sending stuff to people quite a lot, but you've been sending us stuff so that's cool as well. And -

SOPHIE: We've got a few other bits. So we've got one on trauma and emergency care. It's a nice little booklet. These are all things that the BBC have done with the Open University thanks to MU. And we've got a railways one as well. So if you could send us through your address, maybe you address and pick which poster you'd like us to send through to you. And we'll get it out to you as soon as possible.

KAREN FOLEY: Lovely.

HJ: So I think we're just really excited to go.

KAREN FOLEY: Good, well we love seeing everybody on the board. And you're getting a really nice collection of a community out there. As well as, I see, some cake and lots of very, very cute animals. So do send those to us. You can email them studenthub@open.ac.uk. You can send them through on Twitter. The hashtag is #studenthublive16, and our handle is @studenthub. So any thoughts, questions if you aren't in the Watch and Engage, Twitter and email are a great workaround for that solution.

OK so we've been doing a lot of boot camp work lately. We've been looking at a lot of skills. This Freshers' Fair is all about celebrating what the OU do. Showing you some things that you may not know we do, and talking a little bit about being new students. So the first session of today, I'm very pleased have Linda Robson in the studio. Welcome Linda.

LINDA ROBSON: Hello.

KAREN FOLEY: Hello. And we're going to talk about what every student most needs to know, and we're going to do that in 25 minutes. So there's a limit. And we've asked you to put your thoughts on our widget, which is, what three things might interfere with your study plans and TMA submission? Now, when we were talking about this we thought how do we structure this because there is so

much that every student needs to know. And you had this brilliant idea about structuring it around a TMA, a Tutor Mapped Assignment. Now, tell us why was that?

LINDA ROBSON: Well, the TMA is a very definite point within the study plan. And so, it's what you're working towards really. So you get to grips with the study materials, and then the TMA comes along. So it's quite important as it helps you pace your work, as well as an opportunity to get some feedback on what you're doing.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, now we had a session on assessment yesterday at the boot camp. And we were talking about how people felt about their first TMA. They were very excited and very enthusiastic. They're also a very organised bunch. They were looking forward to it, but there was a lot of anxiety around that. Why is this something that people have anxiety around?

LINDA ROBSON: Oh, for a lot of people it's the first piece of assessment they've done for many years. But even if it's not, it still can get quite anxious about it. I've been an OU student for 17 years, but I'll still get a little bit anxious about the TMA because it is the point where I'm testing what I know and testing my knowledge of the course material. So it is something that is a step to take.

You shouldn't be terrified of it. But I think a certain sort of nervous commitment to it is actually quite healthy and useful.

KAREN FOLEY: Some nerves are helpful.

LINDA ROBSON: Yeah. Yeah, it helps you push yourself to make sure that you do do your best.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. So let's talk about this in terms of how one might do a TMA and structure some of these things around that. Now, the first thing that you want to talk about is reading the module materials. Now, students were getting these last week, I think, and the week beforehand. And they were very excited about those. And we've also talked about the importance of the virtual learning environments and how you can access a lot of your assessments online, and also the module materials. So how is reading the module materials something that every student needs to know?

LINDA ROBSON: Well, you need to know, if you start by looking at your calendar and see the pace at which you need to work through so that you can plan what you're going to do, you might have holidays coming up. So you need to plan around those as well. But also, if you have a look forward to the TMA question as well, you will then be able to have that in the back of your mind as you're working through the module materials to pick out things that might be particularly pertinent to

the assessment that you're going to be doing in a little while.

KAREN FOLEY: So it's, I guess, like a more structured reading approach, more targeted, so you know what you're looking for. And then you can focus on what to remember, I guess, when you're doing the assessment.

LINDA ROBSON: Exactly, and you might want to make specific notes about things that you think are going to be key points for the TMA, so that when you then come to want to reference back to them, you know that it's on page 2. You might want to highlight your materials if you've got paper-based materials. Or you might have a notebook where you note things down. Different people take different approaches.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, you're implying here that everything is in a book. And of course, a lot of material is online. And a lot of activities are online as well. How do students make sense of reading in that sort of context. Because I know students love books. There's nothing like getting your highlighters out and drawing over them, or not, as the case may be. How would you recommend students engage with reading the online materials?

LINDA ROBSON: Again, it's individual choice. So you have a choice. For most modules you can read it either through a web browser, or there's the OU Anywhere app, which works really well on an iPad. Some people like it on their phone. I find that far too small, but it's at least portable. So there's a choice of ways to actually read the material. Some of it you can also download onto a Kindle as well.

And then, in terms of making notes, some people might cut and paste things into a Word document or whatever form of electronic document you want. Or you might make paper-based notes. It's really up to you. And I think I would recommend that people try a number of different ways in order to decide what's actually working best for them.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. Now, we asked our audience what might interfere with their TMA submission. Shall we see what they said? OK, let's have a look. So we've got various things: illness, work, time, procrastination, visiting girlfriends, pain control, nothing. Oh, that's good. That's optimistic. Life interruptions, being organised, five children - goodness me. Yes, they certainly might interfere.

Linda, these are very common issues for Open University students. And a lot of students have said in the chat, oh, it's really nice to know that other people have this going on. I mean a lot of people are watching the student hub with the volume quite low, and probably children running

around pouring cereal over their computer, et cetera. We've heard of that yesterday. So how might these things impact them in terms of this organised approach to reading?

LINDA ROBSON: Well, having a plan is your first start. But given that most of our students it would take at least six years to get through a degree, it's very unlikely that anyone's going to get through without some kind of blip occurring during that six year time, whether it's illness, bereavement, job changing, children coming and doing various things. So things will happen. And the key thing to do is to tell someone about it as soon as possible.

So your tutor would be your first point of contact. And often, it's useful to tell someone before it's become a crisis. So say I'm getting a little bit behind. I'm not sure what to do. Can I have some advice on how to deal with this situation? Or even, this situation might become a problem. So plan ahead as far as you can. But in the event that some kind of crisis happens, people suddenly become ill, and then you can't do something on a particular day, just keep talking to your tutor.

They'll be the first point to call. And then they can feed through to other people to give the support to help you get back on track.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. No, that's really - I've just had my tutor group allocated. And I sent them an email yesterday. And I've already heard back from a lot of them. And some of them have said, oh, I've got this coming up or that coming up. And it's really good to see people planning and, I guess, trying to predict some of those things. But like you say, you can't always predict them. But it is good to tell people about those as well.

And also, I guess, bear in mind that a lot of this is quite common, isn't it, for Open University students. People have lives going on in the background. And so, if something does happen, it's unlikely that you'd be on your own or your tutor may have heard of it for the first time. It's always quite common, isn't it?

OK, so we've got a lot of students here at level one, 71% a level one. And interestingly, we've got more students from STEM today than FASS. STEM, obviously, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths and FASS is Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. So we were talking about assessment, and we were talking about some of the anxieties around this. And reading the question was something that came up as a really important anxiety, and one that we thought was fair enough and one of the most common errors.

So how is reading the question then something that students need to be very, very mindful of? You said find the question, do the reading around that. But reading, and I guess more importantly, understanding the question is really critical, isn't it?

LINDA ROBSON: Yeah, you need to look through the question and pick out the key words. So is it, to start with, is it asking you for an essay. Is it asking you to do some maths. Try and identify what the key thing you think the mark will be looking for is. And you can check that with your tutor as well. So read the question, look for the process words in it. And focus in on the topic, but make sure you're not doing a brain dump of everything I ever knew about this particular topic.

Because it's very tempting to do that. Because you're all excited, you know lots of things about this now. But most questions will be asking for one particular point. So look at the question, try and break it apart to understand what it's really looking for. And then, ask your tutor as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Would it help to read question to somebody else?

LINDA ROBSON: It may well do. Yeah, if you've got a friend or a family member who's interested, and I hope everyone has, then do you discuss the question with them. And they may have a different view on it and say well, do you think maybe it's asking for this? Or that doesn't make sense, the answer that you've written. And I would also say, when you get further on through the process and you've got the draft of your assignment, ask the same friend to have a read through it.

And see if they can make sense of it. They don't need to be subject specialist, but it should hang together and make sense. And they may be able to pull out bits where you've not explained something properly.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, this is an interesting idea because I've heard so many people say, oh, they're not interested, or they don't know anything about this. But I actually find, personally, that it's more important that somebody is just able to listen. Because if we try to explain something, it should hang together. You know, you're writing for an informed reader, your tutor. But equally, there should be some sense of it.

And if you can't explain what you're talking about, then maybe you aren't being as clear as you might like to be. So would it be good then just to talk to anybody about what you're trying to do with your assignment?

LINDA ROBSON: Yeah, and I think you quickly find you talk to anyone that's willing to listen when you're an OU student, because you're excited by it. So you do start talking to people. And you will find

people in your workplace, or in social groups that you're involved in, probably, that are also students as well. So they're really keen to talk about what they've done as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, now we spent a lot, in terms of read the question, on previous boot camps talking about process and content words, talking about unpacking the question, and talking about reading the guidance. One of the things we haven't really talked about, though, is the learning outcomes. And I wonder if you could talk about how important those are in terms of the things that your tutor may be looking for?

LINDA ROBSON: Yeah, the learning outcomes are what you need to achieve in order to pass the module. So your tutor will be focusing in on those. So it's worth reading them. Some of them are written more clearly than others. So some of them you may look at and say, actually, I don't know what they're getting at there. In which case, talk to your tutor and ask them to explain it because they will then be able to give really clear indication of what they're looking for in the assignments.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. So many students skimp over those. And actually, often they say critically evaluate x, y and z, or be able to do these things. And it just gives you another indication of what you're being asked to actually deliver, as opposed to on what you're being asked to deliver is about.

Tutorials was another thing you wanted to talk about. So attending tutorials, we've spoken a little bit about that. And indeed, we're going to have more sessions on that later. But what do students need to know about tutorials. I know a lot of students go, what are they all about, and how do they happen, and what do they look like? So what would you tell our new students?

LINDA ROBSON: Well, It's an opportunity to talk with other students, and possibly to meet your tutor, but definitely to meet a tutor, whether it's your particular one or not. And it's an opportunity to really kind of dig into ideas and discuss them. And we often say the best way to learn something is to teach it. And a tutorial is a great environment to do that in.

Because someone else there won't understand a bit that you've got to grips with. Meanwhile, you might be struggling with a bit that someone else has got to grips with. And then, you can teach each other, which works really well. And you just get an opportunity to meet with people who are also passionate about the things that you're learning about.

KAREN FOLEY: So what do students talk about at a tutorial? What happens?

LINDA ROBSON: Generally, when you arrive at first tutorial, everyone will sit very nervously biting their fingernails and wondering what's about to come. And eventually, a brave student, and I hope everyone listening today will be that brave student, will start introducing themselves to other people. And then, you find out who's there what they're doing, usually find people in similar situations to you. And then, the tutor will take you through, guiding you through some activities related to your particular course.

KAREN FOLEY: Do you need to prepare anything for those tutorials?

LINDA ROBSON: Sometimes you do. For a first one, probably not because it's about learning the course structure, meeting other students, and kind of introducing the course. Later on, quite often, you might be asked to read something before attending so that you can then discuss what you've all been reading about.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. And there's a new system now where students can book on tutorials and understand the objectives of tutorials. And that will, I guess, help them focus on those things. I'd like to go over to the hot desk and see what you guys are talking about it, HJ and Sophie.

HJ: Well, as always, we're talking about serious stuff, only serious stuff.

KAREN FOLEY: Is it cake?

HJ: Well, maybe not. Well, Robert, he made some Jaffa cakes. And he said he made them with orange. So he pointed that out. But he did have a -

KAREN FOLEY: He made some Jaffa cakes.

HJ: He made some Jaffa cakes.

KAREN FOLEY: Has he sent us a picture of these?

HJ: He has on Twitter. We'll show everyone later. They look really good. But Robert says he does have a serious question, which is unusual for me. Can you dunk Jaffa cakes? And Kerry said earlier, Robert, no. And Julie agrees with Kerry as well. Apparently, you're not allowed to dunk Jaffa cakes. They'll get all sludgy and soggy.

SOPHIE: Well, no. It's a cake. You don't dunk cake.

KAREN FOLEY: I don't think we've got to the bottom of that discussion yet.

HJ: Dee is actually watching us from a ship as well. She's the captain, apparently, and they're in Grangemouth.

KAREN FOLEY: She is the captain?

HJ: Yes, well.

KAREN FOLEY: Dee, Dee - you can watch on catch up right? Steer.

HJ: Concentrate. But we got some good tips as well. Julie said a good rule of thumb, if you can explain the general gist of your subject to a six-year-old, that's when you know you understand it. And Dave says, yes my sister will avoid me, though, talking OU. Which, I think that happened with my dog because I think you can explain stuff out loud to anything and it's useful as well I've found. Yeah, so.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, dogs aren't so good at repeating back though.

HJ: They're not good at responding to you, but it's nice to - when you say stuff out loud, I find it helpful. But -

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah they understand. They're there with you. And we've got some lovely dogs up there. So thanks for that. Good, good. OK. Well, we will get on the case with the Jaffa cakes and try and get to the bottom of that. But yeah, why don't you try and dunk them anyway and see what happens, Robert, and see maybe if the homemade ones are different. You could do a little experiment. That'd be fun, maybe.

All right. Next on your list. Write the answer. I love the way you've put write the answer, as if that's a very simple thing. And we've done the whole sessions on the note taking and planning the process. And I don't want to go into that in sort of too much detail. But writing the answer is something that students often struggle with because they've done the reading. And then, they're like, right, I'm going to write my assignments.

And then they start writing it, and then they're like, oh, no. Not going so well. Then they go off and do Jaffa cakes and all sorts of other things. So what about writing the assignments is important?

LINDA ROBSON: I think the key thing is to break it into smaller chunks. Because often it's a whole assignment. And you look at it, and you're like, I can't do all of this. But if you break it into small,

manageable chunks and you can do a little bit at a time, not necessarily starting at the beginning either. Sometimes it's good start part way through. If there's one particular bit that you think, actually, that's the bit that I find easier, do that bit first.

And get a bit of motivation from the fact that you've got that bit completed. Some assignments will have several questions. Some will be one long question. So it varies on approach a little bit. But even with an essay question, don't necessarily start with writing the introduction because it's very difficult to write that opening sentence. But if you know what's going in the middle, maybe write that bit first. And then come back and do your introduction later.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. No that's great. Now, the next points that we've got are submit the CMA, receive the TMA back. And yesterday, we did a really thorough session with Jayne from the computing help desk, which was all about how to submit your TMA, and then how to get it back. And also, Peter Taylor talked to us a little bit about what to do with that feedback and how to deal with that.

We've only got a few minutes left of this particular session. So I wondered if we could sort of fast forward a little bit to the celebrate idea. Because a lot of students are very excited. And I wondered if you could tell us how they're best to celebrate submitting their TMA.

LINDA ROBSON: Well, I always, depending on time of day, either make a cup of tea and have a piece of cake, or go to the pub and have a beer. Because it is an achievement to have written that and to submit it. So yeah, I do always make a point of going, it's done. Right, let's have some downtime and some time off and enjoy it. Although, that is quickly followed by, hmm, I wonder what the outcome of that is going to be.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes indeed. Indeed. And then, of course, inevitably, within around 10 working days normally students will get their feedback. And then they sort of need to, I guess, feed some of that forward into the next TMA, don't they?

LINDA ROBSON: Yeah. I realised as we're talking that I've forgotten to show everyone at home our lovely diagram that we're actually talking through. I'm not sure if you'll be able to see that or not. But certainly, when you get your TMA back, always the first thing you see, in fact, on our system is the mark you've got. So it's very difficult not to just hone in on the mark. So I tend to look at the mark. And then, later on I'll download it and get the feedback.

And you get feedback in two ways. There's a cover sheet you get, which I'll just quickly show.

You won't be able to read the detail of this. But it gives you an overview of how you've done in your assignment. And then, in addition to that, your tutor will write comments actually on your script, which will be very detailed and refer to specific points. So if you work through that, it'll give you a good idea of your high points and your lower points, and some suggestions of how to improve in future.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant, excellent. Well Linda, unfortunately we're out of time. But you have summed up some stuff that we've done I think in about eight hours over the boot camps and really honed in on the important things, which are, I guess, really specific to OU students, this idea of the TMA process. And you've, I guess, pointed out a lot of the anxieties that are very, very common, very natural, and that can actually be quite helpful in terms of being alert and paying attention to something.

And I guess a lot of this is because it matters to people. Studying is a really exciting part of the process. And what would you say, I guess, to end the session in terms of how, whilst there can be some anxieties, this is one of your PT3s, and I bet you remember writing that with fondness, in hindsight, what would you say about enjoying the process?

LINDA ROBSON: Always celebrate when you get your marks back. And remember where you started and how much you've achieved. Maybe you wanted to achieve even more. But remember, you have achieved and you're still on track. And remember that you're doing this at the same time as working, looking after a family, all those other things that are going on. And so, you put all of that together and remember, just signing up is an amazing thing.

It's just a great thing. And it's going to change lives really.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Well Linda, thank you so much for coming and talking to us today. That's been absolutely fantastic. And thank you everybody in the chat. I'm aware that there's a lot of chat about people really wanting to have their tutors allocated to them. And that is all in the process of being sorted over the next few days. I had a few bunches of students this morning come through. Yes! So I'm very excited about that.

But it's all a very, very complicated process. Don't worry about it. We have a session this afternoon with the Group Tuition Policy, and we're going to be talking a little bit about that. Because there have been some changes that will hopefully make it a lot better for you as a student, and give you a lot more access to support from a range of tutors around. So I appreciate that you're really desperate to get going and to meet your tutors.

And that will happen very, very soon. So I just want to acknowledge that. And we're going to talk about it a bit later. But in the meantime, we're going to have a little break because I've got the library coming in to show you about how the library can support you in your studies. And we're going to have a short video about the university of the future. Now, you can grab a cup of tea in this time because I know that some of you sit there all day and then write e-mails complaining that we don't give you breaks.

This is your ad break. So you can choose to watch this or not, as the case may be. We'll be back in a few minutes with the library team. And we'll see you in five.

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