

[OPEN UNIVERSITY]

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back. Welcome back, Rubina. I'm really glad you've come back. And thank you for sending in a selfie. Hey, you know, when we have a break after this, we're going to print some selfies out, and it's really nice to know what you've been doing. Sophie and I have been chatting about all of you, and we really feel a part of a wonderful community.

So could you send us a selfie, and when we're off air, we're going to print them out, and we're going to show you later. OK? So send us your selfie, your study buddy, your desk space, or a picture of you-- ideally a picture of you-- to studenthub@open.ac.uk or you can put it through on Twitter. The hashtag is [studenthublive16](#). So Sophie will get those up, won't we, and print them up for a bit later.

SOPHIE: Yes, most definitely.

KAREN FOLEY: Lovely. So we've been talking about our stories, and I have Elsa back in the studio. Thank you for coming back--

ELSA: No worries.

KAREN FOLEY: --because we didn't get time to talk too much about your journey. And one of the things that we really wanted to encapsulate are the different routes that students take.

ELSA: Yeah, absolutely.

KAREN FOLEY: So I've got a load of questions here. Hopefully Gwynn is coming. He is from the Open University Law Society, and he's having a Moot here tonight, and he's bringing this lectern into the studio. So I hope you're going to come back tonight, because from 6:00 we've got a whole range of more activities lined up for you. You'll be exhausted at the end of this, but that's going to be very exciting. So hopefully he can join us in this session soon. Right.

I wanted to ask you why then you chose to study business, because you told us a bit earlier today in the Careers Section that you'd had a fairly unconventional education, being home schooled. Then you started studying some business with the Open University. And after a bit of a while, wriggling around doing various different modules, you ended up settling on something, not what you expected. So what was your experience then about studying

business?

ELSA: Well, like I mentioned, I did some work experience for a company. So I really enjoyed that. But before that I really thought I'd do a maths degree, and then I thought I'd do languages. And I kind of enjoyed them, but I wasn't loving it. So I did like an introduction business module. I just loved it. It just clicked with me. I didn't know what I wanted to do in business, but I just loved it. And, yeah, it just went from there really, just tried out all the different modules, and then I enrolled in the business degree and it went from there.

KAREN FOLEY: And you're now part of the OU Alumni Community, because you're just about to graduate, and you have passed, so you do count. And we're asking questions to our audience, are you interested in attending face-to-face OU alumni events-- yes, no, or maybe-- and also, are you interested in having access to a mentor during your OU studies?

These are some areas that the Open University Business School are really keen to explore, so any ideas that you've got in the chat would be very interesting. We've heard already about some of the networks like LinkedIn, like the webinars and the forums that alumni are engaging with that you find really useful, but do let us know the answers to those questions, and we'll feed those into the chat in little while.

So you were studying and you were enjoying business. But tell us then, for a lot of the students who are just starting studying with the Open University, what was your experience doing distance learning with the Open University?

ELSA: Well, coming from home schooling, I had already kind of got used to being studying at home, a bit more self-motivation. Distance learning from the OU was just kind of a step up. From a young age, I found it quite difficult to interact with all the resources that the Open University has on offer, which is loads if you just make use them.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, you can get so easily sidetracked, can't you?

ELSA: Absolutely. There is so much on offer for students, and when I was younger I didn't really use that. But if I went back now, I'd just go straight from the word go. But just making use of the tutorials, online tutorials, I joined all the Facebook pages, because a lot of modules have their own Facebook page, taking part in that.

And then it's not just your tutor group, it's students all over the UK, even like international students taking part. And that's the best bit for me studying, just getting involved with everyone

else that's doing it, and they really motivate you, because it is hard being so self-disciplined all the time. And it's good to know that other people are banging their head against the wall over a question just like you are.

KAREN FOLEY: They certainly are. So what was it like then going to a tutorial? What was your experience? What happens?

ELSA: So I didn't go to the first few, because I was nervous. I thought all these people are here developing their careers, like we were talking about earlier, and I thought I'm like 16, I've got nothing to offer. But going along, it's realised that they want to help you too. Just go along, ask questions. I must have sounded so stupid to them.

KAREN FOLEY: You wouldn't have. I can categorically tell you you wouldn't have, because I'm a tutor, and so many of my students will not say I'm too young, they'll say I'm too old or I'm too this or I'm too that. And it suddenly struck me the other day that often we're so caught up in our own things that we forget that everyone is probably there with a very similar or different hang up. And you're all sitting there worried about each other, and then you all end up getting on fabulously. Do you wish you had gone to tutorials earlier then?

ELSA: Yeah, definitely. Tutorials, they don't come along that often, maybe like once every other month, something like that. But they are just the opportunity to speak to teachers face to face, other students as well. It's just one of the most helpful parts of a module and don't miss them. Go to them. They're so good. They're so good, and you teacher prepares loads of stuff for you. Usually gives you some hints in the TMAs, so if you're really not sure how to approach one, tutor gives you lots of extra hints there. So it is worthwhile going.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Now, you've mentioned another thing, which some students really love and some students find completely overwhelming, which is these Facebook groups and connecting with other students on social media which, as I said, isn't something that the Open University organises. But it is a route nonetheless that some students experience.

ELSA: Yes, certainly. Carry on.

KAREN FOLEY: Tell us about what you've done with those.

ELSA: So they are monitored by people from the OU. Sorry.

KAREN FOLEY: That's fine. I don't know what's going on. I've had some stuff-- some bumbling around in the

back. So Lord only knows what's happening with the lectern. I can't wait to see it, quite frankly. I'm so excited. I don't want this to end, but I really, really am looking forward to the Moot.

ELSA: Yes, the Facebook pages are monitored by the OU so that you can't obviously go giving answers out to anyone. But it's just more of a social group. You kind of get to know people a bit more outside of your tutor group as well.

Yeah, I have to say, I did leave coming up to the exam, because I was so terrified I was revising the wrong things because people were like I'm going to revise block one only. And I was like, oh no, am I doing the right strategy? But it is great, because you do get lots of insight from other students, how they approach the modules.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, we've talked about planning and being motivated, and most of the students here do tend to be the more conscientious diligent ones, refusing to talk about cake or getting sidetracked into any of our other strange ways of being at the Student Hub Live. But we've spoken about the study planer and about staying on track and keeping motivated. What would your advice to students be about managing their time and staying on track?

ELSA: Well, I know a lot of Open University students do work alongside, either part time, full time, so it is fitting around a life. A lot of people have families, other commitments. So it's just prioritising things, looking at your week and saying at the end of this week, I want to have accomplished this.

And it's setting aside time, telling your family-- if you're living with family, telling your family it's really important, don't disturb me for the next two hours. I need to start on this. So if you're in a house, get your family involved, and they'll be like go and study, go and study.

KAREN FOLEY: Will they? That doesn't happen in my house, I can tell you. What happens if it doesn't go to plan?

ELSA: If it doesn't go to plan, I don't know if I can say what I did. This might not be good.

KAREN FOLEY: Give me one. I don't know any students who it all goes to plan for all the time. Maybe a little bit of the time, but often things happen, the most bizarre and strange things happen. Many students are managing disabilities and family lives, very complex situations, and that's really hard to control for with the best will in the world and the best time management.

ELSA: It's difficult. You've got all this material to get through, all the forms to contribute to, and then

you've just got to think what is the most important thing for me to do this week and then work through them. And if you don't get it all done, you've just got to move on, because you'll just get behind, don't you?

KAREN FOLEY: I'm so glad you mentioned that, because so many students think I have to get everything done, and I can't move into week two if I haven't done everything in week one. So what would your advice be?

ELSA: Like I say, prioritise and then think next week, hang on, I feel I missed out on this week. So there's a great chat going on on the forum. I missed out on that. I'm going to make sure that that is a priority next week so I can engage and do things like that.

KAREN FOLEY: But how do you know what the priority is then?

ELSA: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: I mean, this is the question.

ELSA: Right.

KAREN FOLEY: I'd say find your TMA and see what's in it.

ELSA: I've been watching a lot of the chats going on and talking about-- one of the tutors was saying work through and then approach your TMA. I like to read the question first so I don't start work on it, but I always have the question in my head.

So I'm going through the resources and the materials, I'm highlighting what's relevant, and that for me is a great way to focus where I'm going to be. So if there's a chapter that I think, oh, this isn't really relevant, I can come back to that at the end of week if I've got time. But it's not relevant to this TMA.

KAREN FOLEY: That's really good advice. And how did you get on with your tutors?

ELSA: Oh, I had a right mixed bunch. Tell you what, tutors, you've got to meet them, because when you meet them, you know what they're looking for, because every tutor is different. Every tutor has got different kind of what they like to see in an assignment.

One tutor just loved me putting in diagrams and headings, and I thought that's going to get me marks so I put them in. Another tutor likes lots of references. You've really got to know your

tutor, and you've got lots of TMAs coming, get to know what they like, and then that helps you in your TMAs as well to get the grades that you deserve, really.

KAREN FOLEY: That's a smart strategy. I'm always in trouble with some of my students who've been phoning and texting me and all sorts of things, because I've been quite busy here.

ELSA: Yeah, I know you have been.

KAREN FOLEY: But it's great. It's great to meet people and to have that sort of feedback and interaction. And I think you're right. Tutors are really varied. And you can always just approach them, I guess, and see how they work and ask them and tell them where you're coming from, isn't it?

ELSA: And it's great, like when tutors are always giving amazing feedback. When you get feedback, if you don't understand it or you might disagree with it, always go back-- so many times I've given my tutor an email, saying can you expand on this a bit more? I can see what your criticism is, but I don't know how to apply that in my next TMA. So always get back to your tutor if there is feedback you don't know how to apply.

KAREN FOLEY: And do they get cross with you then?

ELSA: No. Never. You know, if you go back in a nice constructive way and just say, look, it's great feedback. Thank you for the feedback, but could you maybe help me how to apply it in my next TMA. And then I find that's really beneficial. But I've never had a problem with a tutor, really. They've all been really good.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, good.

ELSA: Some of them are more distant, some of them are more hands on, but always get your feedback.

KAREN FOLEY: But it sounds like, as well as the tutors, the students have been a great source of support for you, and they are.

ELSA: They are. Everyone's in the same boat, everyone's got that TMA deadline, and everyone's panicking about it. So it's good to know that you're not the only one.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, no, that's great. That's great. What would your top tip be then for current students studying, aside from getting organised? What would be the one take-home point you would have for them?

ELSA: Oh, that's a quite difficult one. I don't know. There's lots of things to-- using the online resources, because the Open University has got so many links that you can click on to the chat forums. Use the Archive Chats, because usually there's a conversation that's gone on that you don't want to stop. You can just quickly read through people's comments. All the forums are really good. Yeah. I just get stuck in really. Don't be worried about it. Just get stuck in.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, well thank you so much for telling us your story. That's been so interesting. We were supposed to have Gwynn here, but he's been unavoidably delayed. I'm not sure if it's something to do with this lectern. I'm not even sure how big it is, to be completely honest.

[PHONE RINGING]

Oh, hang on. This might be one of my students. Hello. Hello. Gwynn. Where are you? You're where? Oh, my goodness. You want me to post bail. Don't worry. Don't worry. I'll send Kristen to you. She'll rescue you. Bye. Sorry. So the forums then. Sorry.

We've got a bit of time to kill, clearly. No, but I did actually want to pick this point up about forums, because so often-- so you're getting your email from your tutor, and then you've got all these forums, and then I know that students are like, oh no, I've got to put something on here, and they might put something on. And then there's this nothing, because they're asynchronous. So people aren't in real time like the chats happening now. So how do you go about posting on forums and how useful are they? There are all these welcome forums, OUSA cafes, et cetera. What's your experience of putting stuff on the forums?

ELSA: Putting stuff on the forum, for me, is really beneficial. If you're proactive about it, the more you put in, the more you get out, basically. A lot of the modules it's compulsory to put stuff on the forums, but if you really get proactive about it, start something up and then reply to comments, it's surprising how momentum builds. But it's about being proactive.

KAREN FOLEY: Have you ever had to do-- I don't know whether this would have been before your time, but sometimes now-- before your time, because you're so very old-- there are collaborative activities--

ELSA: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: --and these can be quite fun, but sometimes people can feel anxious because sometimes

they're assessed. So sometimes you might be asked to do something on a forum and then chuck it into an assignment. What was your experience of that? Did you find that more anxiety provoking than just the normal forum use?

ELSA: Well, it's funny, because there might be through one, which is my last compulsory module, it was my highest scoring assignment, my collaborative work.

KAREN FOLEY: Really.

ELSA: And I was very fortunate. I was in a fantastic group, and it was all about the delegation, spreading the responsibility, all coming together. And we all took part. And that's what made the work so fantastic. And I was reading people's work that they were posting into our contributions, and it made a really rounded assignment. And it was brilliant.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, good. It's clear you really love the other students. And I want to see what Sophie is talking about on the hot desk, because they have been all having a very good chat. Sophie.

SOPHIE: Hi, yes, it's lovely. And lots of people bonding on here. It's really great. Rubina has a shout out to you as well, Karen. She's loved it, loves your confidence, your personality. Full of love for you.

KAREN FOLEY: She'll have to fill in feedback form on the website.

SOPHIE: We do have a question for you. What is the reaction like when you tell people that you have an OU degree? For example, when you're interviewing and things like that, what sort of reaction do you get from employers?

ELSA: It's mainly interest. It's something different about you, and it's what they want to know about. So people are like, oh, you know, did you not have the university experience, like did you not get on campus? And it's what you make it to be, isn't it? It's how much you take advantage of what the OU's got to offer.

But my current employer, it was basically what I spent half the interview talking about-- the OU degree-- because the OU conjures up like words of motivation, being self-directed, being committed. So I think you've just got to sell it. When you're talking to people about it, just be so positive about it, and people can tell. It's recognised. It's a fantastic university, fantastic degrees, and people know that if you've got it, you've had to work really hard to get it. So, yeah. It's fantastic. I love it.

KAREN FOLEY: Does that answer your question, Sophie?

SOPHIE: Yes, it does. I think that's the reaction that you get from people in general. I know when I tell people that I'm doing a degree at the Open University, it sparks lots of questions. You know, how do you manage to fit in work and studying and everything? So it is just a really good thing to have, and everyone's really appreciative of the information or your help and your tips and things. Everyone really agrees with you. So, yes, we're really good here.

[CRASH]

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, what was that? Gwynn.

GWYNN: I'm really sorry. Thank goodness for that.

KAREN FOLEY: Gwynn, what are you doing here? Why are you so late?

GWYNN: There's been a terrible misunderstanding. OK? I've just been in the clink.

KAREN FOLEY: Sit down, Gwynn.

GWYNN: I've just been in the clink for, I don't know, most of the day, and--

KAREN FOLEY: I thought that was just a fake door.

GWYNN: No, that's an actual prison in there. Yeah, yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, but you're looking surprisingly good.

GWYNN: Yeah, well, thank goodness for Kristen. She gave me this get out of jail free card.

KAREN FOLEY: Kristen gave it to you?

GWYNN: Kristen. Yes, that's right, yes. And I didn't think that it actually worked, but apparently it did.

KAREN FOLEY: She's brilliant.

GWYNN: So here I am.

KAREN FOLEY: I'm so glad you are here. Have you got the lectern?

GWYNN: I have, yes. I don't have it with me at the moment. I was going to bring it along later on.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, we'll install it here for our Moot later on.

GWYNN: Yeah, yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: I'm really looking forward to that. Excellent. So before we talk about the Moots, which we're going to do later tonight, I've been interviewing Elsa, who was on time and didn't go to jail and is a very conscientious young student, about her side of things and how she's been doing business. You've been doing law. So how's that been for you?

GWYNN: Well, I think the knowledge of the criminal procedure rules rather helped me this morning, actually.

KAREN FOLEY: It has. It certainly has.

GWYNN: I was able to lecture them about the Peace and Criminal Evidence Act and custody time limits and et cetera. So that rather helped me.

KAREN FOLEY: Although it did take quite a while, I must admit.

GWYNN: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: A laborious task, but worthwhile nonetheless.

GWYNN: Yes, indeed. Bureaucracy, red tape. But it's been incredibly useful. It really has. The reason that I did a law degree in the first place was because there was a bit of trouble in the boardroom. I'm an estate director of a residential management company. And we had a bit of trouble with our company secretary at the time, who was calling a general meeting in circumstances which we didn't believe were entirely correct.

But we didn't have the legal knowledge to really challenge that. And we were dependent on other people. One of my fellow directors, his daughter had recently graduated in law, and we found her incredibly useful, because she sat there with a copy of Butterworth's Company Law Handbook and just going through saying they can't do that. He can't do that. That's not right.

And so I was mesmerised by that, and I thought I want to be that person that's really, really helpful to other people, that's got the knowledge rather than being dependent on other people with the knowledge. And that inspired me to sign up the following year to do a degree in law, and that was in 2006. And I haven't looked back.

KAREN FOLEY: Wow. So you went and did it yourself to get all of this. Did you?

GWYNN: Sorry?

KAREN FOLEY: Did you get it all sorted?

GWYNN: That particular time, yes we did, actually. There was a bit of correspondence. There was an extraordinary general meeting, which was a little bit musical chairs, because there was one set of directors up on the top table.

I won't go into the details, but at the beginning of the meeting, I was able to quote certain sections of the company's act to indicate why they shouldn't be standing there, and we should be sitting there instead. And then there was this sort of musical chairs moment where we all switched. And then the meeting took place, and everything was resolved in the end. So that was good. But that's what inspired me to do it.

And since then, I've been able to help countless friends and neighbours and colleagues with any number of different disputes, consumer issues, problems with insurance, insurance claims, et cetera. And I've been able to advise them and put them right. And most of the time, they've got a satisfactory conclusion as a result of it.

KAREN FOLEY: I'm glad you mentioned musical chairs, because I've been talking to some of your colleagues earlier from the Open University Law School, who have told me that singing can be very good at improving your jurisdictional presence.

GWYNN: That's true.

KAREN FOLEY: Would you agree or disagree?

GWYNN: I would agree, yes. And, in fact--

KAREN FOLEY: I've been practicing.

GWYNN: Have you really?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

GWYNN: OK. We might have to have a sing off later.

KAREN FOLEY: No.

GWYNN: The Inns of Court, which are these very old institutions that one has to join if one wants to start the training for the bar. They all have a great tradition of music and performance, in general. I'm a member of Grey's Inn, but there are other Inns as well. And every year, Grey's Inn has what they call a miscellany, which is-- it's like a variety stroke pantomime performance, which is on for one night only.

And all of the members of Grey's actually come together and have this great singing, acting performance. And you've got recently joined students rubbing shoulders with Benches in QCs, and High Court judges strutting their stuff on the stage. And it just goes to show that there's a very fine line between acting and actually advocacy.

And I think a lot of the people traditionally-- and, you know, I'm one of the people that wants to help buck this trend. But traditionally, the bar was usually populated with people from either Oxford or Cambridge. Now, I think people in Cambridge who did a degree at Cambridge, a lot of them we know, there's the Footlights, and they went on to great careers in comedy and acting. Those people who perhaps decided not quite to go down that line but perhaps might have been rubbing shoulders with your Ben Eltons and your-- actually, I think you went to Bristol actually. That's a bad example, but--

KAREN FOLEY: You don't need to be very pedantic.

GWYNN: Your Stephen Frys, et cetera, that those same people would probably have said actually, no, I'd like to practise law. But there was a point in time before those paths split where they were one and the same people. I think there are very similar properties that you need for advocacy that also are transferable to the stage.

KAREN FOLEY: One thing you both have in common is this connection with other students. So Elsa, was telling us, while you were so rudely in jail, about the importance that students have had in her OU experience in terms of Facebook groups and tutorials, et cetera. And you're obviously part of the Open University Law Society, so you're very interested in mootings and paint balling, I hear.

So we also asked our audience about whether they'd be interested in attending OU alumni events and also whether they'd be interested in having a mentor as somebody who they could access in their studies. Now, the vast majority, in fact 93% at the last count, said that they would like to have access to a mentor in their studies, whereas 67% said they would be interested in attending OU alumni events, 27% said maybe. Perhaps they've heard about the

paintballing.

But what's this idea then in terms of the importance of connecting with other students? Is there a sense-- I don't know whether this is different maybe in business or law-- of having somebody who can actually help with studies or somebody who can have more peer-to-peer support. Is there a distinction?

GWYNN:

I think there is, yes. I think there is. And both are useful. Both are useful, because it's useful to be able to speak to people and connect with people who have been there before and done that and experienced those dilemmas that you may be going through at the time and come out the other end and say it's OK. Just carry on doing, you're doing the right thing, or what you need to do is X Y Z. That's very, very useful.

In addition to that, it's also useful to have peer-to-peer support, because then you're connecting with people who are actually experiencing the same thing that you're experiencing. And that also can be supportive. It's like, oh, you mean it's not just you. Oh, I couldn't get my head around that either. And that's a different type of support, but it's equally as useful, yes.

KAREN FOLEY:

What about you, Elsa?

ELSA:

Well, doing it alone at home can be very isolating. So to have people that put you in contact with people in the same situation and be local that you can actually meet up in person, anything like that is just fantastic. So all the support you can get is brilliant.

KAREN FOLEY:

Sylvia says that she's so sorry that you were late. And Rubina says well done for getting out of jail and for coming along here today. So we're very much looking forward to this evening's session. Hey, it's been great for you two to share your stories. And those are individual stories, and I think it's really nice for people to hear other people's journeys and experiences, and that's what's been going a lot on in our chat box as we've been spending the afternoon together.

Sophie, we're going to break very soon, and we're going to ask people for more selfies so that we can print them out during the break and also for some feedback. But are there any final words from you before we go off and prepare for our evening's activities?

SOPHIE:

Well, it's all going so lovely in the chat. It's really nice to see that people are bonding. There are quite a few people here who are catching up after a couple of years, actually. which is really, really nice. Sarah Jane found Elsa's journey with the Open University really interesting,

and they're all wishing you the best of luck.

Sylvia did ask if you'd gone to a graduation ceremony. I think Sylvia is over in Canada, and she's looking to come over. So have you gone to yours yet?

ELSA: Mine is a week tomorrow.

SOPHIE: Oh, wow. Yeah.

ELSA: A week tomorrow.

SOPHIE: Well, good luck. We all wish you the best of luck from here. And thank you ever so much for coming on. And everyone out there, we hope to see you very soon with your selfies. Please send them over to us studenthub@open.ac.uk or please tweet them to us with the hashtag #studenthublive16. And I'll try and get those printed out for you by the time we come back at about 6:00.

KAREN FOLEY: Wonderful. Excellent. Well, Gwynn will be joining us later tonight. We haven't had time to ask you all the questions. But fear not, because I'm going to be seeing those to you later in our meeting session. We're back live from 6:00. We're going to play you some of Boot Camp replays that we've had, which are also available on the Catch Up. The Chat Box will be open. Please do keep chatting to each other. We're going to go off and get everything ready for this evening, though. So if you have any burning questions that we haven't answered, do email those to us-- studenthub@open.ac.uk, and we will get back to you.

This evening we're going to be talking a little bit more about law. We're going to be grappling with some issues around current affairs, like bikinis and all sorts of interesting things from both the business and law perspective. We're then going to be taking a look at Sam Alledyte and this whole issue of cheating in sports-- or not cheating, as the case may be-- have to be careful with these lawyers around.

So we're going to be having

GWYNN: Alleged cheating.

KAREN FOLEY: Alleged cheating, yes. Clearly, I'm going to have to revise. I'm also going to be doing some singing practise in the break, because then we'll have our Moot where Gwynn is back, and we're going to give you an idea about what the Open University Law Society get up to when

they're not paintballing.

So we'll see you back at 6:00 or just after 6:00, even, for those sessions. Don't forget, Catch Up, count me in if you want to come to more of these events. Keep chatting to each other, and send us your selfie so that we can show what you look like to each other a little bit later on tonight. We'll see you later, but enjoy the rest of the programme this afternoon. Bye for now.

[MUSIC PLAYING]