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KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and I hope you enjoyed that boot camp session. Just to remind those of you who are just tuning in now, there's a whole host of those. So you can go to the studenthublive.kmi.open.ac.uk website to check all of them out. We've gone through things like preparing your assignments, how to submit them, how to navigate the virtual learning environment, essay writing, note taking, all sorts of really useful stuff. And we're going to be playing that between the afternoon and evening session also for you to enjoy.

Well, I've been having a really nice chat with you guys out there. It's been really nice seeing how this community is developing, seeing some of our regular students participating and welcoming other people, giving lots of tips and advice. That's brilliant to see. And also lots of newbies.

And I was saying to Sophie that Abby was complaining that people weren't talking about cake. And Sophie said, well, of course, these are very conscientious law and business students, and maybe they don't know that you can talk about cake. Well, it's that time of day where we all start getting a little bit hungry and a little bit obsessed with cake. You don't have to talk about sensible things. You can talk about anything that's on your mind, including what you're eating.

So please do go for that in the chat. I'm really keen to see what you've been having for lunch as well. So yeah.

Right, my next session, I'm joined by Ezra and Steve. Thank you for coming along. We wanted to do a session to answer students' questions and to tell them about student support teams and associate lecturers or tutors, and what students can expect from them and where to go for help. So Ezra, you're an educational advisor--

EZRA: That's right.

KAREN FOLEY: --for the faculty of Business and Law. And you said that you fully believe in the Open University's education and support the mission to provide teaching to those who want to realise their ambition and their full potential, which is wonderful. And I think we all agree with that. And Steve, you're an associate lecturer.

STEVE: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: So you tutor on some modules, and you have students of your own. And you're also coming along tonight to talk about football and sport, which I'm really--

STEVE: You can't keep me away.

KAREN FOLEY: --looking forward to. No, indeed. So what are some of the things that students might want to know? We've seen a lot of students here at level 1. And some of them are quite new to the Open University, certainly to the Open University Business School, although we have students from other faculties as well here in smaller proportions.

So what students need to know specifically as they're starting their learning journey? When should they talk to who? They're getting their tutors allocated, sort of as we speak, if they haven't in the last day or two. They're getting their tutorial timetables published, and they're just about to start. So where do they go now? What do they do? Steve, perhaps you can tell us.

STEVE: Yeah, the first thing that should happen, in the ideal world--

KAREN FOLEY: Theoretically, yes?

STEVE: --is that their local, friendly associate lecturer, stroke tutor, should get in touch with them. Send a nice, friendly, welcoming e-mail or maybe even text, or whatever it happens to be-- something to introduce themselves and basically say, hey I'm here. I'm your tutor. So there should be some initial contact, really, that students should get fairly early, well before the module starts, really. A few days, maybe a week or two before.

KAREN FOLEY: Now I'll level with you. I've just got my groups of students allocated, and I've been locked in here for the last few days. So I haven't e-mailed them. But I've already had e-mails from my students. Wow. I've been busy.

STEVE: What are you doing here, then?

KAREN FOLEY: And they can come here. I've been getting texts from some of my students saying hello, I'd love to meet you. When's my tutorial? And I've been getting all sorts of emails. Do they have to wait for their tutor to e-mail them, or can they just get in touch when they get their details through?

STEVE: Oh, no, absolutely. They can get in touch, and some students do. Quite a number of them just say, I hear you're my tutor. Are you still alive and kicking, and--

EZRA: Yeah.

STEVE: I thought I'd introduce myself to you. So we do get a lot of that that goes on. But hopefully the tutor, if you haven't heard already, will be in touch fairly swiftly just to introduce themselves, ask you as students to introduce yourselves to the tutor and so on, as well as give a bit of an overview of the module and what's to expect and how to get in touch with the tutor and the university, and all those other bits and pieces to try and allay any fears that students have. Especially students who are just coming in new and might be thinking, what have I let myself in for, and where do I start?

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, no. Our students out there are super organised. They're super excited and super keen. And of course, their tutor, or associate lecturer, as we may call them, is the forefront, the first point of contact that a lot of them will have. And they can be forgiven for thinking that the tutor is the font of all knowledge. But they're not, are they? Because there's an academic side and an administrative side to the support that we offer students. So Ezra, what kind of things might students go to the student support team for?

EZRA: Well, I think initially, it's about, really, their tutors. So for example, at the moment, it's about where do I get-- how do I get in contact with my tutor if they have not done that? And trying to understand the Student Home page, which is the platform where they can contact the tutor or the student support team. There's a lot of resources on there. So there is a lot of problems with the navigating, getting used to the system, and finding their module materials on that Student Home page. So that's where we come in as a student support team just to help them with that initial process.

KAREN FOLEY: So you offer loads of advice and support in a variety of ways. And you've mentioned the idea of phoning people. But there's also a lot of information on the website, isn't there? When we've been updating and innovating in those sectors. So what might students expect to see there?

EZRA: On the Student Home page, the favourite tab that I would advise everyone to go into is the Help Centre. On the Help Centre, there is a lot of things that you can cover if, for example, you want to know about what support is there for disabled students or anyone who's got a long-term health condition that they think will have a negative impact on their studies. There's links on there where you can click and find more information and find out who to contact to set up

that support. And there is information about your module materials, whether you want to get a different set of module materials, like you can get audio version of the module materials if for example your disability does not allow you to use the traditional textbooks and stuff like that. So there is a lot of information on there.

KAREN FOLEY: But how do students then know whether they're to speak to their tutor or the student support team? I mean, what happens if they phone their tutor and all of a sudden their tutor's like, oh, no, that's not the right place. You know, I don't--

[PHONE RINGING]

Hello? Hello? Who, sorry? Oh, sorry. Yes, you know, you're one of my students.

Oh, I'm really sorry. No, no, no I've been-- I've been really, really busy lately. I've been doing all of-- [GASP] you can watch it on the catch up. Yeah. How did you get this number?

OK. I'll be in touch really, really soon. I do promise. I'm so sorry. Bye-bye.

[PHONE CLICKS]

Sorry about that.

STEVE: No escape.

KAREN FOLEY: But they are super excited, aren't they? [LAUGHING] And it's really nice, because ALs-- apart from me, maybe, just because I've been a little bit busy. But we do really care about our students and love talking to them and love hearing from them.

STEVE: Absolutely.

KAREN FOLEY: And typically, I-- apart from perhaps this student-- normally develop a very close relationship with my students. Typically, an Associate Lecturer might have around 15 or 20 students, so they can get a nice idea about what those students are doing. And it's important, I guess, to be in touch with your tutor early-- sorry-- because you can explain, then, what you're trying to do, maybe any assistance you might require, and just generally get your tutor to give you the best support in that learning journey. But what's changing right now as well is that students are getting a lot more access to tutors. So we have this group tuition idea now where students can attend a range of tutorials, both online and face to face. How do students experience those

sides of things, and what's so special about the relationship with the tutor when there are all of these other areas around supporting learning?

STEVE:

OK, well, in terms of the tutor-student relationship, we do get very close, as you say, Karen, to the students that we have in our group. And we work very closely in terms of managing online conferences on the TGF, the Tutor Group Forum, and so on. And we manage marking assignments and so on, and all that sort of thing. But in terms of the wider experience, students now can attend, like you say, tutorials from around a much larger region and area, and also online. So there's a whole bunch of ways that students can interact with not only their own home tutor, so to speak, but also other tutors, and other students too. But as a first port of call, the tutor is probably the best place to go.

I think you mentioned earlier, where would students go first? And probably the best place is the tutor, their home tutor.

KAREN FOLEY:

Excellent. We're going to take some questions. And I know Sarah Eppert is in our chat box. And she's from the student support team, so she's going to be answering any questions you've got, as well as Sophie and Kristen. And do let us know if there are any burning issues.

But I'd like to touch on some of the broader things that students might ask about. What is the most common question that people would come to you, Ezra, about in the student support team? What do you get the most inquiries about?

EZRA:

The most about that we get is probably around, like I have already mentioned, the Student Home, navigating that, and also how to manage their time on their studies. If they're new to the Open University, they haven't studied for quite a long time, or they actually haven't studied at all. It's about getting that discussion with them and getting advice and guidance how they can manage their time, maybe with other social commitments. They might have family commitments and all that. So we have those discussions with them. So they do call or e-mail regarding those things-- how can I balance my studies with my work life or my family life?

KAREN FOLEY:

That's wonderful, because I think sometimes people think, oh, I'm studying in a distance learning environment, and therefore there's no one to talk to. I'm just going to get an automated message or diverted to a link. And I guess when you've got those issues-- I mean, we were talking earlier about some students doing law modules, and that there were time pressures, and people may be doing multiple modules. That time can feel very, very difficult to manage, especially when life can get in the way, as we know it so often does with Open

University students, because there is so much else going on. So it must be really reassuring for people, then, to be able to speak to a real person and make sense of that. How do you help them?

EZRA: Well, I think it's just having that personal conversation with each individual student. So especially if it's on the phone, just trying to understand their situation as an individual, where they are in their life at that particular moment. Are they working? Is it full time? Is it part time? Have they got any other kids?

Then, with that information, we will be able to advise and offer guidance as to-- well, maybe you'd be better off to start with a 30-credit module, and then see how that goes, and then increase your study intensity later on, because if you are new to the Open University, you don't really know what you're getting into, how much work is involved in each of those modules. So starting maybe with a smaller intensity, a lower intensity, like a 30-credit module, will give you that chance to get to know the system at the Open University, to know how much time you've got, really, to offer to your studies.

KAREN FOLEY: So you both help with work arounds and time management, as well as maybe changing expectations and being flexible in terms of people's learning journey. So they could perhaps sign up for something and then think, actually, hang on, I need more or less of something. And they would talk to you, then, to work out what was best for them.

EZRA: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Steve, what's your most common question? Mine is where are you? [LAUGHING]

STEVE: Well, after that--

KAREN FOLEY: Abby, I'd love to have you as my student. I really would, because you turn up to all of these things, and that is brilliant. We love students turning up at our tutorials.

STEVE: The most common problem and question I have is, I'm sorry, Steve, but I'm not sure I can get the TMA in on time. That's a Tutor Marked Assignment. What can I do? What do I do? Is it the end of the road for me? And so on.

So my job there is to really get to understand what the problem might be and help the student through. So if there are real issues and real problems, then we can cut students some slack. It's not something that we'd like to do particularly in the sense that people might fall behind in

the studies. So we try and keep people on track as best we can. But if there are things-- if life gets in the way or something, then it's certainly not the end of the road. Please pick up the phone, e-mail your tutor, and have a chat about those sorts of things, because we are here to help.

We're the first port of call. And then, if we can't help and sort it out, then we might encourage you to get in touch with Ezra and his team to take things further. But it's really about getting the assignments done is the biggest issue for most students.

KAREN FOLEY: So time management's common between you. But I guess people are going to talk to the student support team about managing their workload, and they might talk to their tutor about other things-- for example, getting an extension. One of the things my students often talk to me about is how to get it done. And sometimes an extension isn't the right answer. Sometimes it's about thinking about what they're actually looking to, so managing expectations and managing time and directing people to the right materials that they need to select for that particular assignment. How often does that happen to you, then, Steve, in terms of the proportion of students who just are going, help? And how often is an extension the right thing to do?

STEVE: Well, I'd say most of the time, most students are OK with the material side of things because they've either attended tutorials or been to online sessions where we talk about assignments and what's coming up in terms of the assignment and the material that they need to look to. So we cover a lot of that. If that isn't enough, then obviously, we need to point them in that direction in terms of material. But also, like you say, it really comes down to looking at time management, and can the student fit the TMA in time or not, and if we need to give an extension of a day or two and help them work around their time issues and the problems that they've got.

KAREN FOLEY: That's really, really lovely. Thank you both so much for coming along. As usual, we're out of time. But the two take-home messages, I think, for students are, there is help and support. Talk to people. And if you're not in the right place, you'll be directed to the right place, and there's no harm in asking.

So either contact your student support team about, I guess, the more administrative side of things, and your tutor about the more academic side of things. But both are really prepared to help and willing and able to do that. And it's great to see you all palling up in the chat box and

talking about how to hook up and going to tutorials and being online. So I hope you really enjoy that. And we'll put some links in the Resources page of the website as well so that you can find out how to contact your student support team.

And your tutor details, if they haven't already just come through, will be coming through soon. Send them a lovely e-mail. Phone them, get in touch, and tell them about your journey and what you're hoping to do. We're going to have a short video break now. And Steve, you're going to come back later for our talk about ethics and football and Sam Alladite and what's going on there.

We've got a really good entertainment session this evening. We're going to talk about news and current affairs and football and have a moot. So I'm really looking forward to that. But we're going to have a quick video break now, and then we're going to come back and look at B100, the introductory business level module, with Alessandra, Anya, and Paul. I'm really looking forward to that. We'll see you very soon in five.

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