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**ANGELA:** (SIGHS) So, Karen, are you ready for the outdoor broadcast?

**KAREN FOLEY:** I was so excited, Angela. It's going to be absolutely brilliant. Great. You're on. Oh! Hi. Welcome to the Student Hub Live. My name's Karen Foley. And for the next four hours, I'm going to be giving you an open day at the OU. Now, we're here outside the Hub, one of the places where we have coffee, or a lot of people are in meetings at the moment. And we're on campus at Walton Hall.

So we thought it would be a really good idea to have an open day to let you have some sort of insight into what it's like at the OU. If you're a new student, we're going to give you lots and lots of information about things that you need to know in your studies. And if you're a current student, we're hoping that you're going to pick up a few tips along the way, meet some of the academic team here at the OU, get an update on what's happening, and also hopefully share some of your advice that you've picked up in your studies.

Now, this session's a bit different today, if you've been to a Student Hub Live event before. We're all about being fun, interactive, inclusive, and it's about developing an academic community. But this time, we're outdoors. And also, we've got a chat box, and we're using social media. So any questions that you've got, we will do our utmost to answer. And if we can't answer them, we'll email you back.

Now, there's a range of ways that you can get in touch with us. As I said, put your questions in the chat box and Sophie, who is on our Hot Desk here on our set, will be able to answer your questions. I will also put them to our panel. You can see I've got Matt and Georgina ready to go here on our stage. Now, we've also got a hashtag, which is #studenthublive17.

So if there's anything you want to know on Twitter, just send us a tweet, and we'll pick that up and put that to our panel of guests. So I'm hoping that we are going to reassure you and inspire you and tell you lots and lots of useful things you need to know.

So Sophie, who's in the chat room right now, and how is everyone doing today?

**SOPHIE:** Yes. It's quite a few of us in. And so we've got Stuart, Devin, we've got Libby. We've also got a few newbies in, which is great news. Some people here were looking to start studying, so

hopefully this will keep you a nice insight into what we're doing. Any questions? Like you said, just let us know. Put them in the chat for us. Or you can tweet us at @StudentHubLive, and we will sort those out for you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Lovely. But you could also talk about other things. Common topics for discussion at Student Hub Live events are biscuits, cake, the internet-- which we've got, which will hopefully work outside today-- and anything you want to talk about goes. As long as it's nice and friendly and supportive, we don't mind. So please do talk to each other and say hello for those of you who know each other already.

So our first session, I've got Matt and Georgina. Thank you for coming along to our new studio! Matt and Georgina are two of my favourite people at Student Hub Live, because- well, Matt has been the chair of DD102, which is the Introducing the Social Sciences module, which is a Level 1 module if you're doing social sciences. And Georgina used to do that, and is now doing a the director of teaching role at the OU.

But you two know an awful lot about what new students might be experiencing and have some tips for study. So this is the first session, and what we're going to talk about is, what happens, what do you get in your box when you get it, if you get a box indeed, and what should you do with this? So Matt, you've got some bits along, haven't you?

**MATT:** I have. The first thing I would say, obviously we're from the social sciences-- Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, FASS. Now, depending upon which module students are going to be studying, they're going to get different things. So social sciences, we've got blended tuition, so students get some materials that are paper-based, and we have some online study. Science, for example, they're mainly online. I think that's a strength, in that as a student progresses through their degree, they'll do lots of different things and experience studying different ways.

But when you get a mailing in FASS, if you're doing DD102, you'll get a Read Me First, which is a good introduction, which Georgina did a couple of years ago.

**GEORGINA:** Excellent.

**MATT:** A good introduction. And we would say, read that first, because it's a shorthand set of tips. Everything you want to do and need to do for the course. How to log on, and how to navigate your way around the materials. So that's always a good thing. And lots of other courses have these as well. I'm working on a course called U116, which is The Environment Level 1, and

they're doing something similar. So lots of different courses have these Read Me First guides.

And then you get, obviously, module materials. And these can be online, or these can be quite chunky books. I've got a couple there. And sometimes you will get an assignment booklet in paper as well, although sometimes these are online as well. And so a variety of different things.

**KAREN FOLEY:** For some people-- I was talking to some of my friends who are at brick universities, and they would say, well, what's it like to study at the OU? How would you communicate what the experience is all about?

**GEORGINA:** Gosh, that's a difficult one, I think. I think the first point to go back to is what Mat said about it being blended tuition. Because we recognise that everybody learns in a different way. Some people like reading. Some people like working online. Some people like online activities or learning from video or audio. So there's a real mixture of different ways in which you can learn, and you'll find your strengths as you go through that.

I think the second thing to say is that many students will feel that this is quite a lonely experience at times. When you get your box of materials, it's really exciting. And then you log onto the website, and that's exciting too, and then you think, oh gosh, what do I do now? And you can feel quite alone.

But the important thing to realise is that you're not. It might feel like that at the start, but you're really not, because you have a tutor to support you, and you also have other students who may be studying all around the country, even in different countries. And they will also be part of your community, too, and you can communicate with those students in a whole variety of different ways.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So when people get things-- I mean some of our students will have registered already. Some are yet to register for our start date. We've got two big start dates, really, and the one we're building up to now is the end of September. And then some students will start in February. So we've got students doing different things at different times.

But right now, some of the organised ones may have enrolled. They may be getting materials. They may come just before the module. What's the process, then, in terms of the here and now, that might happen for students who have already registered?

**MATT:** Normally, students will get a paper mailing. Obviously, that depends on the particular module. They would normally get a paper mailing about a month before the module starts. Five, six weeks, a month before. And then module websites normally open about three to four weeks before. And so they can start going on to the website.

But for now, some module teams have forums open. Some module teams send out emails. We'll shortly send some emails out to people saying, if you're starting to study in October, these are some of the things you could do. And so we are going to be doing that over the next few weeks just to keep students interested. We suggested some light reading, maybe look at, say, BBCI, *The Guardian*, *Telegraph*, look at some news sites just to get a sense of what kind of issues and topics are out there that social scientists are interested in. And other module teams will be doing similar things, too.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And a big hello to Sophia, who's just about to do DD102 in the [? side. ?]

[LAUGHTER]

So some students might be getting organised. But what about students who maybe haven't heard anything? Should they be worried? Should they be doing anything, or does it all really kick off right at the end of September?

**MATT:** I mean, I would say, enjoy the summer to be honest, because there will be plenty of work to do. I mean, OU study is hard but incredibly satisfying. Being a student is hard work, but it's fun as well. And so getting ready.

Preparing your home environment, I guess, as well. So starting to think about, well, how do I fit study around the kids, or work, or caring responsibilities? Or for some people who are particularly busy, all three. So starting to think about that, and starting to think about, well, when will I study? Will it be afternoons? Will it be mornings? Will it be the evenings, after people have gone to bed?

And so starting to prepare. Getting ready mentally and logistically, as it were, for study.

**GEORGINA:** And some students like to get ahead, so once they get their materials, some students like to read the first couple of chapters, perhaps. Once the module website's open, which is usually three weeks beforehand, some students like to do the introductory materials on that. And what students can also do, as well, is to go into the OU website and look at skills for OU study. And they're these things that they can do to brush up there.

But I think my advice would be to, as Matt says, to enjoy the summer, because you really do have time to do your studies as you go along. And there is a bit of a danger, sometimes, in getting too far ahead, because you can hit a roadblock and say, oh gosh, I don't understand that, and then panic. And of course, you're not supposed to understand week 4 when we haven't even started yet.

So we designed the modules so that they proceed in a quite gradual step-by-step way. And it's important to try and do them that step-by-step way and not get too far ahead of yourself, because that can be quite overwhelming and offputting, I think, for students.

**KAREN FOLEY:** No, absolutely. It's not Pimm's, Stuart. Maybe after 12, I've been told.

So you mentioned, then, that people are getting stuff, and there's a study planner going on. And you shouldn't get too far ahead, and you chill out. But what does the study planner look like, and how should one do it? Because I'll be honest. I mean, I started studying the OU a long, long time ago and still am now. I can't give it up. But I wasn't keen on the study planner and ticking things off. And I know a lot of people live by the study planner and love ticking things off, and I guess it depends on how you work.

But why is it so critical in terms of knowing what you've got to do? Because some students might be forgiven for thinking, well, I've just got to read those two books and maybe get my assignment. But you've mentioned a lot of stuff on this virtual learning environment that's important. And I'm guessing that the order is relatively important, although probably not essential, in terms of layering the studies and maybe watching a video, et cetera. How does that study work, and what's the variety of activities that students might then want to attend to their week's worth of studying?

**GEORGINA:** Well, if I say something about why we do it in this blended way, and that might help, if I kind of give an example. If you're reading in the chapters something about social class, which is a great social science concept-- when you're reading it, you might be struggling and think, oh my goodness me. Mark said something about this, and then Durkheim said something about this. Oh gosh, I really don't know what "class" means, because it's a complex concept.

So you put the chapter to one side, and then you might go on the website and then you'll find that there's a video that tells you something about class. And then you might listen to an audio that also tells you something else about class. And then you might think, OK, I'll go back to the

chapter. And then things will begin to fall into place, and you'll suddenly see that OK, yeah, I do understand where that's getting about. So the different kind of materials that you have work together, reinforce each other, so that those difficulties in understanding that you might come across are helped by doing other, different types of activities.

But in terms of the study planner itself, you want me to answer that? It's generally the central column down the module website. What we have here is the 16J website. And for students starting 17J, you will have something that looks a bit different-- and, may I say, better. But it's more or less the same principle.

And what you're looking at is that central column down the middle. And basically, as a new student, just click on the first there. It says Module Introduction. And start clicking through, step by step. Don't worry if you're a bit of a technophobe. You can't break anything. Just keep clicking, and when you want to go back, just press the Back button. Nothing's going to happen. You're not going to ruin it for the students or alter the materials in any way.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And these texts that you get. Will your tutor know, then, if you've done the text and done the readings? That has a monitor if you're up to date?

**GEORGINA:** No, don't worry. The main thing on here is when you're doing activities and you might be asked to write down your thoughts in a box, something like that, or take notes on something, your tutor can't see it at all. So you can write whatever you want. No one's going to be looking in on you. And that's really important to say that.

However, if you want, you could ask your tutor and say, actually, I've struggled with this activity. Do you mind if I just send you my answers and check that I'm on the right lines? And that's OK to do that as well. But generally speaking, your tutor doesn't know what on earth you're doing on the module website. It's your space.

**MATT:** I mean, I would say as well, the way we present these materials and the way they're blended together-- module teams spent quite a lot of time thinking about the order in which they should be studied. I think it's really important, how they link with each other.

And so it's a good discipline, as it were, to try to follow the study planner reasonably closely.

**GEORGINA:** I think so, especially at the beginning. If you're a new student, and you're maybe a bit lacking in confidence, you haven't studied for a while, it's a good idea to follow the order and go

through step by step. But what you'll find as you're gaining confidence that you realise, actually, I can miss that activity. I'm a bit short of time. I've understood it, so I'll just move on. And you learn those little tricks as you grow in confidence.

But at the start, play safe and follow of the order that we've set down.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Now, in terms of checks and things, some of the things like watching a video-- I mean, that's a nice thing to do. You might even be forgiven for thinking you're not really studying if you're watching a nice video or an audio. The books, may be a bit more highlighting involved and note-taking, et cetera. What would you say to students in terms of how they might manage their time in terms of selecting these materials, maybe appropriate times in their schedules?

**GEORGINA:** I mean, again, I think if you can, follow the order. As Matt said, we've put a lot of time and effort into thinking about what is the best order to study. But then think about your time. If you know you have a two-hour commute, and you're sat on the train every day, then that is a really good time to take the book and sit there and do that hard reading of a chapter, because you need quite a concentrated period of time to do that. If you know you've got just five or 10 minutes, if you've got a mobile device with you, you can click on one of the activities and do that.

DD102's quite good in that sense. On the module website, there's a document called "Planning Your Time on DD102." And that tells you exactly what kind of time frame you need for each activity. So that's a really good way of planning your week. And have a look. See where you have your spare time, and see what you can fit into each of those slots. Because even with 15 minutes, you can generally do something. You're not going to read a chapter, but you can do something in that 15 minutes.

**MATT:** It's interesting, because the OU's got a big campaign, I know. Lots and lots and lots of commuter trains have got the adverts on them, actually. And I think you're talking about the OU commute to work, actually. And that's a useful time. If you've got an e-reader, or you've got the book, you can do some tangible work there. Fantastic. And lots of people commute on the bus or something. There are lots of moments when you can take a certain amount of time and just, say, do 20 minutes on this, 20 minutes on that.

**GEORGINA:** And a book is a great mobile device.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Absolutely. Absolutely. And in fact, you can download the PDFs as well, can't you, if you're

going on holiday and feel like you can't quite leave your study at home, that you might just pick it up.

**MATT:** You've got to have flexibility. That's correct.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So tell us, then, about some of your advice in terms of finding assessment and the other things. Would you say it's a good idea for students to locate some of those? Because sometimes you'll get a nice booklet. At some times it will be on the virtual learning environment.

Is it worthwhile, finding out when your TMAs are due and what they're on, so that you can focus things, or should you wait till the week that it's due on the study planner?

**GEORGINA:** No, I think one of the first things you need to do when you start planning your study is to work out when you have to hand in the TMAs. That doesn't mean start to do them, because obviously you need to do the studying, you need your tutor's support and help.

But you do need to know when the hand-in dates are. Because you might find that you've got a holiday coming up that clashes with that, or you might find that you know that's definitely a busy time of work, so you're going to have to work around that. And if you can let your tutor know with good time that this is going to be a problem for you, then they can renegotiate that submission date. So it really is important.

And you need to let your family know as well. Let your family, let your friends know that actually, I've got these dates coming up, and they're really important to me. And see what they can do to help to support you, because it's not just you who's studying with the OU. Your family and friends, whether they like it or not, are going to be involved, and are going to have to try and support you in doing it.

**MATT:** That's a really good point. I mean, the three, four weeks before module starts, that's that orientation time. You just got your materials, and the module website's opened, and you can start to get a sense of how things fit together, and you can start putting the dates on your calendar, make sure you know what they are. Getting ready.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I will have lots of Student Hub Live events during that run-up to module start, probably with Matt and Georgina as well, again, so we'll be guiding you all through that.

Now, our next session, we're going to be talking about tutorials and using your tutor and



studying more generally. So I just wanted to wrap up by asking about forums and activities. Because we've talked about how your tutor won't know what you've written in your activities and things. But one place they might see things is on the forums, which people will find.

And Matt, you mentioned sometimes there are welcome forums, and sometimes there are various forums that for some students, they can think, filling something like this in, I'm acting out my identity in a way, and I'm trying to be like a student now. And how do I be a student? What advice would you give to people in terms of maybe putting questions on there or engaging with other people on those forums?

**MATT:**

I would say I think it's really important that students' forum-- the activities that students will do on forums comes in two forms. One that will be assessed, and one that will be more social, content-based. The questions they just want to ask, basically.

But what I would say is for a student to engage as much as possible with the different things and different forms of social media. So going to tutorials, face-to-face ones, using Adobe Connect, which will be online, and using forums as well to immerse yourself as much as possible.

And don't be scared about the forums. I think that's a big thing.

**GEORGINA:**

I was going to say, I think a lot of students struggle with the fact-- we all use Facebook, things like that, and they think, OK, great, it's another forum. It looks quite different to Facebook, so that takes some getting used to. And I think it feels different, because you know a tutor will be there. And I think many students, especially at the start, think, oh, I don't put something on there, because it will be there then. It'll sit there, and I'll have said something really stupid.

Try and get over that. I know it's really hard, but really, your tutor and other students really benefit from any question that you ask or any input that you put in. It's like anything. The more you put in, the more you get out. And it really helps if you're brave enough to start off the conversation sometimes, because there really is no question that is too stupid. And if you get over that, I think you can get an awful lot out of the forums. But I know it feels different, because it's not Facebook. It's more of an academic forum, even if there is social chat within that too.

**MATT:**

A lot of students are always tempted to go onto their-- I'm going to say Facebook. Now, that's interesting, because it's social, and I get that. But actually, where are you going to get more

out of things? And I would actually say, probably the OU forums, to be honest. Because you've got a tutor there. Normally in a cluster, you've got more than one tutor, actually, with a lot of background and expertise. And they're there to help you. They really are.

**GEORGINA:** And it's another way in which you can overcome some of the isolation that you do feel when you're studying on your own. It's a connection to other students, other tutors, who are all going through the same problems as you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Thank you. We're going to pick that up with George in our next session. So Georgina and Matt, thank you so much for coming along, and we'll look forward to seeing you again in September to engage with our students for the module start. Thank you.

**MATT:** Good luck to everybody.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, I hope you found that session useful and interesting. In our next session, we're going to pick up on what it's like to study with the OU. We're going to talk about tutorials, your tutor, and creating that space that Matt and Georgina have been talking about.

But first, we're going to show you lots of videos around the campus, because I've gone and interviewed Dan Weinbren. He's written this brilliant book all about the history of the OU. And the first video we're going to show you is when he told me about Walton Hall, which is the centre of the OU. And it's just over there.

[MUSIC PLAYING]