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**KAREN FOLEY:** And as we're sitting here in the Jennie Lee Building at the Open University, now we've talked a lot about the buildings, but I wonder if we could talk about the name. Why is the Open University called the Open University?

**LIZ MARR:** Well, that's a very good question, Karen, not least because when it was first thought of, it was actually called the University of the Air because Harold Wilson, who was the brains behind it really, thought that we could be using technology to broadcast the learning opportunities to more people. It became the Open University largely to reflect its mission, which is to be open to people, to places, to methods and ideas.

And just in short, that means that anybody can come and study with us. They can study from anywhere. We're not afraid to try new ways of doing things. And we're always interested in the ideas that people bring. So open in every sense of the word really.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So what are the implications then of being that open? I mean, can really anybody study?

**LIZ MARR:** Yes. I say that with a slight hesitation. And we are open to anybody who wants to undertake a course in higher education. We have lots of free stuff of course that people can take whatever their situation.

But if you wanted to sign up for a degree with us, you don't need to have the traditional a-level entry qualifications or other entry qualifications that most other universities require. And that's because we've done a lot in terms of developing our curriculum to really scaffold learning for people who've come with not necessarily the same background as others who go into the more mainstream universities.

Many of our students are adults. So they are compensated to a great extent for that lack of a-level qualification by their experience in the workplace or by life experience. And they a lot to bring to what we have to offer.

This like caveat was that some of our courses obviously do have some prerequisites. So if you want to study social work, for example, there are some requirements that are laid down by the professional body that we have to adhere to. But in the main, anything that we offer is

available for anybody to sign up for.

We do know they that there are some students who may be lack of confidence, just don't believe that they can do it. You know, they see other people go to university and think you know, it's not for the likes of me. I can't do it. And they lack confidence.

But really, that is just a confidence thing. It's not that they lack the ability. So what we suggest to those students is that they go and take an access course. So they access modules-- there are three of them, as you know, Karen-- one around science, technology, engineering, and math. One in arts and languages. And another in kind of social sciences, psychology, working with children, that kind of thing.

And each of those modules can be undertaken to help a learner develop the study skills that they need. And it really helps them to get into the way of working as an Open University student and really becoming part of the Open University community with less risk, if you like, than having to fork out or having to draw down on a student loan.

And we do have a very generous fee waiver and fee support system for students coming from poorer backgrounds who really would like the opportunity but are put off by the thought of taking out a loan, particularly when they don't know if they're actually ready for it or not. So we do encourage people who have been out of education for a long time or who have maybe some concerns about their abilities to succeed to think about taking the access route.

But actually, many, many students go straight onto our level one modules, and they succeed. They do really well because of the way the courses are designed.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Now, Liz, I know that you've done a lot of work in widening participation, this whole idea that anybody from any sort of background, people who haven't maybe succeeded at school at all. So maybe people who have sort of that idea that they can't actually achieve. And you're saying that anybody can.

But you've learned a lot about those types of people who do succeed, even though they may have not had very good grades at school. What is it about them that makes them sort of succeed and go on? What would you say to those people in terms of enhancing something to get them through this?

**LIZ MARR:** I think that people generally they want to do it. There's something, there's some life event or something that's said to them, I need to do something to change what's happening in my life,

in my world. And I want to do something about it. And quite often people think about going on to do some additional studying or getting a qualification to really make that difference to their career prospects or even just to enhance their own life experience.

And I think that that is part of the journey. So you might be absolutely terrified, and you might think I'm never going to be able to do this. But there's a little bit of you that says actually I want it. It's something that I want to do and something that I think I can do.

I've been reading some quotes for students recently over the weekend talking about I want this so much. I really, really want it. And yeah, it was so hard at first. I'm still finding it hard, but because I want it, I'm going to keep trying. And I get lots of support and lots of help from my tutor. You know? So those kinds of things.

So I think the message is you're never alone in the Open University. There are always lots of other people like you who are experiencing the same things. Don't always say so, but they are. And there's always lots of help and incredible understanding from tutors and from our support staff about what students are going through.

And particularly, those who come from a standing start with no higher education experience and very low prior education qualifications. We do have some students who don't have any qualifications at all.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And you've seen some wonderful success stories I know in your time proceeding at graduations. Can you just tell us very briefly about one of those?

**LIZ MARR:** Actually, I'm going to cheat, and I'm going to do two. OK? So one was a lady that I met. She won an adult learner award in Wales. And she was working in a bakery. And she was a cleaner in the bakery. So she used to go in early every morning and do the cleaning.

And she decided that she wanted to study. She wanted to try and improve her opportunities. So she started an access course. And all the other people in her workplace would say to her, well, why are you bothering to do that? You don't need to do that.

And she said, but I'm doing it because I can. And I thought that was an really, really important message. I'm doing it because I can. And she did really well. And then she went on, carried on after that. Because it's not necessarily about getting the degree at the end of the day. It's actually about the difference it makes to you in your own experience and at any particular

point in time.

So it might be that that was enough for her. As it was, she went on and she did more. But it could be that you just want a certificate or a diploma or even just some credit or just some training in a particular new area that you're working in.

The other example is-- and there are lots like this, but I'm just picking this one out-- is a woman who was a classroom assistant. And she wanted to be a teacher. And she started studying with the Open University. And she's now headmistress. So she's gone from classroom assistant to headmistress. And the Open University has helped her do that. There are loads and loads of other examples, but those are two that stick out for me.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Liz Marr, thank you very much.

**LIZ MARR:** OK.

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