

KAREN FOLEY: Good evening, and welcome back to *The Student Hub Live*. In this session, we take a look at the Open Programme and flexibility. And we'd like to know, are you on the Open Programme? There's only two answers there. You can't be unsure about this. You will certainly know by the end of this session whether or not you are. But tell us right now, yes or no. Which level are you studying? Level 1, 2, 3 or postgraduate? And which subject are you studying?

Now, we couldn't put all of the subjects on here, so there are a couple of choices, which we realise are not exhaustive. But we're limited to five things in these multi-choice questions. So you might want to write in the chat what you're studying and what level. You might want to write the code of the module, or you might want to say broadly what it is. I could never remember the codes of my modules. So pop in the chat what you're studying and maybe how you're feeling about that as well.

And to discuss the Open Programme is Peter Taylor, who is the head, the programme director, aren't you?

PETER TAYLOR: I'm programme director of the Open Programme, yes.

KAREN FOLEY: Wonderful job title.

PETER TAYLOR: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: So Peter, can you tell us what the programme is and how popular it is?

PETER TAYLOR: OK. Well, the Open Programme is different to the named degrees in that you're allowed to kind of choose from a whole range of different subjects. It's a bespoke degree. You put together the subjects that you want to study to create your own degree. So in fact, it was the very first degree that the University offered back in 1970, and it wasn't until the kind of Johnny-come-lately named degrees appeared in the early 2000s that people moved away from just studying the Open degree because many students were concerned that the Open degree in itself didn't have a name associated with it. So employers were looking at the degree and saying, well, what is this degree?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

PETER TAYLOR: So one of the issues that we have is around helping students explain to employers what the Open degree is. And it enables you, as I said, to study a range of subjects. So it's about being able to study more than one subject in depth and therefore showing flexibility-- so be able to do a combination of, say, physics and music, or French and philosophy.

KAREN FOLEY: And rather ironically, since this was the start of the degree programme at the Open University, interdisciplinarity is now so hot. We're looking for these connections everywhere. And being able to use skills from one discipline to another is very, very marketable.

PETER TAYLOR: Indeed. I mean, if you look at the number of jobs there that aren't actually coming and asking for specific discipline, they're just wanting those graduate skills. And for someone to be able to say, well, I've done this bit of training-- I've done some computing, or I've done some languages, as well as other things-- then it offers a wide range of skills for potential employers.

And in fact, about 20% of students at the Open University study on the Open Programme.

KAREN FOLEY: Wow. So it's very, very it is big cohort of students.

PETER TAYLOR: It is. Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Do they all go out and say, right, I get this whole idea. I'm going to go and do an Open degree, and therefore I'm going to do a bit of language, a bit of chemistry, and maybe a little bit of maths along the way?

PETER TAYLOR: It's a whole range of reasons why people choose to do an Open degree. Some clearly have a particular occupation in mind, and that occupation means that they don't want to study just one area, but they may want to study. So if they have a business which is associated with sound medical devices abroad, then having a bit of languages would be useful, having a bit of science would be useful, having a bit of business study would be useful. So to be able to put that combination that matches the needs of their vocation, I think, is important.

Other people are just interested in more than one subject and kind of feel, well, actually, I don't want to be limited to just studying psychology, but I'd like to do more. And there are other people who are genuinely on a journey. They're not sure where they're going to end up, but they start by studying a number of subjects and then start to choose the ones that really interest them.

And the other thing is that, actually, a number of people who may start on a named degree,

but actually, along their journey, they may change direction. So they may actually, either within their own company where they're working or moving to another company, the change of job may need them to kind of study a different subject or whatever.

KAREN FOLEY: What about students? We've had a lot of level 1 students, Peter, today who are just starting out, and they're going to be often studying modules that have a range of disciplines.

PETER TAYLOR: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: So often at level 1, we give students a taster of the various aspects that they may specialise in a little bit later down their degree. Now, sometimes, they might think-- you picked up psychology-- they might think, I really want to do psychology. But actually, they'll think, actually, politics isn't quite as boring as I initially suspected.

PETER TAYLOR: Yep. Exactly.

KAREN FOLEY: And so they might then change their mind. So when do students need to start making decisions about what degree they're on? Especially because, right now, we ask students to sort of name their degree for the funding. So we sort of say, hey, do this degree. Pick it. But can they change their minds as they're going through?

PETER TAYLOR: Yes. So I think, as people are studying, because this is a whole new experience for many, then they're finding out and deciding, actually, maybe this subject wasn't as interesting as I thought it was. But actually, I've then studied this, which is really exciting me. So you can change. And you can do that at any point within your study. You can change the qualification. So we have a number of students who migrate from named degrees into the Open Programme-- and similarly, students who migrate from the Open Programme into named degrees.

It's about making sure, for named degrees, that you've got the right set of modules that match the requirements. But for the Open Programme, the only requirement is that you do 120 credits at level 1, 120 credits at level 2, 120 credits at level 3. Then, really, the world is your oyster in terms of choosing subjects. But there are a few modules where there are prerequisites, so you need to have studied a particular other module before you can take that module. And there's also advice, would you really jump in and do third-level quantum physics--

KAREN FOLEY: No.

[LAUGHTER]

PETER TAYLOR: Having done no mathematics or whatever before? So there are some kind of sensible decisions around this about what's achievable. But our students come with a whole range of different skills and backgrounds, so they may already have quite a lot of experience in a particular subject. So to be able to jump in at level 2 and level 3 in a particular-- say, people might have quite a lot of French skills, but they want to do some other subjects and then do a higher-level, level 2, level 3 French course.

KAREN FOLEY: So it's about being appropriately skilled for the area of study depending on your prior knowledge or, perhaps, it's taught knowledge that you've learned throughout the degree programme.

Let's take a quick trip to the Hot Desk because I know there's a lot of chat, probably not about what we're talking about, though, Peter. HJ, what are you doing?

HJ: Well, actually, we are quite focused today, which is a surprise.

KAREN FOLEY: Must be all the bananas and healthy fruit.

HJ: Yes. We're on track. That sports session really did wonders for us.

KAREN FOLEY: And power naps.

HJ: And power naps, yes.

[LAUGHTER]

I'm going to avoid talking about power naps too much. But Ruth says, very excited to be on an Open degree because it allows me to combine exactly what I want to study. And Colin said, as Peter was saying, I changed onto to an Open degree when my life plan took a bit of a swerve and getting a degree became about keeping my brain active rather than just finding a career. And Sarah is in third year now doing sciences, so not long left to go, which is really exciting.

And Georgina's doing an Open degree, studying child psychology and education module, so she's been able to focus it quite a bit. And she's chosen modules without exams as she's got a terrible memory. So it still means I can get a degree at my age-- I struggle at my age to exam-- my memory is not that good. I like doing the projects. And Ruth says, part of the reason I'm doing an Open degree is because I can transfer my diverse range of credits as well. And she'd love to combine her studies into a project or dissertation at the end. So usually, they're quite

flexible with the titles. I found that. And I got to put quite a lot of different things I picked up in my one, so I'm sure she'll be able to do that.

KAREN FOLEY: Wonderful. And well done, Georgina. You're four of six, getting there. Peter often comes along and talks about assessment as well, don't you, with your other assessment hat on, Peter? So we've heard about exams and various things like that. They're not as scary, or are they?

PETER TAYLOR: They're not. But some students do make decisions, they look at what the courses are about and the assessment strategy and choosing accordingly. I think the key thing is it really is up to the student to choose what. And I often say that Open Programme students, they're brave learners. Because when you take a named degree, you're following a set pattern and things are flowing from one module to the next to the next to the next. And it's a pretty well-trodden pathway.

KAREN FOLEY: Often with similar groups of students, and sometimes even similar tutors. I know in Wales we've got some groups, and I've some students I'm with on their fourth year as they're sort of developing in their psychology degree. And I really like that because I can sort of get to know students.

But for some students on the Open Programme, they might not have that, but then they get the benefit of having all of this other experience from all those other students. So tell us about community and the Open Programme because it's not just the sense that you're sort of taking one module. You do actually do a lot to bring students together.

PETER TAYLOR: Well, I think one of the important things is around students are studying a module, and they often have a module focus. But what we're trying to do is to create much more of a qualification focus, much more of a qualification community, and getting people thinking and helping each other in terms of module choice, in terms of some of the challenges of interdisciplinary study but also some of the benefits of interdisciplinary study. So it's about bringing those students together and letting them support each other.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, you've brought some websites along.

PETER TAYLOR: I have.

KAREN FOLEY: And *The Student Hub Live* way of doing websites, let's take a look at some of the new things that you've been designing for students.

PETER TAYLOR: So this is the new qualification website. It's literally only opened a week or so back.

KAREN FOLEY: I can see upcoming events. *Student Hub Live*. Nice work, Peter.

PETER TAYLOR: Indeed.

KAREN FOLEY: Phew, he says.

[LAUGHTER]

PETER TAYLOR: But there are kind of five areas on it. So there's some news and, as you said, upcoming events. Here, there's your modules, modules you're studying or previous modules that you've studied. There's some stuff here around free learning.

KAREN FOLEY: Don't get them started on that, Peter.

PETER TAYLOR: Here, there is a dashboard where you can put links et cetera that you want to do to personalise it yourself. And down here, we've got our social media, the Facebook page and the Twitter account of the Open Programme. And across the top here, there are various other pages which are quite key. So there's Connect, Discover, Skills, Plan, and Succeed.

KAREN FOLEY: That sounds like a marketing strap line, Peter.

PETER TAYLOR: It is. I'm really playing into your-- this is the Connect notice. On our Connect, you have *Student Hub Live* again.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. You've been doing very well, Peter. You can come back.

[LAUGHTER]

PETER TAYLOR: So here we have a forum where students can actually exchange ideas with themselves. It's still an academic form. It's not personal chat forum, but it would enable students to chat to each other about how it feels to be an interdisciplinary student, but also maybe about what kind of modules are good for doing this or modules for doing that.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, these qualification sites are a really nice space because, as you say, students are on modules. And sometimes you can be on a module, and then you're not on a module. You're on holiday over the summer or whatever sort of path you're on. The qualification sites are a really nice way to collate some of that passion about whatever it is you're studying and to be able to get a sense of things. And just from looking at what you've got on here, there was a

wide range. It's great that people can personalise that dashboard so that they can get contact with what applies to them. Does that then hook into all the other qualification websites because we've been revamping some of those?

PETER TAYLOR: So we are. This is kind of the new website format. And the Open Programme, being one of the largest-- it is the largest-- in the university, wanted to be one of the first to go with it because in many ways it's harder to bring our students together. And therefore, having something like this is important.

KAREN FOLEY: So we've been talking about getting your study calendar and your module website, but also check out your qualification website, whether you're on the Open Programme or you've got access to another qualification that you're studying. They're a great place to connect your news and to fill those gaps between studying as well.

PETER TAYLOR: Yep. And that should be available on the StudentHome site.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely.

PETER TAYLOR: Should I show you the next one?

KAREN FOLEY: Yep.

PETER TAYLOR: So this is about discovering. So there's news and events, some discussion about the qualification. So here, there's some materials around what it means to be a multidisciplinary student, what kinds of challenges, what are the benefits of studying. And the website has a range of videos. Here is a video which was from another *Student Hub Live* event talking about interdisciplinarity.

[LAUGHTER]

See, I'm playing into your--

KAREN FOLEY: You are. You're wonderful, Peter. And a case study.

PETER TAYLOR: And a case study about a particular student talking about the choices that they made in terms of particular subjects. So there's a lot of areas where you can discover and help decide what particular subjects you want to study because there's some advisory routes. So one of the things we've created are these half degrees. These are 60 credits at level 1, 60 credits at level 2, 60 credits at level 3 in particular subjects. So if someone says, well actually, I want to study

some history, but I also want to study some computing, I can pull all those together and create my own degree.

KAREN FOLEY: Fantastic idea because, so often within the named qualifications, you get an optional module and a core model. So you could take advantage of doing the core modules, but with different options-- say, for example, if you were really interested in counselling and psychology but you didn't actually want to get a psychology qualification.

So this is great. And there's some stuff here on interdisciplinary learning and the benefits of studying in that way. Can you briefly tell us, then, why this is so hot right now in terms of employability? Because employers are looking for these skills, and I think Open Programme students are a lot better at articulating some of those skills that I've taken from one area to another.

PETER TAYLOR: Studying in a particular named degree is great if you're going to study in that one area. So I trained as a chemist. I'm a chemist. And working in a chemistry laboratory, teaching chemistry, that was a good degree for me to study. But actually, there are a lot more jobs which require you to be a lot more flexible, especially in some of the SMEs, the Small to Medium Enterprises, where you need to do more than just one little thing. You need to kind of be flexible.

So to be able to study a range of different skills to be able to apply to those jobs, I think, is one of the reasons why people think it's a really important area to study.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, we are running out of time. We've got three minutes. I see the next one is on employability skills.

PETER TAYLOR: It's on employability skills.

KAREN FOLEY: And you've highlighted again *The Student Hub Live*. I hope you're not expecting a pay per click, Peter, because this doesn't work with paper versions.

PETER TAYLOR: I have the same jacket on there. Clearly, this is my *Student Hub Live* jacket that I wear.

[LAUGHTER]

But here's about employability. And there's kind of an online tool here that enables you to look at the skills you've developed either within courses or you've brought to it from other areas-- your own employment, et cetera-- and to be able to work out what skills you have, what areas

you need to improve on. So that when you do apply for jobs, you have evidence of all these skills, but you can also explain exactly what kind of Open degree you've done, what subjects you've studied, and how that makes you a suitable candidate for that particular job.

KAREN FOLEY: And we all like a good quiz, and this is a great one actually because sometimes doing quizzes like this can really help you identify what skills you've got and maybe things that you can work on. And you can figure out how to actually work on them. So it's a really useful tool. Excellent.

And next, planning your qualification. So we know that you can get advice from the student support team because we've talked about that today in terms of how educational advisors can give you advice and say things like, if you don't like maths, don't do psychology. But how do people plan their qualifications and stages?

PETER TAYLOR: So really, here's simple planning tool which enables you to bring certain modules into the various stages so you can start to think about how you're going to put your degree together. And, as I said, there are these half degrees where you could use that. Otherwise, it's about contacting your SST.

Hang on a minute. One other important thing to show you.

KAREN FOLEY: There's no *Student Hub Live* on here, Peter.

[LAUGHTER]

PETER TAYLOR: But this is an animation which has got top tips from students. So we polled a number of students about how they chose particular modules and why, and so there's some information there about what students are saying about choosing modules.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Very good advice, as well, to hear from other students. Speaking of which, let's just take a quick trip to the Hot Desk. HJ?

HJ: I think you could help Louise with some advice. She's doing English language and literature, and she's been told that for careers, English side of things may be more useful. But she's a bit confused about what she's going to do at the end. She is enjoying it, but she's worried it would be too late to change what she'd like to do with the qualification. So what would you suggest? Do you have advice or somewhere she should go for more specific advice?

KAREN FOLEY: Especially if she's finding history fascinating.

PETER TAYLOR: Well, I think our Careers Advisory Service is very good. So I think chatting to the Careers Advisory Service, talking about the modules you've done, if you've got some modules that you still need to do, having a chat to them about what choices you have to go into particular types of professions or whatever. So I think that they can provide you with a lot of kind of sensible support.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely.

PETER TAYLOR: And then this one is just another series of case studies. We have this Guess the Graduate game, a guess who where we describe as a set of modules that someone studied and then you have to work out what job did they do from the module study. And here's another bit of *Student Hub Live* there. See?

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent.

[LAUGHTER]

Well, Peter, I must say you do like *The Student Hub Live*. Thank you very much for such excellent prep. And you know, the qualifications website is a great space. Well, there's loads of stuff. You can get quite lost in here, but a nice way to start out before modules start maybe, just getting connected with some of these areas, hearing about other students, and again having those options about planning things.

When is too late, then, if students want to change to or from an Open Programme qualification?

PETER TAYLOR: Well, I don't think it's ever too late. I think you need to think about the modules that you're doing and the modules you're putting together. But at any time, it's possible to change over. You might have studied quite a lot of a named degree but then suddenly think, well actually, I do need to get some expertise in this new area. And it's fine to convert.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, Georgina says that she is really glad we've explained the new website because she's been a little bit lost on it. So that was really good. Well done for finding out as well and navigating, Georgina. That's top marks for you. Excellent.

OK. So there are lots of resources. We've talked about careers. And finally, Peter, what advice would you give students who maybe think, actually, I'm not quite sure about whether or not I am on the right path? Should I change now to an Open degree programme after listening to

you and all your fine *Student Hub Live* stuff on your qualification website, or should I progress? When should they start thinking about their options?

PETER TAYLOR: I think you have to be thinking about where you want to be when you've finished your degree right from the very beginning. Even if it's to do with what are my options, you may actually choose a number of different pathways and say, well, I could do this and this, or I could do this and this. And then, as you kind of study, you'll slowly kind of focus in on one particular pathway. So start thinking about where it is you want to be from the very beginning, but always keep your mind open for changes-- particularly, as I said, because of career changes or interest changes or whatever.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Well, thank you for coming along and filling us in on all of that. HJ, are there any final questions? I think we've covered a lot of things, but I just want to take a quick trip back to you to see if there's anything outstanding.

HJ: I think we have covered everyone. Louise says, thank you so much for the advice. And I would say get in touch with the Careers Service because they're so friendly and so useful. And we've just been talking about our different combinations. So Stephen is a tutor and studying with the OU as well, and he's had some very interesting modules that people put together in interesting combinations. And it's really nice seeing where people go with it, as well, and what they decide to do.

But yeah, great session. And I am aware that some people have some great questions after we finish sessions. So if there's something that you think of after, remember you can always email us, studenthub@open.ac.uk, and we'll get back to you if it's for resources, a question, or you just want to say how great it is.

KAREN FOLEY: Or send us a picture of your study buddy, your desk space, your stationery, or your study stacks.

HJ: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. HJ, thank you very much. Peter, thank you very much.

OK. We're going to have a short break. We're going to give you a little tour of our campus, going to show you the Jennie Lee Building. Then, we're back, and I'm going to be talking with Gemma and Scott about ambitious futures. Stay tuned. We'll see you soon.