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KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to the Student Hub Live. Well, in this session, we're going to talk about registration-- an important process in this whole, very important thing that you must do next now that you've had your module results. I'm joined by Colin Beesley, who is the senior manager of policy and control within academic services at the Open University. Colin, thank you for joining us.

Now, I'm hoping that we can blitz this whole process about registration, because I've been phoning some of my level 1 students, and saying right, great, you've got your results. Now you need to register.

And they're saying, well, why do I need to register? I'm on this qualification. And for some people they can, quite rightly, not really understand the whole implication of the registration process, and what they need to do. So I'm hoping you can fill us all in.

COLIN BEESLEY: Yeah. It's quite a common misunderstanding, actually. It's one that happens across the whole sector, actually. OU study is obviously modular. So once you've completed the first part of your qualification, you then need to decide what it is you want to do next. And the simplest and easiest way to do that is to get in touch with either the student support team, or one of the specialists in the student recruitment support centres, and just have a chat, have a conversation about how you've done previously, what you'd like to do next, what your particular interests are, and get a place reserved on the next module.

KAREN FOLEY: So it's really important, then. A lot of students will wait until they've had their results. And you can see a widget on your screen at home that's about whether you're registered for the next module. And then for our next session, where we're going to be talking about disabilities in a video, there's a question there that you can tell us about your feedback for.

But Colin, a lot of people will say, well, I'm registered on a qualification. They'll have finished the module. And then they need to speak to student services. They might have quite a clear idea. I mean, there might be a limited range of options that they can choose from. So why should they then speak to somebody about the next step? Why is that important?

COLIN BEESLEY: It's just to make sure that you've had all the right advice and guidance about what you're doing

next. Because obviously you're investing a huge amount of time, a huge amount of effort into this study. You want to be completely sure that you're doing the right thing next.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. No, exactly. I know some students have been on a pathway, maybe say I'm interested in an open programme, because there might be a bit of flexibility, when there are so many new models as well coming into play that could be interesting for students to mix it up a bit. Is that quite a common thing for students to do, in terms of their registrations, sort of be on a pathway, and then say maybe I'll change a bit?

COLIN BEESLEY: It's really common, actually. Yeah, the Open Programme's the perfect example. It's got the entire breadth of the entire OU curriculum. And lots of students will do a little bit of this, and then a little bit of that, and chop and change as they go through. That's the kind of the whole purpose of the Open Programme, really. But in order to make sure you're making the right decision, it's really useful to speak to an expert, and make sure you've had a really informed conversation with someone who knows about all the OU stuff, all the OU offerings.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. So even though you are on this qualification, you need to register for the next module. And what happens then?

COLIN BEESLEY: Well, the crucial thing is to go off and make sure that you've got your funding sorted out. We find lots of students will conflate or confuse kind of registering with the OU, and also securing funding. And unfortunately, we don't manage the funding on behalf of students. More often than not, though, they will have to go off elsewhere and secure either a loan or a grant from one of the UK governments. And that can take a little bit of time to get sorted out-- between six to eight weeks. So our recommendation is as soon as you know what it is that you want to do next year, go off and get your funding sorted out, just to make sure that if anything does happen, or anything goes wrong, we can intervene and help support.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. So you've got some of these forms. And like you say, so we handle the registration process. And that's about securing your place on the next module, because there is a limited number, and a certain time period as well, isn't there, in which students can register.

COLIN BEESLEY: There is, yeah. Enrollments-- or enrollments as we call them-- i.e. reserving a place in the module-- that the last date at which a student can do that is kind of early September. So the clock is ticking a little bit now as we get into August. So students really need to kind of pick up the pace, and get on the phone, and make their decisions.

KAREN FOLEY: So they need to get that space, and then they need to sort out the finance. And I guess if they're paying for it, they can do that right towards the end. It just means that you've got a place. But the finance is the most important thing. And you've got lots of forms. And as you say, these are handled by external companies often. So there's a lot of paperwork and things to get right, isn't there?

COLIN BEESLEY: There can be. I mean, I brought the forms on to kind of demonstrate, actually, it's much better to go online. So we have the four major loan funding forms here. So there's a Northern Ireland one, an England, a Wales one, and a Scottish grant form. So it's a similar application process, but actually the funding's non-repayable.

But as you can see, they're pretty chunky documents. I think they're 30 or 40 pages if you're going to do the hard copy process. So what we'd always recommend is actually students go online. And the website's relatively intuitive. And what it will do is it will direct you to the right bits based on your previous question.

So the forms are deliberately difficult, because they have to cover every eventuality. And there are huge sections on residency, so if you have perhaps a complicated immigration status, or residency status, that's why that stuff's there. But for the majority of students it's not applicable. So if you've lived in your particular nation for your entire life, it will skip that stuff and go basically directly through to the relevant bits for you.

KAREN FOLEY: Right. Now we've got one-third of our students who have not yet registered on their next module, which as we say is very understandable. A lot of people are waiting for results, and they do need to go forward and do that now to get a place. But tell me, Colin, these forms, I mean, if they are to some extent complicated, and you have to do this every year, are there any quick fix hacks? Can you save stuff? Is there a way of sort of making this a bit easier for students?

COLIN BEESLEY: I think, really, the online process is probably the best. You can do part of your application, then return to it later. It will flag up errors-- or not quite errors, but things that don't quite make sense to the system as you go through. So if it's not sure about your status, it will say are you sure, and it will kind of direct you to the right bits of guidance.

Whereas obviously the form, the form comes with an associated bit of guidance. And it's 40 or 50 pages. Yeah, we really strongly recommend, if you apply for any kind of support, do it online, because it's always the easiest way.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. Now there are various forms of support that people can get, because these forms are complicated. And you've got people in the office who often provide assistance, and can talk people through things. How does that work?

COLIN BEESLEY: Well, in my particular area in student fees we've got various different teams of specialists. So we have a kind of student loans team. And we have a team that deals specifically with the Northern Ireland finance. We also have a team that deals with the Wales finance as well. Scotland's stuff isn't handled by us in Milton Keynes, but the team up in Edinburgh are absolute experts in that as well. So it should be relatively easy to get hold of someone, and get some advice and assistance.

And if there is an issue with the form, we've actually got very good relationships with the funding authorities now. So we can just pick up the phone, and hopefully unblock it for you.

KAREN FOLEY: And I guess it's very important to have these sorted out in a timely way. What's the deadlines and the process for all of this?

COLIN BEESLEY: Well, the timelines that the funding authorities give us is six to eight weeks. Generally speaking, if there's no issues, it goes through in two or three. But you do see occasionally things going a little bit wrong, particularly where there's income evidence required, or what we referred to previously, slightly complicated kind of residency immigration issues. But we would always recommend apply as soon as possible. Even if you're not totally sure what it is you you're going to do, you can secure the funding, and have it applied to a module a little bit later.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, really? So it's almost the two processes are in tandem, but there is a need to at least get something in there so that at least you've got your options open. And how many students apply for loans? Is it the majority?

COLIN BEESLEY: It's the vast majority in England. It's over 60% use loans in England. It's an increasing proportion in Wales. Scotland don't have loans, yet, but they have this, that the fee grant system, which is really fantastic level of support.

So as time goes on, we're seeing an increasing number of students accessing loans, because by and large they're quite a good product, if you can get through all the sort of stickiness of the application process. You'll only ever pay back a proportion of your loan based on your income. So it's not like a commercial loan, where you have to pay the whole thing back. Lots of

students will find out actually that they never have to pay the whole thing, depending on their circumstances.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. And what are the other options? Could you briefly tell us the other ways that students will arrange funding?

COLIN BEESLEY: So, effectively we have kind of government funded and self funding, as we term them. So students who are self-funding are essentially using their own means to cover the cost of their module fees. A key part of that kind of group of students is OUSBA. So it's a university funded loan, but it's much more similar to a commercial loan than the tuition fee loan. So essentially the student is loaned the amount of their module fee. And the student then pays that module fee back in instalments over the course of the module.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, OK. So it makes it a bit more easy to do on a monthly basis than--

[INTERPOSING VOICES].

COLIN BEESLEY: So if you're in a position where you can pay, afford the instalments, it may well be a preferable option than the tuition fee loan, where if it exists for a longer period of time. Therefore you probably accrue more interest on it.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, brilliant. HJ, have we got a question about EU funding?

HJ: Yes. I think that's a very good question. But Melody says, is there non-UK funding for those of us in the EU?

COLIN BEESLEY: It varies from EU nation to nation, unfortunately. So the best thing to do is to speak to the funding, or the student funding authority in your relevant nation. EU students who are moving to the UK to study, there's is funding available. But obviously we might see that changing in the nearish future.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. Excellent. Now in terms of changing people's minds, then, in terms of the qualifications, what happens between now and the summer? People are going off filling those forms. Then they're going and speaking to their student support team and seeing what options they are going to have to register. What are the timelines for actually making certain, and sort of getting down, and committing to, what you're going to do for the next academic year?

Well, continuing students are in a much better position than brand-new student, because they

already have what we call the CRN, the customer reference number, from their funding authority. So if they've had funding previously, they can actually complete their registration and go through all the legal stuff and make sure they've got their place absolutely locked down before they've got their funding approved for the year. So if you have a CRN, and you have all your details, then give us a call, or go online and complete the registration process, and get everything sorted. And you can then relax until the modules actually start, and have a bit of a summer break.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. No, it's very important, isn't it? Excellent. Thank you, Colin. HJ, are there any other questions and chat going on as well that you'd like to fill us in on?

HJ: Well, there's always lots of great chat. But actually Kate has an interesting point about the new funding for second degrees in STEM subjects, if you could tell us a little bit about that.

COLIN BEESLEY: Yeah, we're quite excited about that. So historically, loans have only been-- well, since 2012 in England-- loans have been restricted to students who don't already have a degree. There was a very small ELQ relaxation, as we're terming it-- it's the equivalent or lower qualification rule-- in 2015.

But this year it's much broader. So we have 24 eligible qualifications. So even if you hold a degree, or even if you hold two or three or four or five degrees, you can still come back and get funding to one of the 24 subjects, one of which is psychology, which I believe is our most popular degree.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, a very good degree as well. Excellent. And I wonder, actually, just because we've got a minute or two, if you could just touch on the postgraduate loans. Because that's another very exciting thing. And also, so many people are undergraduates, and not quite in a position to be doing that, but think, oh, it would be brilliant when I get there that these options are available.

COLIN BEESLEY: Yeah, it's also fantastic news. So historically, postgraduate students have always been expected to find money themselves, whereas this year we've got a postgraduate-- well, it's there's two types of product, actually. There's a tuition-fee loan and a maintenance-type loan.

The tuition fee loan applies in Northern Ireland and Scotland. So that's where the loan is paid directly to the university to cover the cost of the module fees. Whereas the maintenance loan applies in England and Wales. And that's funding paid directly to the students. So those students will still have to find the module fee themselves up front, but can then kind of

reimburse themselves from the loan as they progress.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. HJ, I see we've got some more questions.

HJ: Yes. One question is, is it possible to apply for the part-time fee grant, and pay the remaining balance in instalments?

COLIN BEESLEY: Yes. So there's various different combinations of ways to pay. If the part-time fee grant doesn't cover the cost of the module fee, you could either pay that in full, or you could apply that to a OUSBA loan. There's lots of different options. If it starts to look complicated from a student perspective, I'd suggest giving us a call and just talking it through with an adviser.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. So you're so knowledgeable about all of it. I had no idea how much support there was for students. Because some of these forms, they can look so daunting. And I think so many students aren't aware that they need to complete, fill them in, because it's been quite a new area as well for students.

COLIN BEESLEY: Yeah, the funding seems to change on an annual basis. It used to be one system for kind of all the UK nations, but now they're kind of going off in different directions. So it's a little bit challenging to unpick.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. Are there any areas of the website that you would want to draw people's attention to? Is it best to call, or is it good to--

COLIN BEESLEY: All the information is there online. And assuming that the system will recognise your residency-- so there's different stuff for the different nations-- then all the stuff that applies to you will be made available to you. If it's not clear, or if it's difficult to understand, then yeah, by all means, pick up the phone and give us a call.

KAREN FOLEY: Because it sounds quite personal. It sounds like a lot is based on your circumstances. And also it sounds like there is a lot of flexibility in terms of how you could manage all those payments.

COLIN BEESLEY: Yeah. It would depend on where you've lived, how long you've lived there, what your level of previous study is, and also kind of your financial status. OUSBA might be a better option if you don't want to have this tuition fee loan for longer. It's quite a complicated set of conversations that need to happen.

KAREN FOLEY: I know a lot of students say I'm really going to start doing the OU, and then they'll forget to do

the forms, or this, that, and the other, and forget to arrange their finance. And then we get to the start of the module, and things aren't in place, it could be hugely disappointing for those students who've had the will to do something, but maybe haven't arranged things in the first place. I mean aside from sort of completing these forms early, what advice would you give students about managing that whole process, in terms of committing to study, and then arranging the funding for it? What would you say in terms of thinking about their budgets?

COLIN BEESLEY: This might be a little bit controversial, but I would suggest actually that they don't have too much faith in the funding bodies. I mean, they're massive organisations, and they do a fantastic job within the bounds of what they're trying to do. But don't assume that everything is happening on schedule. If you need to give them a call, and give them a poke, and make sure everything's is tracking OK, then by all means do that.

KAREN FOLEY: Right. OK. Good advice, there. Excellent. Thank you very much, Colin. HJ, just a final few comments from the chat desk before we move on to our next video.

HJ: I think we're really happy with this advice. And we've got some people in the chat posting some links about the information as well, which is fantastic. But I've just posted, and it's always worth remembering that you can contact the OU, and there's always someone at the end that just wants to help you out. So if you go on the student home pages, and there's always that contact button, or just email us, and we'll be happy to help you out to go with studenthub@open.ac.uk.

But a lot of people are saying they loved having you, and it's been really helpful at this stage to hear about the finance. And I'm sure Jane as well, she's just starting in October, and sorting everything out as well. So she's really happy that you've come along and cleared a few things up.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, thank you very much for that, and thank you all for the comments. And if there's anything haven't covered, do feel free, like HJ says, to email us, studenthub@open.ac.uk, and we'll send it to Colin's team, and get back to you with an answer on that. And again, there's plenty of resources and support out there for you. But you must register, and you must do these two things-- get your place on the module, and also sort your funding out so you can start again in October, if indeed that's your next start date.

Colin, thank you so much for coming on and talking about all this. It's been really reassuring, and very, very helpful.

COLIN BEESLEY: Thank you for having me.

KAREN FOLEY: Thank you.

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