

**KAREN FOLEY:** Hello, and welcome to the Student Hub Live. Well, isn't this festive? This is our Christmas special.

I'm Karen Foley, and I'll be hosting this two-hour special session that we're delivering today, with a view to sort of allowing you to celebrate a bit of this festivity around this time of year, and think about some things that OU students may be struggling with, like time management and getting those TMAs done over Christmas and all sorts of things. So, we've got a really great session for you.

Now, the Student Hub Live is a live, interactive, online event. And you'll see some widgets, which are interactive voting tools, that will be appearing on your screen. And we'd like to know where you are, whether you've been to a Student Hub Live event before, which faculty you're studying with, and how you're feeling right now.

Now, you'll get used to these widgets, which will be appearing in each of the sessions as we run the programme today. And it's a really nice way for you to check in and let us know what you're doing. And we tailor the contents accordingly to suit you.

So if, for example, you'd like to select one of the multichoice questions, or pinpoint on the map where you are, or fill in one of our word clouds-- there are three options on the word clouds, by the way, and if you can't think of three, that's fine. Just put a full stop at the end of one and submit those, to send them. But it's a really, really good way to let us know how you're feeling and check in. So, please do complete those now. It's really useful, to get a steer about where you're at.

But that's not the only way that you can interact with us. There's a "Watch and engage!" option on the website. And hopefully most of you are in that. And there you can chat.

Now, HJ and Sophie are behind the chat desk, and Evan is backstage, as well, as are some of the other team, to talk along with you, answer any questions. So, do give us a shout-out if you have any questions that they can help with. And they'll be feeding all of that chat and dialogue back into the studio with our live panel.

If you aren't in the "Watch and engage," do do that, because it's a much nicer experience. And you can also use those widgets there, too. So, if you aren't an OU student, or you aren't in

"Watch and engage," go back to the website-- [studenthublive.kmi.open.ac.uk](http://studenthublive.kmi.open.ac.uk)-- click on the "Watch and engage!" option, and then you can come back in.

And you put your OUCU, your normal student or staff login details in there. And then you can watch and engage with us. And if you aren't a current student-- because everyone is welcome-- you can create an account, which is quick and easy to do.

There's also a Frequently Asked Questions section on the website, if you are stuck. And I hope that you've found the "How to use the [INAUDIBLE] guide" useful, as well, that we've just played before the session. But people will come and drop in and out during this, and that's absolutely fine. There's also a catch-up service available, if you can't stay for the full two hours with us.

So, just feel free to drop in and out as much as you want to. But, most importantly, interact and let us know how you're doing.

We've also got social media. So, we've got a Twitter account, which is being manned, which the hashtag is #studenthublive16. And we've got an email which is also being manned, and that's @studenthublive.

Now, I'd like to introduce our hot desk, Sophie and HJ! What a lovely, festive array you have there. How are you both?

**SOPHIE:** Hi! Very good, thank you. How are you?

**KAREN FOLEY:** I'm good. You're looking absolutely fabulous, in your Christmas jumpers.

**SOPHIE:** [LAUGH]

**HJ:** Oh, thank you!

**SOPHIE:** It's my first time, this year. I've been excited. I've saved my first Christmas-jumper day of the year for today. So I think it's apt! [LAUGH]

**HJ:** Yes. It's the right time of the year. It's not too early.

**SOPHIE:** Definitely.

**HJ:** So, yes.

**SOPHIE:** Definitely. I mean, yours is slightly better than mine. I think you need to--

**HJ:** I wouldn't say that.

**SOPHIE:** I do!

**HJ:** I've got-- I-- this one--

**SOPHIE:** You have a trick up your sleeve.

**HJ:** I have a trick up my sleeve, with this one. I'm very excited about it. So, I've-- [LAUGH] this is probably my favourite jumper of all time. [LAUGH]

**SOPHIE:** Not even Olaf can beat that. [LAUGH]

**HJ:** So, there are loads of people chatting. And I'm really excited to talk to everyone. If you've got a fancy Christmas jumper that you want to send us in, or a picture of your Christmas tree, or--

**SOPHIE:** Festive study buddies--

**HJ:** Festive study buddies.

**SOPHIE:** --have already come in. I do like a festive study buddy.

**HJ:** Oh, that's brilliant.

**SOPHIE:** Study buddy in a hat? Can't go wrong. [LAUGH]

**KAREN FOLEY:** Now, we always like to send things out to people, don't we? So, what have you lined up today, to post back through your lovely mailbox when people send us in these selfies?

**SOPHIE:** Well, we've taken on the time management and the new year. So we have a time planner, here, a Student Hub Live one. It's got some Student Hub Live dates in there.

So, any selfies that you send through, please email them to us. It's [studenthub@open.ac.uk](mailto:studenthub@open.ac.uk), or tweet them to us-- either way. And we will get these out to you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Lovely. Well, thank you very much. And it's great to see some new students here. A lot of you are doing science. And a lot of you are doing level 1. And I'm going to tell you what you have in store over the next two hours.

So, firstly, I have Mathijs Luccasen, from the Department of Health and Social Care. And he is going to be talking about mental health, which is a really common issue at this time of year. And we're going to think about things that we can do to make ourselves feel better and make other people feel better, as well, hopefully, over the festive period and these dark winter months.

Then we have Stefanie Sinclair. She's going to be talking about time management-- again, a really, really topical theme. Christmas is often a time when I think, oh, I've got two weeks off. There's loads I can get done. And then I come to the end of it, and my to-do list isn't looking much happier.

So, we thought about how we could actually factor that in, because a lot of you will have TMAs that are looming in the new year. So, Christmas can be a really good time to catch up and get up to speed with things, but also we can sometimes notice, in particular if you're at level 1, that sometimes TMA 3 can be a little bit harder, if you're on a 60-point module, than maybe TMAs 1 and 2.

So Matt Staples, the chair of DD102, Introduction to the Social Sciences, is going to come and talk to us about how to actually tackle some of those things and also, very importantly, how you can get support over the festive period. And then it wouldn't be Christmas without a discussion of religious festivals and the role that they play in society. And so Paul-Francois Tremlett will join me, and we'll be talking about all of those things, also.

So, we've got a really lovely programme. But let's see how you're feeling. Because we asked you to fill in our wordle, in which there are three choices. You can still fill that in as you're going along. But let's see how everyone's doing right now.

So we've got some lovely things coming up. "Christmassy," "motivated," "busy busy busy," "Christmas," "TMA result," "cake," "sparkly," "ahhh," "pensive," "deadlines," "calm," "glad student hub live is back." That's wonderful. Be interesting to see how many of you have been to an event before. So, if you haven't filled that data in on the widget, do let us know whether you've come to an event before or not.

Now, before we crack on with this fabulous programme, I have some news. OK? So, I'd like to talk about two things first. The first is the NSS, the National Student Survey, which is starting in January.

Now, this is something that over 25,000-- yes, 25,000-- OU students are contacted to take part in this. So it's not something that everyone can do. You're actually contacted.

And it's run by a market-research company, Ipsos MORI. And they basically contact you via email and say, would you like to take part in this? Have either of you two done this, when you were students?

**SOPHIE:** Yes, I've done one.

**HJ:** I've done one, as well.

**SOPHIE:** Oh, there we go! Yeah, I did mine last year. So--

**HJ:** I did mine a bit before that, I think. It was in the middle of my studies.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So, what was it like, though? What happened?

**HJ:** I got sent an email link, saying that I'd been one of the chosen to do the student survey. And the survey just asked a bunch of questions, like, how happy are you with teaching, support, the students' union? And it could ask things whether you're happy on different scales. Or there's some boxes where you can leave some comments, as well.

And, yeah, it was a bit varied. It doesn't take too long, either, which is a good thing.

**SOPHIE:** I was just about to say. You look at it, and you think, oh, gosh, it's going to be really long. But actually, because you get into, it asks you the right questions, and you can get give comments and some feedback. And then it's sort of done with, in 10 minutes. So, yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant. Well, if you get contacted to do it, please do take the time to fill that in. It's also really interesting, when you're studying social sciences and often doing your own research projects, to see what it's like participating in someone else's research, as well. I often find that quite interesting.

But the NSS is really important to us, as a university. And they help us understand what we're doing. And, in fact, events like the Student Hub Live have come directly from some of that feedback, where students said that they wanted more opportunities to explore their interests with other students and academics.

So, please do fill that in. Your feedback really is heard. And be honest. You know, if there are

ideas about ways in which we can improve things, we really, really do want to know.

So, as I've said before, those come to you on an email, and they're through the market-research company Ipsos MORI. So, please do take part in that, if you're asked to.

Now, another thing that you can do is fill in an award, if you think one of your tutors has been outstanding. So, the Open University Students Association are inviting nominations for the outstanding tutor. And this is part of the OU's teaching awards. So, every year, we run these teaching awards. And this one is a chance for students to nominate somebody who they think has been particularly supportive, encouraging in their studies.

Tutors really are important, aren't they, Sophie and HJ? And we're going to be talking to Matt Staples about the important role of the tutor. But sometimes they can seem a little bit removed, both physically, I guess, and emotionally. Have you had a tutor that's done something particularly wonderful, that you might nominate?

**HJ:** Yes. Probably just putting up with me as a student for-- [LAUGH] would be-- someone would be in line for an award for that. But one of my tutors was really brilliant. And I went to one of his tutorials which was a little bit away from me.

And I knew he was travelling on the train back to Cardiff, so I said, oh, do you mind if I join you? And perhaps you could talk through some of my TMAs with me-- see what I could do overall to improve-- perhaps some tips? And he did!

So [LAUGH] I sat on the train with him on the way back to Cardiff. And he kindly went through my TMAs, and we actually went for lunch after. So that was lovely.

**SOPHIE:** Private tutorial!

**HJ:** Yes! [LAUGH]

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant!

**HJ:** So, yes, he was an absolutely brilliant tutor. and his advice really helped me get the score I got overall in that module. So, I was very happy with that, yes.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent.

**SOPHIE:** I had a tutor, actually-- I used to have to handwrite mine, although I was with the OU, because

I did math, or I'm doing maths. So, instead of scanning them in, she actually lived sort of in between where I live now and where my dad lives. So I would drop the off on the way, so I could make sure they were delivered, rather than put them in the post.

And that really helped, actually, just secure the peace of mind that she had it in her hand before the deadline. And there was no postal errors or delays. So that was really nice.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Wonderful. Well, if you have a tutor who you think has gone that extra mile, above and beyond your expectations, then you can write only 300 words to sum up why your tutor's special and how they've gone the extra mile to help you. So, do you feel they've demonstrated excellence in teaching? What's special about maybe the way that your tutor supports you? And also the impact of that behaviour on your work.

So, if you think you'd like to nominate your tutor for that, then send an email with Outstanding Tutor to [ousa@open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa@open.ac.uk). We'll put that link in the Resources page of the website. And we will also put it in the chat box. Now, that is due by the 10th of January. So that could go on your Christmas to-do list, if you feel like nominating somebody for that.

And those are all going to be presented at the OU's birthday, which is Charter Day, which is in April. So, we look forward to hearing you from that. Right. That's all the news. I'm going to welcome my first guest. Mathijs, welcome to the studio. And I'm delighted to see you brought a big sack of presents!

**MATHIJS** I did! I did. I got a special Santa sack.

**LUCCASEN:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Because we're going to be talking about giving, aren't we, as part of mental health? So I think that's is really, really lovely.

**MATHIJS** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**LUCCASEN:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Good! Excellent! So, you have been challenged with the task of, in a very short time, thinking about ways that we can have a positive impact on our mental health around this time of year. Now, by "mental health," we don't necessarily mean mental-health problems, do we? But mental health is something that we all have and that can fluctuate and vary, depending on how we're feeling and what we're doing, as well as maybe whether there are mental-health problems.

We also know that a lot of students will study with the Open University possibly because they may have mental-health problems. And indeed, a lot of our students do have various disabilities, some of which are mental and some of which are physical. That can have a real impact on their studies.

But this session in particular is about irrespective of whether there is a marked mental-health disorder or issue or not. We wanted to think about five ways that we could encourage good well-being over this festive period. And you've given us some ideas. And you've wrapped them up in presents, haven't you?

**MATHIJS**

**LUCCASEN:**

I have. And I guess I just wanted to sort of, on the back of what you were saying about everyone having-- everyone has mental health, you know, like we have our physical health, we all have our mental health. And that fluctuates over time. And I think Christmas can be such an exciting, wonderful, magical time of year for so many people, but it's also an extremely difficult time of year for others.

So, I guess we get sort of bombarded with those images of the perfect family or the sort of right way that Christmas should be done. And that can be quite tricky for a lot of people because they don't have that sort of family experience. And also, I guess, just before I launch into those and what's in the gift bag, is, it's also really hard for those people that have had a bereavement, especially if it's a recent bereavement, because Christmas will be the first time that that someone is missing from the gathering.

So, I think those things mean that-- well, those can be real challenges to mental well-being over the festive period. Yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

I mean, it's one of the times of year that, I think, tends to have higher suicide rates, higher levels of depression. And there can be a lot of loneliness and isolation. And, as you say, we have these constructs. We have these ideas about what perfect Christmas looks like.

There's social media. Everyone's putting their trees up. There's a lot of pressure right now.

And it can be hard if, for whatever reason, you don't feel like colluding with that idea of the norm and being happy, because a lot of people can really struggle with the winter. It's hard to get out and do things. It's hard to meet people. It can be physically very isolating, as well as mentally being isolating.



We've got some widgets on our screen, as well. So, we'd like to know what three things you're most looking forward to giving, this season. We'd also like to know what you find most challenging about this time of year. And we've got a multichoice question there. So you can think about which aspects you find particularly difficult.

Also, there's a scale. So, where on that scale do you feel, in terms of how connected you feel to people you care about, and also how in tune you feel with your immediate environment right now? So, if you can feed those in to us, we'll be incorporating those in some of the discussion that Mathijs and I will have.

So, what's the first thing you'd like to talk about?

**MATHIJS** Well, I couldn't resist. I already had to, like, grab one of the gifts out.

**LUCCASEN:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Get the presents out, yeah.

**MATHIJS** But these sort of five ways that I had come up with, I want to acknowledge that I got those  
**LUCCASEN:** from the Mental Health Foundation in New Zealand. And they'd come up with this way of thinking about wellness and how we can support our own wellness. And then I just-- when we were talking about it, earlier, thinking about how we apply that to Christmas.

And the first one that got us is about taking notice. And that, I guess, is about being mindful and aware of what's happening. And for me, one of those things that really sort of stands out, after maybe the tenth game of Charades, where I'm sort of bombing at that and not doing especially well, getting a little bit frustrated--

**KAREN FOLEY:** [LAUGH]

**MATHIJS** --failing at it, and thinking, OK, I've had enough of the Charades. I then sort of try and think  
**LUCCASEN:** about, like, noticing certain things. And one of the things that sort of melts my heart is seeing my father-in-law and how much he enjoys the family gathering and everyone being together. And I think it's his sort of happy place.

So, even though I'm really rubbish at the Charades, and they can be a bit of a struggle, I sort of try and notice that. Because I think that's really quite a helpful thing to draw my attention to.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah. No, absolutely. It's a difficult one, isn't it? Because I think there's so much

commercialism. There's so much-- I mean, there's a lot of things going on.

People feel pressures to eat. I mean, I know everyone's chatting a lot about food. Can I just thank our team, here, for this wonderful spread that we're going to tuck into, later.

But there is so much going on that can be difficult. And I guess what you're saying is appreciating those things that are meaningful to other people and trying to take happiness from some of those things. Also, being mindful. I mean, being physically present in your body. That's really important.

In relation, I guess, to this idea that we're also going to talk about, about being active, being mindful about your physical environment is important. But why is it more of a challenge at this time of year than others, do you think? Is it the winter? Do you think it's because there's so much going on that's more mental and more spiritual or emotional? You know, people can lose touch, I guess, of how connected they feel.

**MATHIJS**

**LUCCASEN:**

Yeah. Well, the physical one-- it is tricky, because you're not so motivated, I guess, to go outside when it's really cold. And so the weather does play a part in that. So, if it's 2 degrees outside and it's heaving with rain, then you're sort of thinking, mmm, I probably won't do that.

And the other, I think, is, a lot of times people are in different environments. So, they're not in their usual home environment. So, they might not have the same sort of access to the gym. They might not necessarily sort of--

They feel like part of the routine of Christmas is quite different to their regular routine. So, they probably feel like they can't just go on a run, spontaneously, like they would if there weren't the sort of family commitments that people can feel sort of quite, in some ways, locked into. And then, I think, it is sort of the temptations to sort of stay warm inside and eat nice food.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yes, as we are. [LAUGH]

**MATHIJS**

**LUCCASEN:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

But there's also-- I mean, I think when you start being mindful and noticing some of these things, winter has a-- I mean, it's nearly the solstice, which I always think, yes! Thank goodness that's over. From now on, every day will get a little bit lighter.

Trying to notice those times, and also the Christmas of the air. And, you know, there's still a few autumn leaves around, because I haven't swept some of them up. But, you know, there still-- there's a lot changing in the weather, and there's a lot to notice, isn't there, that's special about this time of year?

**MATHIJS**

Yeah. And I think it's sort of-- it's interesting, coming sort of from an Australasian background--

**LUCCASEN:**

it has a completely different sort of focus, I think, a northern Christmas, versus a Southern Hemisphere Christmas. So, like, if I compare and contrast them to how they are in Australia and New Zealand, it's different. Because there it's the summer holidays, whereas here it is very much around the summer sol-- I mean, the winter solstice, I should say, and these sort of rituals that we have associated with the cold time of the year.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

Yeah. Sophie's obsessed with it snowing. She won't stop go-- in fact, this whole Christmas thing has been your idea, hasn't it? [LAUGH]

**SOPHIE:**

Pretty much. Yeah, I spent a lot of time doing the decoration. And, yeah, I do enjoy Christmas. [LAUGH]

**KAREN FOLEY:**

So, what are people saying? Because, on your social-media board, we've got some ideas. And we want to try and pool some of the ways that people are relating to some of these things. Apart from food, which I do appreciate is a very sensible topic, what else is going on, in terms of some of the things that people are talking about in relation to Mathijs's ideas?

**SOPHIE:**

So, we've had quite a few-- a lot of people coming back, actually, about the tutors and how their tutors have been very helpful. And Helen's mentioned the student advisors. And I think it's very important that people feel they can contact not just their tutors but the student support teams. There are loads of different people that-- you know, OUSA, for example-- there are loads of forums and groups that the OU give you access to. And I think it's helpful for people, at this time of year, specifically, to feel included.

So, I definitely like the idea of talking to as many people as possible-- student support teams, all sorts. So that was Helen. So-- anything else?

**HJ:**

I'm getting a bit distracted, with people talking about snow and foods. [LAUGH]

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**SOPHIE:**

--Dr. Who.

**HJ:** This is what-- we did talk about New Year's resolutions, so perhaps mine should be "more focus." [LAUGH]

**SOPHIE:** [LAUGH] Yeah, we did get a Dr. Who Christmas decoration sent in, as well. So I don't think that's really helped you. [LAUGH]

**HJ:** No.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I'm surprised no one's talked about Star Wars yet, to be completely honest.

[LAUGHTER]

With our lovely starry screen and the imminent release--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yes. And Paul-Francois Tremlett, for those of you who've watched previous Student Hub Lives before-- and if you haven't, you might want to watch that-- he has done sessions on "Is Star Wars a New Religion?" So that's quite a hot topic, for him. And I imagine he'll want to be talking about Star Wars later, as well, just to throw a spanner in the works.

But we've asked you to feed back on our widgets. And one of the things that you've said you're really struggling with about being most active this time of year is feeling motivated. So, about half of you are struggling with that side of things. Maybe that's why there's some focus on making New Year's resolutions, et cetera. But it can be difficult, can't it, Mathijs, to feel motivated?

**MATHIJS**  
**LUCCASEN:** Oh, definitely, yeah. And I think the thing is that we sort of want to balance the activity with some relaxation, as well. So it's a sort of-- I think, with the pressures of the festive season as well as the pressures of study and all the other commitments, yeah, you can just feel overwhelmed.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Because, they're saying, time is the next best problem. So it's that balance, isn't it-- what to do with the limited time that you've got? OK. So, what's the next of the ideas that we're going to focus on now?

**MATHIJS**  
**LUCCASEN:** Well, the next is about gifts and giving. And I think this is a real pressure point for many people, because you mentioned earlier about social media. And one of the things, I guess,

that people cite is, you know, people have pictures on social media of sort of, stacked metres, high, these gifts, you know.

And a lot of people don't have the money to be buying all these gifts. And I think what the thing is to focus on, in terms of wellness, is how we can give in many different ways. So it's not just about financially giving and getting the most expensive gift.

But, like, when HJ and Sophie were talking about tutors, one of the things that people can give is actually kind words and deeds. So, it's not just about, I guess, the material giving. And I think it's the sort of thing we should perhaps ask ourselves, is, what is really the meaning of this period of the year for us?

Is it really about us getting the most, and giving the most, materially? Or is it about other things? And how can we think about giving in a really sort of general sense.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, let's see what everyone said, Mathijs. Because we asked what three things, including gifts, people are most looking forward to giving, this festive season. So let's see what you said.

"Time," "family," "food," "love," "friendship," "friends," "kindle." "Seeing my children," "time with my hubby," "clothes," "happy people," "camera belt," "family time." "Joy," "drone," "Christmas dinner," "children," "relaxing," "Christmas cards," "my son a fab Christmas."

Lots of different ideas, there. Very few of them material. Do you think there's a bit of a backlash, at the moment, against this whole idea of consumerism?

**MATHIJS**  
**LUCCASEN:** I think so. And I'm sort of heartened by everyone's responses, because they're focusing, I guess, on the essence of what's really important. It's that meaningful time together with loved ones. It's being able to sort of connect. And it's about, I guess, the joy that comes from that.

And I think it's a good thing that there's this backlash about consumerism, because where does it stop? And what are the sort of messages we're giving members of the younger generation, in terms of what's valued and what's seen as valuable?

**KAREN FOLEY:** I've seen some lovely ideas on social media about gifts that could be meaningful that people could give, things that people could make. And then I saw some today that were like these personalised books, which were really nice, but they were like, ah, this is the perfect gift for people who've got everything. And I was thinking, oh, that would be really nice.

And then I thought, actually this is all just a construct. It's me filling in something with a populated book that's then generated within minutes that looks quite nice but actually some thought hasn't gone into it. And I keep thinking-- I'm really stuck on this, because I don't feel very Christmassy at all. I keep thinking, what can I give? How can people make sense of what to give, that's something that means something to other people or actually, in the act of giving, can make you feel better?

**MATHIJS**

**LUCCASEN:**

Well, I think sometimes it's the process as much as it is the end product. So, on the weekend, two of my goddaughters-- they're, like, 4 and 7-- had made some rocky road, and they wrapped that up and they gave that to us. And I think that was a really nice gift, you know. And there was the love that went with that.

And it's probably the process of making the rocky road that's just as important as it was for them to be giving it and for us to eat it. So I think there's definitely the thought and the intentions behind that. And there's the commercial products that make those albums, but then you can still make those yourself. And, in some ways, maybe it's also, in combination with that, cutting yourself a bit of slack, because it will be a bit quicker to have it done commercially than it would be to do it as a craft project yourself.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

Yeah. But there is this pressure, still, that one has to deliver, on Christmas day, gifts. And a lot go-- I mean, it can be quite stressful, can't it, thinking, am I going to perform? You know, we're asked to, ultimately, fulfil a role, aren't we? Give something, receive something, be happy with it, you know, give something appropriate and nice. There's a lot of pressure.

What advice would you give people? I mean, you're starting to say be realistic and things, but what advice could you give people about the pressure around the giving?

**MATHIJS**

**LUCCASEN:**

I think there are no fixed rules, and I think that's a useful thing to bear in mind. So I think what is useful-- and perhaps the boat has somewhat sailed, for this Christmas, in terms of, if there's a sort of an agreement amongst the family, then that can really help, because when you're gathering-- if there's the expectation that everyone is going to get a gift for everyone else, and that's sort of how it's always been, it can be difficult to change that. But it's not written in cement.

So it could be the focus is just on one gift for each of the younger family members. And, instead of giving more gifts to the adults, you can give to a charity. Or, if people really find that so difficult, they can be selecting one of the family members, an adult family member, that will

be the focus of the gift from one person. So you do get fewer gifts that way, but I think it sort of reduces some of the anxiety.

Loads of families do this. It's not like I'm suggesting anything really revolutionary. I think the thing at the back of your mind is, there's nothing set in cement about this. We can do it slightly differently. And, you know, that can help with the pressure and also, I guess, with the messages that we give, with the giving.

**KAREN FOLEY:** It's something I'm going to be talking to Paul later about, is this whole idea of rules and enacting things. But I guess what you're saying-- it sort of strikes me that we perform these things. And rules can both hinder and also help us. So, if we make rules and if we explain what the norms are or maybe reevaluate the usefulness of some of those rules, like buy everyone everything, or-- people do change those. And then that can be a way of, I guess, managing things.

So-- be interesting to see what your rules are about your Christmas and whether those help you. If any ideas that you've got. In particular, any really thoughtful gift ideas that we can potentially steal for-- [LAUGH] but some ideas would be great to know about. So we'll come to the social media desk in a minute and see what you've been talking about there, in terms of really thoughtful, meaningful gifts that you're both looking forward to giving as well as receiving. Mathijs, what's next?

**MATHIJS** Well, I couldn't resist one more comment about the gifts.

**LUCCASEN:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Oh, yeah?

**MATHIJS** I think one of the other challenges is that different people have different financial means. So, it can be really tricky in a family where different family members have quite different economies. And so, I guess, sort of also being up-front with the rules around that.

**LUCCASEN:**

So, you know, how it's negotiated can be a bit tricky. But actually, by talking it through and having some rules around that, I think that can help reduce some of the anxiety. Because people can't necessarily match other people with the costs of things. And I think that can be quite anxiety-provoking for people.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah. No, really, really good point, really good point. And I'm not expecting my puppy to get

me anything for Christmas. [LAUGH]

**MATHIJS** [LAUGH] So, no new Alfa Romeo in the drive.

**LUCCASEN:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** No! [LAUGH]

**MATHIJS** The next one is about connecting. And I think connecting, for those people that live at a distance from family members, might be by Skype or by phone. And so I guess it's us thinking really sort of broadly about how we connect with people. Because it's not always possible to see everyone.

**LUCCASEN:**

And there are lots of people that have blended families, or they've got families spread all over the country or overseas. And so I think sometimes it's about, again, being realistic about what you can achieve in one day. There will be people that will drive, probably the breadth of Britain, trying to see different family members, all on the same day.

And I think that does add some pressure. And it's each person's call, but there can be ways in which we can use technology, I guess, to sort of supplement things and not feel like we have to see everyone all on that one magical day.

**KAREN FOLEY:** It's that sense of connectedness. And we asked you how connected you feel. And people are mainly saying that they feel very connected. HJ and Sophie, I'd like to come back-- any ideas on the gifts, or any ideas on the sense of connection and what's meaningful for people-- how people are managing to feel connected?

**SOPHIE:** Yeah, there's lots actually going on in chat. It's really lovely. Just to point out, that it is moving quite quickly. So, the little pin button, in the top right-hand corner, if you click on that, that means that can scroll through easily, and you don't get distracted by all the new comments coming through.

I saw a really nice one. Actually, I think it was Julia. And she is learning a song from *Anastasia* in Russian for her girlfriend this year.

I mean, I absolutely adore that film. It's a really good film. And I think that's absolutely lovely that she's doing something that doesn't necessarily obviously cost anything. But I think it's a really nice gesture.



**HJ:** And we've been talking about what Mathijs has been saying and sort of sharing our ideas. So, we're connecting on here, which is really lovely. We put up there, earlier, that me and Sophie had a little think, and we talked about, in giving, we should give advice from our own experiences. And a lot of that has happened here, which is lovely.

And Davin's saying-- we are skipping to some of these who go between them, which is good, though. But Davin likes to study MOOCs over the break, so that's how he's going to keep learning, which is really good. People are going to the gym. That seems to be quite popular this time of year, [LAUGH] although keeping it up-- yes.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**SOPHIE:** --get home, and it's dark. No... I'm going to get into bed! [LAUGH]

**HJ:** So if you guys do keep it up, you deserve a medal for that one. [LAUGH]

**SOPHIE:** Much better than we are. [LAUGH]

**HJ:** We've talked about winter walks, which is nice. Yeah.

**SOPHIE:** Yes. At that time of year, I do like going-- you know, layering up and getting out. I think that's sort of the most exercise you'll get to be doing anytime soon. [LAUGH]

And also there was another comment. I'm really sorry, I can't remember exactly who mentioned it. But they have, like, a diary-- oh, it's Elizabeth-- a homework diary. And so she makes sure that she studies little and often, so that the work doesn't pile up over the Christmas. So, she put different pages, which page she should read, and things like that.

Which I think is a very good idea, because it does-- you do sort of put everything off. Oh, I've got all this time off. I'll do it then. And it sort of never comes about. So, I think that's a really good way of making sure that you study every now and then.

**HJ:** Yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Lovely. Some brilliant ideas. And, as usual, you guys are all super organised. I don't think we need this time. Let's just eat mince pies! [LAUGH]

What's next on our list of things to talk about, Mathijs?

**MATHIJS** Well, it fits with what HJ and Sophie were saying, in terms of learning. And, I guess, for OU

**LUCCASEN:** students, it's learning-- we associate that with the TMAs and keeping up with the virtual learning environment and engaging with our modules. But it's also learning, really, quite generally, in terms of what's working for us over the festive period.

So, someone was saying, well, what they had figured out-- and it ties in with their formal learning-- is that they do little and light. And that's the way in which they manage, and it's helping their wellness. And I think other people will be thinking, right, well, I know that I'm best to try and not consume too much alcohol on Christmas Eve, because on Christmas Day I get quite hung over, and I can't enjoy it as much as I would if I'd cut back on the drinking. That's not based on personal experience.

**KAREN FOLEY:** No, I was going to say, I don't think I've ever learnt that, despite knowing it a lot. [LAUGH]

**MATHIJS** Yeah. So it's the sort of learning in the really broader sense, so, what are we actually taking away from this? How are we benefiting from our experience? What are the insights that we have? So that, next Christmas, we, I guess, learn from that and benefit from our previous experiences.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And this can be tricky, because Christmas happens at one time of year. And often you can think, oh, I know that I get really stressed when so-and-so come round, or I drink a lot at this time of year. So, we can know our triggers.

But it's easier to learn, isn't it, when things are happening often. Because, you know, when things happen once a year we can get caught up in the thrust of the Christmas festivities and forget some of those things. How can we take advantage of these learnings? Because you're talking more about these insights into how we behave and what's going to work and be helpful. What advice could you give our students about how they can actually take some of this and remember it for next year or be mindful through the process about what may and not be working?

**MATHIJS** Well, two things sort of leap out. One would be-- you'd have to be somewhat diligent with this one-- and that would be to capture your thoughts in writing. Because then you're much more likely to be able to remember them.

But the other is, I agree with you, Christmas comes once a year, obviously, but some of the experiences that happen at Christmas are not just unique to the festive season. So, some of the things that you mentioned, some sort of challenging dynamics with certain family

members, that could crop up anytime through the year. And actually it's almost like you could use Christmas as a practise ground for, like, OK, well, I know that this is going to be a bit tricky, but how will I try it this time, at this time of year?

And it could apply at Easter. It could apply for the summer holidays or the other, I guess, pressure points in the year. So, for those people that are less diligent writing things down, they probably will get a chance to practise some of those skills and apply their learning, "very general" learning, throughout the year.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Lovely. Excellent. Well, people are still very connected to the idea of food, which is still dominating our Wordle. So, if you haven't had a chance to enter some of how you feel, and then please do enter that onto our word cloud. People pop in and out during these sessions, so, welcome to new people who've been joining us. And it's great to see so many students from our arts and social sciences, as well, here, who've also been joining us more recently.

We've been asking people how in tune they feel with their immediate environment. And people are saying that they feel very in tune with things. And I don't know whether that's a result of having the chance to sit down and reflect on things or whether, as I say, they're just a very diligent bunch out there, Mathijs.

Why is it so important to be feeling in tune and being, I guess, in your body, being active-- that sort of thing?

**MATHIJS**  
**LUCCASEN:** I think being aware of your own state helps you sort of anticipate, I guess, some of your emotions and some of your behaviours, as well. Because if you can already feel like, OK, I'm feeling like I'm in a low ebb, then, by identifying that, you can start to sort of address that issue. Or, say, for example, you might notice you're getting more anxious or distressed about something. Picking that up is the first step towards doing something about it. So, the common strategy is, then, to control your breathing and to slow it right down. But for controlled breathing or relaxation to work, you have to realise that you're in a distressed state to begin with.

And I think we can learn things from little kids, like-- because you also said about, I guess, being aware of the environment. Really small children, Christmas is either now or not now. And so, we can all benefit from that, I think. They don't think so much about, you know, it's 10 sleeps to go. Some of them do.

But it's not now, or it is now. And then, when they're in that moment, I guess we can, by recognising their joy-- because most kids do find it really joyful-- it rubs off on us. And we can sort of see how they are very much in the moment. And we benefit from their awareness of what's happening.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And their pleasure in so much of this, as well. And, yeah, it's beautiful to see the children at this time of year-- the wonder and awe of things. You know, the lights coming on. And actually, when you do look around you, there is so much to be mindful of and thankful for.

But being active is the last one we want to talk about, isn't it?

**MATHIJS**  
**LUCCASEN:** Yeah. And different people, I guess, will relate to these five different ways of well-being more so than others. Like, this is the one I probably struggle with the most, because I'm not really massively into going to the gym or exercising a lot. But it's still one to be really aware of.

Because if you're going to spend three or four days indoors, all sort of together, you sort of get cabin fever, in a way. So, it is quite useful to do, like, what Sophie, I think, was suggesting, around wrapping up warm and going for that walk. Because getting some fresh air, and even a sort of 20-minute walk, can really help reset things and to help with a little bit of physical exercise. Because we know that physical exercise helps our mood.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah. I mean, fundamentally we know that. But it's cold and chilly outside. And sometimes we can struggle with that motivation to go and do something.

You know, I often-- it's when I notice too late, and my husband will be like, right, you're out for a run! Because you start to feel low, and then you realise you've been indoors for a few days, and this, that, and the other. And it can give you such a great sense of perspective. But sometimes, getting motivated-- which wasn't an issue, to be fair, people were really struggling with too much. But being motivated to actually go out and do exercise can be hard.

Sophie and HJ, what are some of the tips that people have been giving? Because a lot of people have mentioned that they do like going out, they do go for walks, they go to the gym around this time of the year. How do people do it?

**HJ:** I think one of the themes that is coming out is that people do it, like, in little bits. They don't push themselves to do something big straightaway, and sort of build it up and get into habits, which I think is really good. Because if I'm faced with something like, this year I'm going to go to the gym for three hours a day, it's not going to happen. [LAUGH]

But doing little things and building it up, like going for walks. I think Robert said-- it might be Robert-- that he's bought a new bike, to start doing stuff. So that's really good.

**SOPHIE:** A lot of people are talking about, like, exercising at home, for example. You don't necessarily have to go to the gym. And Davin's just bought himself a treadmill. So, that's just arrived today. So, that will help him.

But you don't necessarily have to-- like I say, you can just go for a walk. It doesn't mean you have to go to the gym or do anything, you know, massively strenuous. Even just a walk is good to clear your head, and things like that. So, yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:** You can even do things-- I've seen some of these places where you can borrow people's dogs. Because, you know, going for a walk with a dog is, we-- I-- think is a really, really good, fun thing to do. Walking with friends, and this, that, and the other, you can chat and enjoy the weather. It's a nice way of getting out and doing things maybe a bit different. Brilliant.

Mathijs, that's nearly all we've got time for today. So, what would be your take-home message, I guess, in terms of saying, you know, these are five ways we've looked at, in terms of mental health? You've said everyone is very different, and people will have really different takes on some of these aspects. What would be the one thing that you would wish well for our people watching today?

**MATHIJS**  
**LUCCASEN:** I think one is probably, you know, be kind to yourself. Because I think we can be tough on ourselves-- the expectations that we set. So, don't be too rough on yourself.

And the other is to try and enjoy as much of it as you can. It might not be all entirely joyful. And we just probably need to accept that there's going to be times when there will be frustrations and you want to sort of push everyone out the door and say, OK, enough! You can head off, now! I've had my 30 minutes with you, and that's enough.

But to sort of be kind to ourselves, and to just look out for the joyful bits. And perhaps sort of try and not attend too much to the challenging stuff.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant. Mathijs, thank you very much. Let's pull a cracker, to celebrate. Ooh! I won. Ha-ha.  
[LAUGH]

**MATHIJS** [LAUGH]

**LUCCASEN:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** OK. I'm not going to wear the hat. There's going to be no hats going on today, I don't think. I hate these Christmas hats.

Can we read the joke out? "Why did the golfer use two pairs of trousers?"

**MATHIJS** Oh, I don't know!

**LUCCASEN:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Oh, this is really bad. I'm not sure we will read-- "In case he got a hole in one." We don't even have any sound effects to go-- [MIMICS TROMBONE] [LAUGH]

Anyway, Mathijs, thank you so much for joining us. There's been some brilliant advice, there. And also thank you, at home, for sharing a lot of that advice. You're all super organised, and it seems like you're all on the right track with things.

So we're going to have a little chat with HJ and Sophie. In our next session, we're going to take a focused look at time management and how to tackle some of these issues over the festive period.

Now, Mathijs has put some brilliant resources on the website, so you can take a look at those, as well. And those are things from OpenLearn. So, there's lots and lots of different bits and bobs that you can take a look at, if you go to the Resources page on the Student Hub Live website.

Sophie and HJ. I see you've got your lights, Sophie. They're very, very festive.

**SOPHIE:** Yes, thank you very much, I do.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So, what other things are people talking about, right now? How's everyone feeling?

**SOPHIE:** Everyone seems to be really cheerful. We've just had a lovely picture. She's put my snowflakes to shame. Hopefully we'll get this printed off soon.

It's from Laura, and it's amazing. I mean, I am quite upset that I didn't think of that, myself. So, hopefully--

Thank you so much to everyone who has sent us some photos. We have got quite a few. And we'll try and get those printed out as soon as possible, so that we can put them on our tree.

**HJ:** And we've had some more comments about Mathijs's session. And Sylvia's been very studious, and she's doing her TMAs over the break, so that's-- definitely, well done for that. And she says she gets a lot of great support from her tutor, as well. So, perhaps she'll nominate her tutor for that award.

**SOPHIE:** Yes. There's lots of good feedback on the tutor support and the student support team, which is really nice to have. So, that's really lovely.

**HJ:** And Stuart's deciding he's going to treat himself, this Christmas, a roast fillet of beef. So, that's lovely. And we did have some more Christmas-cracker jokes, but they're just too painful to read out. [LAUGH]

**SOPHIE:** They are. We did notice as well, the Wordle widget, the widget about what people are most looking forward to, food was the biggest one. [LAUGH]

**HJ:** I don't think we can expect any different, to be honest. It seems to be a trend.

**KAREN FOLEY:** It's finally one time of year, I think, it's completely socially acceptable--

[LAUGHTER]

--to both consume and talk about a large amount of food. And, hey, isn't our cake brilliant? This is an Italian breakfast bread. Wouldn't that be lovely to have? I think everyone should have that breakfast on Christmas Day. It looks absolutely magnificent. And, of course, all the mulled wine and mince pies, and all these yum-yummy--