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KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to the Student Hub Live OU Open Day. We are going to talk about Access modules. Now I know some things about Access modules which is that students who have studied an Access module tend to do much better than students who haven't. And to find out more about this fact and to what extent it's true, I'm going to talk to David Healy and Helen Cooke.

Thank you for coming along. You two have both been regular guests at our Student Hub Live events before. And we're here today to talk about Access courses. Now these are range of courses that you're going to explain to us, aren't you? And we can talk about whether or not they're right for students. Students who are currently registered who are out there, should they be thinking about maybe whether they've done the right thing here? Is that what you're saying? Or is this really something for prospective students?

DAVID HEALY: Well I think by the time we get to the end of this little slot, some people might think, hold on a minute. Maybe I should do an Access course first. I mean, it's a wonderful opportunity to be an undergraduate student right from the start on your first day. That's the point of it, which I'm going to explain what that means in a minute.

KAREN FOLEY: And I was talking to Colin before about all of the fees and things. And he tells me that some of these courses, if they're linked to a qualification, can be included.

DAVID HEALY: It's all on the website. There's a brochure that people can get. So it's detailed. But the main bottom line is that yes, in England it costs 700 pounds. In Wales and Scotland and Northern Ireland it's slightly cheaper. But you can get it free in England if your household income is less than 25,000. And that's true Wales and Northern Ireland. But in Scotland, it's if your personal income is less than 25,000.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes, because Scotland is slightly different.

DAVID HEALY: And that's the thing I think, to think about. So for a lot of students it's going to be a free opportunity to get ready for undergraduate study.

KAREN FOLEY: And a massive opportunity, because this will effectively take you through a similar length of time studying and it gives you a chance to see if OU study is right for you without having the

massive financial commitments.

DAVID HEALY: In many ways you're stealing my thunder now.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, sorry.

DAVID HEALY: Because-- that was going to be our punchline. But actually, the first minute on the first day of being an undergraduate student, you know everything about the Open University. About the systems, about the material, the standard of the teaching material, about the relationship with the tutor, about how to use the forums, about how to talk to other students, about how to negotiate the internet, the student internet. You know everything.

KAREN FOLEY: You'll make all our students who haven't done one of these jealous now.

DAVID HEALY: You know--

INTERVIEWER 2: I wish I did one. On the first day I thought, I knew I had a start date, but I didn't look at anything before hand because I thought just something happened. And I didn't know what to do. So maybe doing an Access for me would be helpful.

DAVID HEALY: One of the things we were going to do here-- I was going to ask Helen. Helen was going to pretend to be a potential Access student.

KAREN FOLEY: Well now I've completely ruined your show, David.

DAVID HEALY: No, you haven't. You haven't. In fact, it's great because we got the end right at the beginning. So it's exciting all the way through, now.

KAREN FOLEY: Good to know we're live, isn't it?

DAVID HEALY: One of the things that-- if a conventional student goes to a conventional university, 18-19, after a gap year-- I was going to ask Helen, and I'll ask you, Karen, how long do you think it takes them to feel comfortable and settled at that university?

KAREN FOLEY: I think quite a while.

DAVID HEALY: Quite a while. I reckon at least two or three months before they even feel they're a kind of an undergraduate student and they've got used to it. I think the same is true of being an OU student. I mean, I was an OU student in the 70s and 80s. A very different university then. It still

took me, I reckon a year before I felt settled. If you do an Access course, my promise to the people out there is on day one, in the first minute, they will be an undergraduate student already. They will feel comfortable with everything. And that's why it's important to do an Access course.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. Good. So do you want to tell us about the three, then?

DAVID HEALY: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah?

DAVID HEALY: Well, should we do this little thing?

KAREN FOLEY: Let's do the role play before I get like--

[LAUGHTER]

--complaint letters. OK. Because we love acting here, don't we?

DAVID HEALY: We do. Of course. Go on. This is real, though.

KAREN FOLEY: Do your role play.

DAVID HEALY: It's being.

HELEN COOKE: With the caveat that I am no, you know, Oscar winning actress.

So David.

DAVID HEALY: Yeah?

HELEN COOKE: I've been advised to do an Access course. But why should I do one?

DAVID HEALY: Well. OK. So it's clear to us after four or five years of Access that students start their undergraduate degree much better prepared. A lot of students come in lacking confidence, lacking self-esteem, lacking the necessary study skills. Because it's been a break for a while, you know, from school, isn't it? And that's the main thing the Access programme does. Yes, it teaches you material. Yes. We've got three subjects that I'm going to talk to you about in a minute. But the main thing is study skills-- how to write an essay. How to plan an essay. How to talk to your tutor. How to learn in the best way possible for you. And at the end of it, OK. It doesn't count towards your degree formally, but I would say it counts far more than that

because at the end of it you're ready, as I say, on day one you are an undergraduate student.

HELEN COOKE: So is it just one Access module? You said there was a choice.

DAVID HEALY: So there's three. There's three. You get wonderful material sent to in the post. We have three courses-- Y031 is the arts, and it's all about painting. They do the Turner Prize. They do poetry. They do World War I poetry. They also do a language as an option. You can do some beginner's French and Spanish, or other languages. And it's a fantastic course. Really fantastic course.

In the other one, Y032, that's more social science. So you've got things like psychology, sociology, management, law, understanding children, and you've got health. All combined and all interlocking and interweaving to a fantastic course. So at the end of that, with the arts you're ready to do any arts subjects. With that one you're ready to do any kind of social science subject.

And the third one is-- last, but not least-- Y033, which is all about science and technology and design and mathematics. Did I say that? Math, science, technology, and design. Fantastically important courses. And of course then, you're ready to do that pathway through the curriculum.

HELEN COOKE: So I would just need to pick one of them before I started?

DAVID HEALY: Yeah, just do one because, as I said, the most important thing are the study skills and the increase in your confidence. And then you're ready to be a student. Yea.

HELEN COOKE: So do I still get a tutor if I study an Access module?

DAVID HEALY: Yes. Very, very much so. In fact, I would say that with Access you get more tutor support than you might well do once you start being an undergraduate. You have one to one tutorial support with a tutor by telephone, and also online. And that tutor, within agreed times and so on and certain boundaries, you can call that tutor. They can call you. And they talk you through the material. They talk you through your essay. They talk you through how to prepare an essay. And so on and so forth.

So not only is the course material fantastic, but the tutorials support is top drawer and very intense.

HELEN COOKE: And do you still get tutorials with other students?

DAVID HEALY: No. You don't get classroom tutorials, but more and more we're offering online tutorials. So you're there with other students with your tutor learning together. Yeah.

HELEN COOKE: And will I have to sit an exam?

DAVID HEALY: Well the good thing is no, you don't. You don't have to do an exam. And in fact, at the moment there are three essays. And each one is marked, but it doesn't count to whether you pass the Access course or not. What they're there for-- you do get a mark, but the mark is just to show you how you're doing. So this is what you would have got if it had been real, so to speak. But each essay is a stepping stone preparing you for what's called the end of module assessment, which is really a slightly longer essay. But by that time you've got all the feedback from your tutor, both written and on the telephone, about how you are doing. And I can't remember the exact figure, it's in the 90s, very high, all those who sit the EMA, 95% or so, pass the EMA, because they got ready along the way.

So if you failed essay one, essay two, essay three, it doesn't matter. In fact, I would say the more you kind of maybe not do so well in these three essays-- because they don't count-- the better you are, because you learn more from the mistakes you make.

HELEN COOKE: And what if I'm in that 5% that don't pass the EMA?

DAVID HEALY: As long as you submit something. Because sometimes, as we all know, life gets in the way. And we're find with Access students, life with a capital L is getting in the way. Right? But as long as they submit something, they can get a re-sit. And then they get reallocated to a tutor and they get all the personal support again. So it's well worth remembering that if you do do an Access course.

You know, there is never a moment along the course where you have to give up. Because there's lots of support along the way.

HELEN COOKE: OK. Well I think I'm convinced. But what's the main benefit?

DAVID HEALY: Well, the main thing is what we said at the beginning.

KAREN FOLEY: I want to know which one you're choosing, Helen, because I think they all sound really, really good.

HELEN COOKE: I'd like to do a bit of all of them.

KAREN FOLEY: Does it matter?

DAVID HEALY: No. I don't think it really matters. But I think yes, if you want to study history you should do the arts one. If you want to do chemistry, you should do the science one. But in fact, I think-- you know, because I haven't done the research-- but I think there's evidence to suggest that some people change. Certainly within Y032, which has got about six disciplines, some people start off wanting to eventually do the nursing degree or to do a psychology degree, end up doing a law degree. And vice versa. In the arts, some people decide they're going to want to do art history, but they love languages so much, in the small introduction, that they start doing a language degree.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, while these are amazing, for our students who've already enrolled for level 1 modules-- because these are primarily aimed at students who maybe haven't studied much before, haven't got GCSEs, or haven't been in study for a long time. So they are great. But if people haven't done this, it's not the end of the world if they're prepared to just start now. Because there's loads of stuff that people can start doing before September. **DAVID HEALY:** I mean, well there's Open Learn. There's Future Learn. They can do all that. So I'm not trying to talk people out. Those people who have registered, that's fine. But I'm not afraid to say that actually by doing this, you become, on that day one, as I said, right at the beginning, you already are an undergraduate student. And you don't have the four or five, maybe six months of kind of quite difficult time negotiating everything. You've got it all on a plate. That's why, really I think we should call these courses off to a flyer. You know? And I suggested that in a meeting. It didn't go down very well. But in many ways, that's what I think it is.

KAREN FOLEY: Well I've heard people sort of, who are studying with the OU, they're trying to get their mum to do something. And maybe people are saying, well, I don't know. I couldn't study. I'm not sure if it's for me. And so a lot of OU students will say, well why don't you do this because it's no risk. It's not going to rack up a massive debt or anything like that. You can often do it for free. And they're a great way to see if it's right, isn't it?

DAVID HEALY: Absolutely. You know, if people are now just saying, what's it take to do an OU degree-- six years? What's another six months? You could ring up registration and say, you know what? I've been so convinced by Helen and David's presentation that actually I want to do an Access course.

[LAUGHTER]

Because another six months is neither here nor there. Because in fact, informally, I think you're gaining so much in terms of time that actually I reckon your degree will be much better at the end of it.

KAREN FOLEY: And like you say, you know the systems, I guess, so that you're having to focus on the content as opposed to--

DAVID HEALY: Even sending in an essay in the OU systems for new students is a lot to learn. But you do all that in the Access course.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. Great. All right. Well, you've sold me.

DAVID HEALY: OK.

HELEN COOKE: Which one are you going to do, Karen?

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, well I'd have to do the people, work, and society. But, to be completely honest, even if I was going to do this I would probably do a quick STEM one just because I think when else would I get up to brush up on my math skills?

DAVID HEALY: That's true.

KAREN FOLEY: And so if I was doing something, I think there's an argument to say let me do this, because I'm never really going to have the luxury of doing it again.

DAVID HEALY: Well if you do it, get some potatoes in, because they do a live experiment with potatoes.

KAREN FOLEY: I know. Yeah. Brilliant.

DAVID HEALY: Don't ask me what.

KAREN FOLEY: Lovely. David and Helen, thank you very much. David, you can go off and answer all your phone calls about your Access module. Helen, you need to stay because we're going to talk about choice and talking about an open qualification. But in case you missed it before, we're just going to take a quick look at the tree sculpture video where Dan is going to fill us in on that. And then we'll be back with Helen to talk about could an open qualification be right for you? See you in a minute.

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