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KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to the Student Hub Live Open University Open Day. We've been having a brilliant day getting to know some of the people and things and processes here at the Open University. And now we're going to talk about could an Open qualification be right for you?

I'd also just like to say thanks so much for all the tips and websites and things on OpenLearn and Future Learn you've been sharing in the chat. It really, really is brilliant. And if you haven't said anything in the chat and you'd like to say hello or what you're studying, then that would be really, really nice too.

Helen, welcome back. Now, many people don't know about this fabulous thing that the Open University do that is very, very unique, which is an Open qualification.

HELEN COOKE: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: And so I'm going to ask you about that and about how students know whether this sort of thing could be right for them. It's called an Open Degree, isn't it? It's had various names.

HELEN COOKE: Yeah. So it's shocking that people don't know about this wonderful degree, but the university does offer a degree called the Open Degree. We also have a diploma and a certificate available in our suite of Open qualifications as well. So students, if they don't want to study the full degree, there are other qualifications available.

And it's our biggest programme within the university. It makes up nearly a fifth of all students across the university. So it's really popular. And it's also our longest running degree as well. So it was the original degree when the university was very first set up, so it's got a very long history. And we're very proud of it.

KAREN FOLEY: And the idea is that you can find things that suit you. But can students really study just anything that they want to?

HELEN COOKE: So it's a really flexible degree in that students can choose modules from a wide range of subjects. Students starting their qualification now do have to complete each stage of study in turn. So they'll need to complete their level one modules before they move on to level two.

KAREN FOLEY: Right.

HELEN COOKE: That's the same as for any of our named subject specific qualifications as well. But within that, generally they can choose the modules and the subjects that are right for them, either based on their personal interests or their career plans, and really build a qualification that's really unique to them.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. OK, so say someone was interested in maybe doing some French language and maybe a bit of counselling and various things. Could they all of a sudden at level three think, I really need to do a bit of chemistry now?

HELEN COOKE: So technically yes, they can. They can start new subjects at any point during their qualification, but we do try and advise against starting a brand new subject at level three, particularly something as specific as chemistry. That's not to say you can't.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

HELEN COOKE: If you've got relevant work experience, and there are other resources that you can use to bring yourself up to speed. So what we try and get students to think about at the very start of their degree is what modules they might want to study at levels two and three so that they can think about the modules that they need to do in preparation for that, even though there's not usually any prerequisite modules. There are in a few cases.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, so that brings me to my next question, which is what sort of help and support do students get in planning all of this? Who do they talk to, and is that different?

HELEN COOKE: So it's not different. All Open Programme students are allocated a student support team, the same as all other students across the university. And they can talk to advisers within their student support team about the modules that might be right for them to talk about what knowledge, what skills they have already. We also have a range of resources available on our - we call it a Qualifications website.

So we've worked with faculties to produce some half degree pathways through certain subjects. So if you're interested in studying art history and French as part of your Open Degree, then we've suggested modules that work well together at each of the different stages in order for you to build your knowledge so that you can study them alongside each other. So

there's also a forum that we've set up for students to ask each other questions.

So I've studied AA100. What would work well with that, or what could I go on to next day if I'm interested in-- and so of there's a community of students, of Open Degree students, who are sharing that knowledge with each other.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, I know this isn't specific to an Open Degree, but I just wanted to ask. Say someone starts on a qualification, maybe with AA100, and they're doing an Open Degree, and then they decide, I want to do a qualification, or vice versa. Can you change from a named qualification to an Open Degree, and back?

HELEN COOKE: Absolutely. So we have quite a lot of students who, as you say, start with an Open Degree but find they really love arts and humanities in their first year and want to study a named qualification. That transfer is a little bit more complicated. You need to make sure you've got the right modules to be able to transfer to the qualification. And again, student support teams are set up to be able to support students with that choice.

Alternatively, we also get students who start with a named qualification and for whatever reason decide that's not for them, or their job changes and it's no longer relevant. And actually, they can transfer into the Open Programme again, either at degree, diploma, or certificate level so that they can still carry on studying. They can still graduate with a degree, albeit not in a named subject, but they're then able to choose other modules that interest them or that are relevant to whatever their changing path, as it happens.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, I know that a lot of people are asking about is an OU degree still recognised by employers. And we know that it is, and we know employers in particular really like the way that students have to be resilient and dedicated and motivated. But what about an Open Degree and the fact that maybe it hasn't got a specific qualification, what is the situation with that with employees?

HELEN COOKE: Yes. So there are a number of careers where employees will expect students to have a named qualification, particularly areas like law and nursing, those kind of things. And also where professional accreditation is required, so psychology for example.

But many employers-- and there's research to suggest that a lot of employers don't specify that a degree has to be in a certain subject. And so actually they value the breadth of study that an Open Degree student has rather than having really in-depth knowledge of one

particular thing. They might be able to apply a little bit of business management, a little bit of languages, a little bit of sociology into their work place, and that's really beneficial to employers.

And I think the other thing we'd say as well is that for Open Degree students who are making their own choices about the modules they study, they're not following a specified path laid down by the university or by a teacher, for example. So they have to be quite brave and they have to be quite confident and independent, as do all OU students. But we think having that freedom of choice can actually be quite difficult.

And so to take on an Open Degree, it's not the easy option which sometimes it's referred to. But actually you have to be quite dedicated and you have to be able to be quite flexible in terms of transitioning between different subjects and applying, adapting to different referencing systems or different discourse and language that's used in the different subject areas.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Thank you so much, Helen. HJ, I hear there's some lovely chat on the hot desk.

HJ: Yes. Well, we've been talking about a lot. And I'm actually quite, Helen, because you covered a point that came up. Because Ruth was saying she was a bit worried about the degree title not showing what she's actually doing because she's doing IT and social sciences, and a combination of technology and social science, she said. And she was a bit worried about it, so I'm sure she's happy now that you've answered her point about how employers--

HELEN COOKE: So I think it's worth mentioning that your Open Degree doesn't recognise the subject studied, just to make that clear, when you graduate. But you do get a transcript of all your modules, and actually we've got some great resources on our Qualification website as well about how to articulate what an Open Degree is to an employer. So I think being able to explain that and explain the module choices that you've made is the important thing. So yeah.

HJ: Yeah.

HELEN COOKE: Good.

HJ: Yeah. I don't want to distract too much from what you were saying, because we are talking about a lot of things. But [INAUDIBLE] says hello as well, as requested. And a lot of people are looking to connect to each of us. So Ruth said she wouldn't mind following some people on

Twitter if that's your thing.

But we were talking about the library has a Twitter as well with lots of great resources, and we do too. And just talking about the great OpenLearn material as a great way to get a taste as well of what it's like to study with the OU in different subjects. So maybe if you hop onto OpenLearn and try some things, you might decide to go through for an Open Degree after doing different subjects.

HELEN COOKE: Yeah. I think that's a really good point, actually, because OpenLearn is one of the areas of resource that we do suggest to Open Degree students. So if they are starting a new subject at level two and they haven't done any music before, then actually there are some taste of materials on OpenLearn, and before they make that choice and start the module, it just gives them a chance to try it out before they sign up for the module.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Helen, thank you so much for coming along. Well, I hope you've enjoyed that session. That's not all. We're going to squeeze in a final session because Jo Jarvis is coming along with a model philae lander because the School of Physical Sciences also have an Open Day which is coming up in a few days, so I'm going to find out a little bit more about it.

We're just going to watch that video again about what is an online library with Katherine in the library. And then Jo will come and tell us all about this exciting event that's happening on Thursday. So I'll see you in a couple of minutes.

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