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KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to the Student Hub Live. Well, we've been having a whale of a time in the chat with you at home. And we aim to please. And Bruce has had a request that we show you the studio. So Bruce, we thought, no problem at all. Let's let you have a tour of our very small studio here in Walton Hall in Milton Keynes at the Open University. So this is what everything looks like.

There we are. And you can see that H.J. isn't on his own. There are some people helping him. But he's doing a sterling job with everything on the chat, managing to keep all your comments coming through to us in the studio. All right, leave him alone now. There we go. And it is great chatting with everyone. There've been so many tips, so many ideas shared. Please keep them coming, in particular for our next session.

So in this session, we're looking at returning to study. And as part of that, we're looking at how this might be experienced for new students, and also how it might be experience for access students. So those are students who are just starting at the Open University at Level 0, doing an Access Module with us. And I'm joined by Anactoria and Carlton Wood-- Anactoria Clarke even. I should say your surname as well, in case people want to email you.

Now, I wanted to pick up on this idea about how people might be returning to study. Because for a lot of Open University students, all of a sudden, they're getting very excited about their module. Or they might even be returning to study after the break in the summer. So they might be thinking about that. And there's often a mixture of excitement, nervousness, et cetera about what's to come, some of the expected, some of the unexpected. But can we talk about people who might be studying for the very first time with the Open University and what that sort of experience might look like? How do students tend to come to us?

ANACTORIA CLARKE: I think they tend to come to us because they have always wanted to do further study, but didn't have the opportunity, at the time when they might have normally gone on from school, or just weren't ready, just didn't have the belief in themselves. So quite often, we've got a lot of students thinking, I don't know if this is for me. I don't know if I can do it. And also, they don't know if they can fit it in often. It might be the first time they're trying to fit in something other than family and work. So yeah, they're often quite nervous, but excited.

KAREN FOLEY: Have you heard of this idea of imposter syndrome, where you think everyone's going to find out that I can't do this? I often feel like that with a lot of things. And I've heard some students say that as well. This idea about thinking you can do things and getting on with it, how important is that, in terms of doing things?

ANACTORIA CLARKE: Yeah, I think it's really important to just be open to-- you're going to find stuff out about yourself and about study. You're going to find out what doesn't work. And that, to be honest, is almost as important-- in fact, I think it's more important than finding out what does work. So an Access is great. Because it's where you can make mistakes. It's where you can kind of try things out and think, oh, that wasn't that successful. Because you're doing it a really supported way.

KAREN FOLEY: So Carlton, tell us about-- in your role overseeing students on the staff, tutor side of things that you've been involved with in the past, what sort of issues do students come with? I mean, I've heard, for example, that some students are thinking, oh, I don't really have this sort of skill or that sort of skill. And yet, we know that a lot of these courses, Access or Level 1 are structured to introduce students to these sorts of skills. But what things are common in terms of anxieties that students might present when they're starting to study?

CARLTON WOOD: Well, there's probably about three or four main ones. So one is whether students think they've got the time to actually participate in the module. Another one is whether they've actually got the academic ability to do it. And a typical concern is around maths type skills. In the science, technology, engineering, and math subjects, people are really concerned about whether they've got sufficient math skills to allow them to proceed.

KAREN FOLEY: And of course, this is the issue with Open Access. Because anybody can come to the Open University. And yet, we also, because we're Open Access, have a range of materials out there that anyone can get to grips with. And sometimes, the summer's a good time to start brushing up on some of those skills. Would you say that's a good idea, in particular if people were anxious about the maths?

CARLTON WOOD: Yeah, I think it's-- yes and no. Because it depends on the individual type of student that you are. Because some people are quite happy to go off and explore for themselves. And if people have got the time and inclination to do that and they're not going to get too worried, by all means, do so. If they're the kind of person that might get a little bit worried, then it might be better just to wait until you've had a chance to you talk to your tutor. And they can point you in

the right direction. And that way, that might be a little less scary going down that route.

KAREN FOLEY: These are big concepts. I mean, sometimes, if you say, I think he might struggle with maths, that can be a big thing for people. And yet, they might have the basic arithmetic skills. They might be more worried about the logic. They might not know what the maths is that they have to grapple with, the writing skills, the referencing skills. Sometimes, when you're starting to study, you learn what you're missing. But also, you might have anxieties that maybe aren't so warranted. It might be that, just by going into Tesco and doing your weekly shopping, you've actually got quite a lot of numerous skills that you hadn't maybe given yourself credit for.

CARLTON WOOD: Well, myself and Anactoria have been doing a little piece of research looking at how students progress on the Access module. And there was a lovely piece of feedback from one of the students, where they said that after engaging with the materials, they felt help to help their son with their maths homework for the first time ever. And it was just a confidence factor. It's just they had not felt confident enough beforehand to be able to do so. But after engaging in the materials, they were able to engage. And that was a really nice piece of feedback.

KAREN FOLEY: So part of this, I guess-- I mean, Simon's just been talking about learning journals and being mindful of the way that we learn things. Part of this, I guess, is this whole exploration and thinking, what am I doing, what can I do, but also knowing that the OU have this whole host of ways of helping students, if things get sticky. So like you say, Carlton, they could maybe start doing something in advance. Or it might be that they just go with it. And then, all of a sudden, once they recognise that they might need a bit of help on x, y, or z, they can then go off and do that. What tends to be the best way for students to, I guess, identify some of those areas when they might need help?

ANACTORIA CLARKE: Well, I mean, quite often, they'll be identified through doing the assessments. Particularly on Access, the tutors will play a really vital role in giving them feedback and identifying any areas that might need to a bit of extra work or support and pointing them in the right direction. So even if students are worried about submitting something, they should do. Because that's an opportunity to find out what you're strong at actually, where were the gaps, and what can you do to plug them, but actually, what's working really well for you, and to get that help and support.

CARLTON WOOD: And certainly from a tutor perspective as well, one of the things that the tutor will be looking to do early on to initiate that discussion with students around the areas that they think they may

feel most concerned about and trying to explore that and trying to work out whether that's a real concern or whether it's a concern around confidence. Because sometimes, people are able to do things that they're just not very confident that they can.

ANACTORIA

And they just need to find a way into it. But it hasn't been explained to them before. So

CLARKE:

sometimes, a tutor can just offer a different way in.

KAREN FOLEY:

And this confidence is such a key thing. It's often, I think, what makes students stay with the OU, as opposed to leave. Because often, like you say, there are just different ways of teaching. Sometimes, when you're already stressed out and you're under time, pressure, and you've got a deadline, you can't get a concept. But maybe later, you can go and watch something else or have it explained in a different way. And then all of a sudden, it makes sense.

CARLTON WOOD: And that's the advantage of the Access model of tuition, if you like. Because it's a one-to-one contact. So it's offered through the medium of telephone. And from a tutor perspective, it feels like you really get to know students very, very well. You never actually see them face to face. But you actually know them really well by the end of the module. And some studies require a lot of help. And that's fine. Some students require less help and are far more independent. But that's the thing about Access. It brings everyone up to a similar kind of standard by the end of the module.

KAREN FOLEY:

Yeah, Siobhan says she's finding the session so useful. And she's going to watch it on Catch Up later. I'm pleased you're finding it useful, Siobhan And do put any comments in the chat as well that you'd like us to clarify.

So let's talk about Access then, this whole idea, which is Level 0, a 30 week module. We've got three options that students can do. Now, I've heard a lot of students, who are studying with the OU-- and we've got 68% of students who are not returning after break, so only 32%, just under a third of students, are returning after break. So we've got quite a lot of continuing students here in the chat right now. But I know a lot of students will say, oh, my mum said she'd like to do something. But she doesn't have the confidence. And Access can be a great way for people to try an OU course.

And I know a lot of students recommended it to their friends. Because how often do you find OU students who know other students, et cetera? But it might be an option that some people haven't considered. And so I'm wondering, for our continuing students, when their friends are

saying, I don't know what you're doing. And they're saying, well, you should go and study with the OU. Tell us about the Access so that they can maybe fill those people on why they're a nice place to start.

ANACTORIA

CLARKE:

It's a much more relaxed pace than your traditional Level 1 module. So you require fewer hours in the week. It's a nice place to start, if you're not sure how are you going to fit it in, for example. So if you've got lots of other commitments or lots of other stuff that you want to do and you're not quite sure at the moment where those hours are going to come from, it's much better off to start with Access. Because you can try and get a bit of a study pattern going. You also have, as Carlton said, the one to one tutor support with tutors such as Carlton, who are lovely. So you have a really nice person who's going to be contacting you. And they're going to be helping you with your studies. And you can get help on the things that are pertinent just to you.

CARLTON WOOD: The other elements around it as well, all the Access modules are quite wide ranging as well.

So students get the chance to dip their toe in different aspects of a subject. So for instance, the one I'm involved in is a science, technology, engineering, and maths one. And so sometimes, students come in thinking they want to do science. Then, they find actually that engineering design was really interesting. And they'll go off and do that instead. So it's a good way of just exploring areas that relate to the ones that you think you might be interested in.

KAREN FOLEY: Did you know, though, if I was going to do one, I'd do the arts course. Because I think that would be so lush just to--

CARLTON WOOD: No, no, no.

KAREN FOLEY: Just to do something that I maybe wasn't going to do for my undergraduate degree. So it can be a nice way to actually get a bit of something else in addition.

ANACTORIA

CLARKE:

Absolutely, yeah, I mean, it's a really nice place to just experiment with those subjects as well. Because quite often, students come in thinking, I definitely want to do history, for example. And then, they meet art history. And then, all of a sudden, it's like, oh, but I really love that. And that's the thing that they got the most out of. So they might slightly change career direction. And particularly with, actually, our Y032 module, the People, Work, and Society, quite often, people come in with a very fixed idea of, oh, I want to do law. But then, they'll do something in management or something in psychology and think, oh, but actually I really enjoyed that.

KAREN FOLEY: Because the whole idea is that it gives a different voice from the disciplines. So you'd learn a little bit of content, a lot of study skills, and just the different ways, I guess, that certain disciplines are grappling with some of the issues that are central to these modules.

ANACTORIA Yeah, absolutely. So you get a different perspective on things.

CLARKE:

KAREN FOLEY: But does it matter then? So say I say, well, art. Does it matter, in terms of choosing something like that? Because it can be linked to a qualification. But equally, you can do a stand alone one, and then completely change tact and do something else. And they're not going to say, well, you haven't done a STEM one. So you can't come into our chemistry qualification, et cetera.

ANACTORIA Absolutely, I mean, we have actually got experience of students doing the Arts Module, and then going onto the first Science Level 1 module, and being very successful at that. So I think just the practise that studying with the OU, finding the time, getting your study skills up to date is great. If you are particularly worried about going into an essay writing discipline and you think you need practise with that, then it might be better to do either Y031 or Y032. But actually, all of them will be valuable just for getting your head back into studying and getting those skills sorted.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, Jonathan loved his Access course. He thoroughly recommends it. So that's good to know.

CARLTON WOOD: Good to hear that, Jonathan, louder, louder.

KAREN FOLEY: So what about students then-- so these are a great thing for people to maybe recommend to friends or family, if they're already studying. But for some of our students who may be starting to study and may be watching this on Catch Up who aren't here right now, let's just think about that whole period-- irrespective of whether it's Access or Level 1-- or some other sorts of key things that students could do to start getting organised, start getting prepared over the summer? We don't want them to go off and do too much stuff and get burnt up before they even start. But aren't there some things that set good organisational patterns or good boundary patterns at home? Is there anything people could do to I guess mentally and maybe a little bit physically prepare themselves, if they're starting this October?

ANACTORIA

Yeah, I mean, I continue studying. So it's the time when I'm doing all that myself. So I have a look at what's coming up over the coming months and try and set myself a little timetable of when do I think I'm going to be doing my study, making sure I don't book too much in. So I don't commit myself to going out every Monday night, for example, or anything like that. And getting a space at home sorted, I think, as well is really important. I mean, I'm very conscious that, for our students, they're studying in their own time and their own space. And quite often, that space can be used by other family members. And it's really important, if you can, just eke out a little bit of respect for your study space and a little bit of your own bit of the house, where you can study. Then, that can help enormously.

KAREN FOLEY:

And people study on their beds. They study on the train. They study everywhere. But I've heard students say that sometimes putting on a jumper or putting on something can help them get into this physical study space. And one of the things I love at the end of an academic year is cleaning out my files, getting all my paper, and new books, and stuff, new highlighters, and just feeling like there is an organisation. And even though maybe I'm not always as organised as I'd like to be, I often want to pick one or two things I'm going to try and do a bit better the next year. Any advice, Carlton?

CARLTON WOOD:

I think it's trying to work out what worked for you in that last year. And you'll know straight away that there are some things that just did work for you. And equally, you'll know some things that didn't work for you. And those are the things probably to try and concentrate on, and just try and adapt your study techniques to try to work on those things.

Same with Access, where we've even had quite experienced students come back to study with us and engage with some of the study tips and skills. And they come across things they've not seen before. And they go, well, I'll give that a go. And those kind of students who engage with that kind of thing do really well. Because they just have their mind open to try different things. So it's just, every time, just try something a bit different for the things that didn't work so well in the past.

KAREN FOLEY:

Well, Dave's got to go. Bye bye, Dave. And Siobhan says that she's really been picking up the Access. And she hadn't studied for 30 years, and it really, really helped her to decide what she was going to do. So well done, that's lovely to hear. OK, so a lot of this about getting your mental space and getting things ready and up and running for students, are there things that they might want to think about then in terms of maybe calendars.

I know students like calendars, like plotting things. You've mentioned that that can be helpful for you, and just thinking about your time in that sort of way. We also were talking about study intensity before, and thinking about the tasks, and managing time, and being reflective. How can students start to get a handle, I guess, on how they might start recording and reflecting on some of those things when they start to study? Is there anything you do in your study, Anactoria?

ANACTORIA Well, I always plot the TMA deadlines into my calendar.

CLARKE:

CARLTON WOOD: She always has been focused.

ANACTORIA Well, but also, I always then make sure that I plot a quiet week beforehand. So the weekend

CLARKE: before I've got an assignment due in, I'll make sure that I block that out my calendar. And I'm a tutor as well. So when I'm marking, I do the same sort of thing. If I've got a TMA deadline, I block out the weekend after, so that I can mark it. So I guess I'm just forward focused in when are going to be the flash points and trying to be as prepared for those as I can. But if I'm studying, also looking at the pattern of modules, so is there any stuff that I'm going to need to get in?

So I did a Science Module last year that Carlton teased me about.

CARLTON WOOD: You did very well on it. You did surprisingly well for an art student.

ANACTORIA But I was really rubbish, actually, at getting all the stuff together for the practical experiments

CLARKE: in time. So I spent frantic hours in B&Q looking for ungalvanised nails on a Saturday morning, which is ridiculously difficult, actually. So I could have done with much more time to do that. So next year, I'm going to be much more focused on what do I need to have like to hand a couple of weeks before I actually need it.

CARLTON WOOD: I think for the brand new students, I'm always impressed if someone says to me they've got the study planner in front of them stuck on a wall, and they know what they've got to do. If you're asking students, do you know where the study planner is, and you can hear them scrabbling with bits of paper, that always concerns me slightly. But if someone has got it in front of them, you almost think they've got their study under control. They know what they've got to do. I think, for me, that's really key, to know what's coming up and how long they've got to study a particular topic or do a particular task.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, you'd mentioned in Access that you get a personal tutor. And they talk to you on the phone a lot. And at Level 1, you might have online tutorials, face to face tutorials, and various different things going on. But what is very central and very unique about the OU student journey is that contact with their tutor. And you're both teaching as well. How important is it that students get to grips with that relationship with their tutor? And how can they use their tutor most effectively to help them? What sorts of things are not in scope for our new students out there who may not know?

CARLTON WOOD: The key thing, if a student is struggling, contact someone is the bottom line. Because there's a number of times where students think, oh, I'm not quite sure who to contact. So I didn't contact anyone. Bad idea, if you've got a problem, contact someone. So it may be a student's support team. But more often than not, go to your tutor in the first instance. Because your tutor deals directly with the subject matter in the module that you're studying, deals with most of things around any assessment that you'll be doing.

And if they don't know the answer, they will know who to refer you on to. So the key thing is, if anyone is struggling, just get in contact. Because the tutor can make a big, big difference to someone's success.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, and tell me, what if students start studying, and then think, actually, this is a bit more complicated than I'd initially thought. Maybe I need to go back a level. Because with Open Access, it is difficult to gauge where you're at. Is there flexibility there for students?

ANACTORIA CLARKE: There's a little bit of flexibility, maybe not as much as ideally we'd like. But I mean, certainly, they should chat to their tutor first. Because it might well be that actually the things they're worrying about can be helped on the module that they're on. And we all are slightly over anxious, if we hit something that we think, I just can't do this, or I feel that this is insurmountable.

But if that's only a tiny bit of the module and the only bit that's struggling on, it might not mean that they can't do the rest of it. So yeah, definitely talk to your tutor first. I mean, I love it when my students communicate, if they drop me an email and say, oh, I've read this bit of the module. And I really enjoyed it. That's fantastic. So never be scared of contacting your tutor. That's what they're there for.

KAREN FOLEY: And of course, students are such a great support. In fact, I'm going to see my friend in France

this week, who I met at an OU tutorial about 20 years ago. And we're best of friends ever since. And there's some lovely friendships being made in the chat room as well. So don't forget your students are a great support as well. I'd like to just have a quick catch up with HJ to see some of the lovely friendships that are starting to blossom.

HJ: Yeah, it's good to just see on the chat, people are just finding things that they're mutually bonding over and helping to support each other, which is always fantastic. I think one of the things we do say though is it might not be wise to share certain details. But one thing you can do is, if you email us, StudentHub@open.ac.uk, you can email us. And we're happy to pass on details between each other, if you want to and rather keep some details safe.

But one thing I must take up with Davin, he's saying a bit of a difference is that we have no food on the table at the moment and whether or not I've stashed it. But the only food that I've got here is Brazil nuts. So I'm quite disappointed, actually. But maybe I can find something later. I don't know. There was some talk of cake earlier. But I'm not sure if we've got any at the moment.

But yeah, a lot of people saying they find the Access Modules really helpful as a springboard to their qualifications. And I think Jane just keeps saying how she's very excited to see her new module as well. And a lot of people are finding it helpful to get all this advice as well. So if you do have any questions, I'm sure all of our lovely guests would love to hear from you as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Thank you, HJ. And you're doing a sterling job on the chat as well. I see you've got two computers there, which I assume means you're doing double the work. So we'll need to get you some cake or something to keep your sugar levels up.

CARLTON WOOD: I think that's wise.

KAREN FOLEY: That is brilliant, excellent. So lots of students are very excited about their journey. And thank you very much, Anactoria and Carlton, for coming and sharing some advice there for students. I hope that's reassured you at home that it is all a learning journey. You don't have to be perfect at Level 1. And that's why the grades don't count as much at that point. And everything is nice and staggered. So if you are just starting to join the OU, there's plenty of help and support available, lots of loving tutors, lots of lovely students to talk to and connect with as you make your way through.

So thank you very much for joining us today. We're going to have a short video break now,

where we're going to take a look at the Legacy Garden. And then, we will be back to start looking at Year 1 to 2. So that is for students who've done the first year of Level 1 and are starting to get a little bit more specialised. And I'm joined by Sue Polley for that session. And we're also going to take a quick look at maths within that, so again the whole idea of where things get a little bit more technical that Carlton was talking about before. So stay with us after this short break. And we'll be back very soon.

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