

- KAREN FOLEY:** Good evening. Hello, and welcome to the Student Hub Live (re)Freshers orientation event. Now, here we've got a lot of policemen in the chat this evening. HJ, what's everyone been talking about? HJ!
- Look. I appreciate that the power naps were good, but we have had three hours off air now, so you're going to need to get up to speed with everything.
- HJ:** OK. So Sheila's joined us.
- KAREN FOLEY:** Oh good.
- HJ:** Great
- KAREN FOLEY:** [LAUGHS]
- HJ:** OK. Sorry. I didn't mean for it to turn into three hours. That tends to happen sometimes.
- KAREN FOLEY:** Now, HJ, there's some new people who've just joined us this evening because some people have jobs to do. That means they can't any of these events in the day. So I think we should just tell them briefly what all this madness is about. So this is a live online interactive event, and what makes it really special is that you guys can chat to each other. For questions, we'll pretty much try and answer any question you've got although we have categorically discovered that biscuits are not good for studying in more than one or two quantities.
- So we'll try now to answer any questions that you've got in the chat. Now you'll also see a lot of widgets, and these are like interactive tools that you can click on. So you'll see there's a map. There's a thing saying which level are you studying, which subject are you studying, how you're feeling right now. You can select what applies to you most, or if it's one of these word cloud things with three boxes, you need to put something in each box. Now, if you can only think of one or two, just check a full stop in the others, and then your results will submit.
- Now, when you do those, you will also see what everyone else is talking about at home. So it's a nice way to keep track of who is out there in real time watching live. Now, not everyone can because some people have got other things to do, and the catch up is available shortly after the event. And we've also got a packed programme of things in store for you tomorrow as well. So engage with as much as you can, check out the sessions that apply to you the most. And that we hope that you have a lot of fun in this chat.

Now, in all seriousness, HJ does a sterling job and in the chat, and he's learned today about the importance of eating bananas and having power naps when studying and about making the most use of your station. So we have been doing some very sensible things in our time today. HJ, what is the one thing you're going to pick up and do differently in this year's academic year?

HJ: I think from all the tips, it's being careful with my eating, so I think from that sport session we picked up then how important is for study, the way we think, and how we concentrate. And I think that's one thing and I really want to work on this year. But I've had lots of other tips as well about using note cards and using all the time you can studying. I've put them on my fantastic board here, and people have been sending how they've been studying, so lots of cashew nuts and some selfies as well. It's really great to see.

So if you send me some tips, which will help me in this academic year, send them to our Twitter @StudentHubLive or email StudentHub@open.ac.uk, and I'd love to see them. But I'm also a bit lonely for a minute. So I've got Sophie joining me. I'm not sure how much help she's going to be on the chat desk, but anything and everything goes in the chat. And our guests always love to see you as well, so if you're new, as we said, just pop along and say hello. And let us know what you're studying. And welcome back to everyone who we saw this morning at the other events as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Sophie needs some snacks. She's looking a bit stationary, HJ. You'll notice I've put lots of Brazil nuts and bananas, and there's some healthy options on your desk for you to choose from. And I've taken away all the Coca-Colas.

HJ: Yes, I noticed that.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, let's see how we get through tonight's programme with you on healthy snacks. We've got studying with additional needs. We're going to talk about the open programme and flexibility, a key benefit of OU study. We're then going to talk a bit about ambitious futures, which is the graduate screen, really exciting stuff. And then we're going to have a religious studies discussion, which probably won't have much to do with religion.

And then we're going to do some computer work. So we've got some quick fixes for you. So that's a key session if you are new to computing. And this is just going to give you some quick hacks that may make life a little bit easier for you when you're studying with your computer. So

in our first session, I'm delighted to be joined by Sheila Cameron.

SHEILA Hello.

CAMERON:

KAREN FOLEY: Hello, Sheila. Sheila is the chair of the Disabled Students Group. And we've often had these sessions at the Student Hub Live, and we love them because they're a really great place to be able to share lots of stuff in the chat. Now, please do do that and feel free to do that. We will read out what's relevant, but equally you may want to chat among yourselves. And I know that you've got some colleagues in the chat also haven't you, Sheila.

SHEILA Yes, they've lured the DSG committees in the chat. So hopefully they'll be able to give some answers as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Fantastic. Now, for people who haven't heard about the DSG, what are they?

SHEILA We are the Disabled Students Group, about 17% of the whole of the university, which is a good sized group. And we support any student with any additional need, whether it's an additional need that people can see or whether it's a hidden need to at all. And we're really students supporting students.

KAREN FOLEY: So it's really the voice of students with whatever a disability they may feel. And why is it important that there is a place for such a voice?

SHEILA Well, at one time when I used to study, any additional needs had to be added on whereas now everything's embedded in the new module. So if you doing a new module, you'll find an awful lot of things have been embedded, and it's not as hard then because you get PDFs and all different things that's there so that you can either take it, print it off. You can read it. You can listen to it. So whatever you need is, they will find to work round for you.

KAREN FOLEY: And it's one of these things where there were so many different complexities, depending on what disability there is, whether it's something that's seen or unseen. The Open University work very hard to try and accommodate as many of those as possible, whether, as you say, there are things like PDFs and various sorts of tools or things like building and caring for yourself during your studies. But the Open University don't know about some of those things unless students tell them. And so this is why it's really important to have a voice and to be able to feed in to the Open University so that these adjustments can be included.

SHEILA The committee feeds directly to the association and to The Open University. We do all-- lots of
CAMERON: trials. I was doing one today with computer-style robot. Fellow was down. It was very interesting. It's really in its infancy, but it shows the university has instalment what there are at the moment. They're always moving forward to make sure that everybody gets the interaction that they need whereas as you might look at a picture and I might need to somehow through my computer feel that picture, feel that thing, so they are always moving forward and they're trying to continue on.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, you're providing a platform disabled students to interact with every part of the world all of the time. And your Facebook group is a very vibrant community. Sometimes in the middle of the night, when our OU students study at very different times of the day etc., having that connection to people can feel really important. Can you share with us just briefly some of the interactions that happen in that space and why that time, that point of being accessible to people whatever time of day, really can help?

SHEILA Well, you may live in India. You're putting a comment on at 4:00 in the morning. But that's
CAMERON: during the day here whereas we try to be there as long as possible to 24/7, 365 days a week. Not every day celebrates the holidays at the same time. So to some people, what's a holiday in our country is not holiday elsewhere.

Then you get a crisis. You may wake up during the day and think [GASPS]. Oh, I forgot lesson now. I should be doing that. And just so [INAUDIBLE], take a breath. Just take your time. Tomorrow morning, or during the day, send an email to your tutors. Send an email to student support team. That can just be enough for a-- give that person a chance to think, right, I'll go back to sleep. The next morning may not even feel so bad that they don't need to do it. It. But if they do need to do it, in the back of their mind saying, right, I'm going to do because somebody else agrees with me.

KAREN FOLEY: Sheila, we asked people at home whether they consider themselves disabled, and there were three options. There was yes, no, and don't know. Should we see what that said?

SHEILA Yes, please.
CAMERON:

KAREN FOLEY: So 60% of students said yes, 27% said no, and 13% said don't know. What a very interesting response. And one would expect there to be a higher proportion of students engaging with the session because of the content. But the don't know is very, very interesting. What is

considered then a disability?

SHEILA

CAMERON:

Well, that's an interesting point in its own right isn't it? I'm sitting here in a chair. And when I first joined OU, I didn't consider myself disabled. And you might look at me and say, course you are. But I looked at a full-time job, a management job, and I could get about. Why would I class myself as disabled?

Someone else may have a heightened disability. They could be dyslexic.

They could be that a set of days they get fatigued. Nobody's going to see that. A hearing loss-- I have severe hearing problems, but nobody's going to see that. So there's lots of ways-- and I can understand the 13% that said they didn't know because I would have answered no or I don't know. But through this journey-- study, I now realise, yes, I do have additional needs. But I would actually maybe possibly still answered no.

KAREN FOLEY:

I'd like to take a look at the profile, which I know is a little bit further down our list, but people have been filling this in, Sheila. And so I'd like to touch on that before I talk about experiences as disabled students because again, we're seeing a very similar picture emerge. So let's see what people said when we said have you completed your profile? 63% said yes. So bearing in mind, we're in the 60% of people who had said that they were considering themselves disabled. And 25% say don't know. So a much higher proportion of people not quite knowing.

So could you tell us what this profile thing is because, again, it's hard to know if you fit into a category because if students don't know what's the profile is, how are they expected to know whether they've completed one? But before we talk about that, maybe you could explain why it is so important to have a profile and what is right.

SHEILA

CAMERON:

It's like everything else. The Open University calls a profile. Somebody else might call it bibliography of what-- your does and your don'ts. It just depends.

I didn't know what a profile was, and I hadn't filled it out for a year and a half. Didn't even know it existed because you go in your student home page, [INAUDIBLE] you go, oh, what it's all this about? So you don't find your profile. You haven't, in the very beginning when you're registered, checked the box that said I'm disabled. So the Open University thinks you're a not big group of students, which is over 8% that's not disabled.

KAREN FOLEY:

So a profile isn't like your home page, or there's sometimes a blog you can get and people

like, oh, I don't know what's happening with my blog because it can be confusing. People may have filled in their profiles here, and they've maybe added a picture. But this is something different. This is directly related to whether you declare some sort of disability.

SHEILA Which goes to the Open University.

CAMERON:

KAREN FOLEY: Right.

SHEILA So you've got-- you fill it in. You can get help. You can phone up, and someone will help you. I
CAMERON: got my [INAUDIBLE] through phone data because I'm in Scotland [INAUDIBLE] my accent. And I phoned in but-- and the lady was very good. She talked me through it. She asked me questions. I gave her answers, and she made out for me. And she sent it to me and said, this is what you were meaning. It says the additional needs you need here where we need to tell the truth to the x, y, and zed. And different-- piece of a apartment that you're using. And then she put on my profile for me. And you don't need to just do it once. You can update it.

If, unfortunately, you become unwell and it's even for a short time, you put on a profile. So you may not see you've got additional needs. You may not see it disabled. But you've broke your arm, and that's your writing arm. So in the meantime, temporarily put it on your profile, I am having trouble with x, y, and zed. That will let the tutors know and that will help them-- they'll realise that oh, you might need an extra week for a TMA or something like that. So it's not always the fact that you're a disabled student for your profile. It can be any student that uses a--

KAREN FOLEY: What about things that fluctuate, things like maybe depression or anxiety, things that may be triggered off some sort of incident and things that you might want to say I don't want to be in a depressed category, but right now I'm really struggling with this. And it's having an impact on my ability to sleep and concentrate and study. Is that something that people should phone about?

SHEILA You should put anything on your profile that affects your study.

CAMERON:

KAREN FOLEY: Now, why should you do this? What's in it for people who do it?

SHEILA If you do that, then you get support. Now, you can't get support or you can't support you if you
CAMERON: don't know about it. We're not Harvard University. If you're studying in front of your tutor and

that tutor is looking at you, and they're looking at something going, well, they're normally quite cheery. And they're normally-- that's their normal. Next thing, hmm, I may have to rework with them. But you've never ever been in a tutorial face-to-face one. You've only ever done online. You don't get that same interaction unless you write something down and tell someone. So it helps.

KAREN FOLEY: So this profile-- I want to talk about who does it because I don't want everyone phoning this nice lady in Scotland because it's a little bit misleading. [LAUGHS]

So basically people will phone their student support team and get referred wouldn't they?

SHEILA A nice gentleman you know.

CAMERON:

KAREN FOLEY: It might be. They might be somewhere else. But they phone their student support team, who will then be able to assist them with this. And they need to check the box that says they have a disability and talk about what that is and either complete it themselves or someone can help them do it. And then they got this profile, which is something that can change over time and that they're tutor can see and that stays with the student throughout the modules that they're studying.

So it's useful for the tutor to be able to say, OK, I know x, y, or zed. So I might then blah. So I know for me, when I'm teaching if students say they've got anxiety or depression, I might contact them and say, hey, do you want to know what's going to happen at the tutorial before you come? Or I might talk to them about the fact that the venue is accessible, and I'll say, don't worry. There's parking right at the front.

So things like that can really help people to take-- it's OK. I don't have to feel anxiety because sometimes not knowing how far the parking is from the tutorial venue and whether or not there's a lift or whether or not you're going to have this massive long quiz in the tutorial can really help put your mind at ease.

SHEILA Even the fact that you as a tutor have contacted them, that can be enough for that person and
CAMERON: feel less anxious and just enough for [INAUDIBLE] come to your tutorial.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes.

SHEILA So, yes, it makes a big difference for myself. I get the information beforehand so that I can use

CAMERON: my screen reader. So that I'm not sitting here and seeing [INAUDIBLE] everybody else doing. So it makes a big difference.

KAREN FOLEY: Do you know I had a student once, and they hadn't filled in a profile. And I had all the printouts in 12-point fonts. And I knew nothing. She came, and she said, oh, I could have really done with this bigger. And if I'd known, I could have done that, but I had no idea, and it made it quite difficult. So it's really useful to know those things so that you can raise them in advance and also perhaps even get in contact with your tutor and say, hey, these are the sorts of things that could really help me. So maybe not just relying exclusively on that profile but connecting with your tutor and talking about how you could be enabled to engage with your studies to your full potential.

SHEILA
CAMERON: I-- before I start each module, once they manoeuvre the chairs because to be in the way if you don't and sometimes it's a week that it opens before you find out. And that first email that comes on saying, hello, I'm your tutor x, y and zed, I do send back. And I say, now I do have a profile. Very, very-- three four lines just so that they will then go to and read it more in depth. And it makes a big difference. And you feel as though you're engaging with that person and then more faintly than not.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes. Yes. Now, you mentioned before that you didn't initially consider yourself disabled, but I wanted to talk about some of the experiences that some students might have who do consider themselves disabled, partly from your work with the Disabled Students Group. So what are some of the things-- you've mentioned before hidden disabilities, dyslexia, mental health conditions, and physical disabilities. Is there such a thing as an experience, as a disabled student or are there things that are common among certain groups of people that might be worth bearing in mind for some people who are new to the Open University.

SHEILA
CAMERON: The biggest common is anxiety. You don't have to be officially depressed to be anxious, especially freshers and first years. It's brand new. You've only for got that student home page, and you're going, oh, my. Did I do the right thing? And in the first few weeks, we got a lot that. Have I done the right thing, especially students that haven't got the Disabled Students Allowance through.

You haven't got all the equipment in place. You haven't a start already. And you feel as if all these other people seen in these charts. I've reached week 3, and I've done this, and I've done that. And you're still struggling through your first week. At the beginning, we got an awful

lot of people saying have I done the right thing. And they just need so somebody, yes, you will get there. Just take your time and a lot better time and a lot better time.

KAREN FOLEY: I guess I think most students might feel like that, especially when they're brand new, because you do think can I really do it. Everyone seems a lot better than me. And have a bitten off more than I can chew. And I've got a TMA, so I'm really anxious about that. So there is that sort of level of anxiety and uncertainty irrespective.

But students will meet other people, and I guess one of the things that I'm very conscious of whether somebody has a disability or not is that a lot of people think I'm the only one who is blah. And so often I get to tutorials, and everyone so focused on themselves in terms of how anxious they're feeling. They don't realise that actually most of the people in the room are feeling anxious. And it's being sociable and kind and helpful that gets you through this. And I guess this is what the DSG group do is provide the support for students.

SHEILA
CAMERON: We have a lot of students that never get to a tutorial even an online tutorial is too hard for them. They want to study, and they want experience. But they can't directly engage in a very, very safe and tight experience of the DSG because we are a closed group. And it's like-minded people. So someone else will go that happened to me six months ago. That happened to me three months ago. And they realise they're not alone. They may be studying two separate things. Doesn't matter what you're studying. It's experience that is similar. And that alone helps. And so you're up during the night and there's somebody else just saying, yes, I'm here as well. You don't feel quite so alone. And that helps, too.

KAREN FOLEY: No, it does. It really does. Let's take a trip to the Hot Desk and see what HJ's up to. Hope he's not sleeping again. HJ.

HJ: No, I've learnt my lesson on sleeping. Devin's asking whether a cheeseburger counts as a health snack. Even with sesame seeds, I don't think Ben from the sports faculty will agree with that. But he does say the OU are great at supporting people in the way that they support Devin with his additional needs. And we've got lots of people from the DSG joining us in the chat as well. So Colin's on the DSG committee, and I think Megan as well joined us. I might get some names mixed up.

But they're just telling us how great the DSG is and how supportive the OU is. And Natalie's just reassured us that the information that we give to the OU is only seen by staff and tutors and used to help us. It's not for anything else. And a lot of people say-- Colin said always good

to communicate with your tutor and just let them know. And Joe's actually got a really good question.

And Joe says, this may sound like a joke-- I don't think it's a joke because anything goes in chat-- it's actually a really good question. But is age relevant to additional needs? I think I understand this because older people-- a family member of mine has arthritis being older. When I started with the OU, I started with the young applicants scheme, so I got additional support there as well. So it goes both ways. But I think that's a great question.

KAREN FOLEY: What would you say?

SHEILA
CAMERON: No, age doesn't-- a mature student-- that's what I call myself when you're 60 plus. I'm a mature student. But we have students 18, 19, 20. If a student needs additional help, whether it's short term or long term, age shouldn't make any difference. And it doesn't. And I've never seen a situation that don't universally would.

And that is why-- and what we used to call we were studying in the ear-- I was studying the 1990s with Open University with [INAUDIBLE]. And it was hard then, and we didn't get any help. Now, there's a lot of help, but you have to inform people. Ask. That's the biggest thing. If you don't ask, then they don't realise you're struggling. No matter whether you've got additional needs or not, you've got to ask.

KAREN FOLEY: But the thing about age, I guess it's thinking about the symptoms or things that accompany that. So it might be, like HJ was saying, arthritis. There might be conditions that are associated with getting older that one could identify. So when do things-- we asked people at home do you have additional needs. And this was very interesting actually because, again, we've got our don't know category.

And this is probably changing at the moment, but we have 33% saying yes, 40% saying no, and 20% saying that they don't know. So, again, that percentage about whether or not people have additional needs is quite high. I mean How do you decide what counts?

SHEILA
CAMERON: That is very difficult. I didn't realise as much counted as it does. If you do decide to go down the way of getting an assessment, it's fantastic what you find out. They're lot of things that are going to help you. But if I don't know what's there to help me, I don't know. So finding out from another student because you've got that student support, and a student will say, well, I had that problem but when I went on at OU, they adapted, and they sent me a large print. And if

you ask, it will happen.

Does help-- oh, by the way, you can actually get your core books in a form of Daisy or a form that you can listen to for another student. And I go, no, I didn't know that. No, that might just be enough for them, so it's very difficult because no two people even with the same problem-- say they do have arthritis-- one person, it won't affect the studies, but we're certain in someone else it does. So you can't even say, oh, other [INAUDIBLE] has got arthritis should get x, y, and zed. It doesn't work like that unfortunately.

KAREN FOLEY: And often there are so many things that are happening in relation to each other, it's very rare that you've got one nice clean-cut condition, like you said, that can be universally applied. OK, so there are various ways that people can help. The DSG is one of them, and you've mentioned the Disabled Students Allowance and processing with the whole idea of assessment. But briefly before you tell us about the Disabled Students Group in terms of how to get in touch, what are the other things that people can do to get support as students, things like societies, clubs?

SHEILA
CAMERON: Well, there's a lot of societies, depending on the type of faculty you're in. Sometimes you're inundated with societies. You have to pick and choose because obviously it depends how much time you've got.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes. Let's just pop over to the Hot Desk.

HJ: We've had a great comment when we're talking on support, and Natalie's asking about mentioning Nightline if you can tell us more about that as well.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, Nightline is brilliant, especially like you say for those early hours in the morning.

SHEILA
CAMERON: Nightline is brilliant.

Any student-- you don't have to be a disabled student. Any student--

KAREN FOLEY: Awake at night. [LAUGHS]

SHEILA
CAMERON: We've gave the link. The link-- HJ'll have the link. We gave the link, and any student can lift the phone. It's not quite like Samaritans, but it's similar. If you have any sort of anxiety, it's students supporting and doing it voluntary. So they've been there. They've understood the

anxiety and all the problems.

And, yes, they may say, well, I can't deal with that, but see if you do x, y, and zed. And go to the OU or go to whatever. They'll give you the support-- the brilliant during in the night. And all TM time they're on.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And HJ's put the link for that in the chat as well. And there are other sorts of ways of student supporting the students and volunteering, etc. that you could either connect with or even volunteer yourself for.

SHEILA
CAMERON: Yes. And we also have community meet-ups, some of which are online and some which are direct. We have a lot of chats online. And, again, we meet up with students. And then next week, we're having a team talk to do with the mental health. Are we in this day. And we having one in Scotland near me. Because we have also universities and colleges that are twined with Open University, So we have buildings within those facilities that we can use.

So we've got a room in my local college, and we're meeting up with anybody that wants to come. But then at night, we're also have an online one for the students who can't go whether it's because of a disability, whether it's because of family circumstances, there's lots of reasons why you can't go and got you these things. You might wanting to come and join us at night. And it's just to give anyone a tea and talk-- bring your cup of tea, take your biscuit or your cake if you want one.

KAREN FOLEY: Or your banana!

SHEILA
CAMERON: Or your banana!

KAREN FOLEY: A healthy snack.

SHEILA CAMERON: Get your cosy [INAUDIBLE]. HJ maybe has one or two too many, and that's why you fell asleep. Get your cosy. Get your laptop or your iPod and come and talk to us. And you'll find that there's somebody out there somewhere. But you also have the all year. There's always student service support Monday to Saturday. Unfortunately, not on a Sunday.

KAREN FOLEY: No. No, they have to rest on a Sunday so have their big power nap of the day. So there's lots and lots of different options, and I know that HJ's putting the links as the members of the disabled group in the chat, but for people who are watching this on capture who don't see all

the chat that's going on, just tell us briefly about the Facebook page and how people can connect with you and find you. Not you! Or that nice lady [INAUDIBLE] generally speaking.

SHEILA

CAMERON:

We have the Open University Students Association. And if you just go to your browser-- I'm getting good at these words-- browser, and you put in Open University Students Association, I'll take you to that link. And when you go to that link, on that link is micro-link to us. And then you click and now. You get that information. I know now it shows you how to join. But it's a close script.

And that makes a big difference to a lot of people that once you've joined, all you-- no one knows who they are in that group. And And students that are in that group supporting students in that group because some people will declare that they've got a disability even to the family. Some people won't. Even their family and friends might know how much they're struggling. We wouldn't take that out. So it's stays in that closed group.

KAREN FOLEY:

Excellent. Sheila, thank you for coming along today and for filling us in. And I hope you found that useful at home. And I know there's been a lot of discussion in the chat, so thank you also for all of that. The OU Student Association are coming on tomorrow. So they'll be involved in a couple of sessions and have one on their own. So that's all about societies and ways that you can get involved in those areas as well.

But stay tuned for the rest of the programme tonight. We're going to show you a short video break, which is about the Open Programme. So we've got a session on science and maths. And then, we're going to be talking about the Open Programme and flexibility with Peter Taylor. So we'll see you in a few minutes.