

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back to the Student Hub Live Induction Event for Sport and Fitness. Well, I hope you're all having a good afternoon. This session is all about the importance of your tutor, one of the key people you're going to meet in your OU studies.

Now we hope that there are a lot of new students out there. There may well be continuing students as well. Tell us how you have found your experience with your tutor, if you're a current student. What did you get out of them that really helped you? How did you make initial contact?

Maybe you had some additional requirements that you might have wanted to communicate with your tutor. So please share your ideas with our new students who are out there.

For those of you who are new, you probably haven't been allocated your tutor yet. We're going through a very complex process of matching all the students to tutors right now. But don't worry, that will all be sorted out before the module starts. You'll get a notification of who your tutor is. And I've got some here today.

So I'm going to reintroduce you to Helen, who you've just met, and also to Ola, who is a tutor on many of the sport and fitness modules. Thank you for coming along.

I wondered if we could talk a little bit about the student journey, because we wanted to cover how it all works. Students register. They get sent some stuff, maybe. They might get access to an online platform, the virtual learning environment. They'll get their tutor details. They'll get their tutorial details.

And then all of a sudden, the day of module start comes and often nothing happens. There's no sort of fanfare. There's no big event. People need to make their own way and connect with their learning materials, with their tutor, and often with other students.

So tell us how this all works. And what do our new students need to keep an eye out for? And also, bearing in mind, we've got a lot of continuing students as well. Are there any ideas of things they might do differently this year? But first, brand new students. What happens? How does it all work?

HELEN:

OK, well, I say that there's a- first of all, I would say, there's a bit of a myth, I think, that we expect students nowadays to know exactly what they're doing with media, because there's so much social media, as we were just talking about, that there's this expectation that everyone is media savvy.

And I think that you definitely need to make time to become familiar with a new digital learning environment, because it's not something that you're automatically going to understand. I think it takes a bit of time to familiarise yourself with a different platform. And I think that that's a lot of time it takes to begin with.

And I think that just going on there with no, necessarily, a particular agenda, but just gaining a sense of familiarity with the platform, and figuring out where things are, figuring out what it is. Go in there a couple of times just to gain that sense of familiarity. That's what I would say. That's the first important thing that you should do.

Yeah. I agree with what Helen had said to us, because there is an element of trial and error where students really need to go in, click on all the links within the--

KAREN FOLEY:

They can't break them, can they, right?

OLA:

They can't break them. They can't break them. Pick on all the links you see. Take the journey where it goes to so you always bring yourself back. Always bring yourself back to the student home page, because your student home page, it always takes you back to your original module, or whatever, which ever module you have enrolled on. And I think that's the first key thing a student should do.

Another thing a student should do is also-- again, this sounds like a- they really need to check their emails. The reason why we say that is the first initial contact you most likely will get from your tutor will be a welcome email.

Now some tutors tend to phone. I don't tend to phone students straight away, because I'm not yet sure if they're happy with getting phone calls, because I've done it before. I phoned a student, going, who's that? And I'm going, it's your tutor. I don't like being called.

So I tend to just try, OK, send an email first. And you need to check your junk email, because sometimes some of the emails go to the junk email folder.

So I would say, between now and up to the second week of October, check your junk emails

and also your normal email folder. And you will see any emails from- if it says .ac.uk, you know it's from your tutor.

You'll have a heading. Most likely, it will say, A Welcome Email from Your Tutor. And information about how the tutor will contact you, what times your tutorials are on will also be in that email.

Also, another thing students need to first thing to do really early is go into the tutorial group forum, where they will also get an initial welcome message from the tutor welcoming them into the module as well. And also, that's where they will also meet the other students as well. And they can actually have what you would call an informal chat. I always tend to call the tutorial group forum a student common room.

Go in there. Say hello. Just say, hello, my name is Ola. And you most likely will get a reply from another student. And that's how you tend to build up the rapport, or whatever you want to call it, communication with the rest of the students.

KAREN FOLEY: Now for some students, especially new students, there's this whole idea of who's out there that can sometimes lead us to be a bit shy, because if we don't know who's out there, how many students the tutor has, or even how many students are in that forum, you can think, well, I don't really know what's appropriate.

And there's this whole social thing that we get with meeting people face-to-face that can be really, really wonderful, because we can sense all of these things. But tell us what the ratios are for students and tutors and what people might expect, because sometimes we have tutor group forums which are often just for that cohort.

And sometimes we might have a cluster forum where there might be more people. And then people, if they really want to chat, can go off and join all sorts of cafes and things that they can connect with and talk to students about lots and lots of other things. So what is this ratio? And how do students gauge what's appropriate?

OLA: OK, for the tutor group forums, now from my experience, as a sports and fitness lecturer the group size normally is between 16 to 25 pupils to a tutor.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. So you can get a nice relationship, yeah.

OLA: It's never that-- no, I think the largest I've had is about 28. So it's normally about between 20

and then 16.

HELEN: It's similar with me, because I'm an associate lecturer for a different department in psychology, which I know some of you are doing multiple modules. And I know that not all students are doing two sports modules. They might be doing a sports module and a business module or a sports module and a psychology module. So I'm one of the tutors for the psychology module. And I have a similar number, 15 to 20.

OLA: So it's a quite nice number. It's actually a good number for the tutor as well, so therefore, they can interact, even, I will say, more intensely with the students, than a large- you think about the brick and mortar universities where you have 120 people in a tutorial room. And you're thinking, OK, I'm just going to give a lecture and then walk out. And nobody actually- you never gain any kind of real rapport with your students. So it tends to be that kind of number.

Now you do have the cluster forums. And if I am correct, the E117 module this year, most likely, it's just going to have a cluster tutorial forum, which may mean that you will have a lot of others, because that means you've got a cluster of maybe 5 tutorial groups, which you could be thinking about a hundred students.

KAREN FOLEY: The tutors don't need to worry about how many people are there. It could be busy. It could not be busy. But one thing is for sure, if no one talks, it'll be quiet. So what sort of things might you encourage students to say about themselves on a forum then, whichever one they manage to connect to?

HELEN: Well, when I send out that email, I actually encourage students to send me back something about why they're interested in the module, what their educational background is, and what they're hoping to get out of it. It might be that they do something similar with a forum, so something really simple like that.

KAREN FOLEY: Introduce yourself, maybe.

HELEN: It doesn't have to be a big, long essay. It could be quite short, as long and short as you want, really. I would definitely try and use the forums early on to try and get, again, a sense of familiarity, just to try things out, really. You're not going to do anything wrong. And no one's going to be sitting on the other end of that forum laughing or anything like that. They're just probably thinking, great! Someone else has said something. So I can say something as well.

OLA: I would just like to add to that, that one of the things, I tell students that, look, if you're thinking

about it, then I bet you there's about 20 other students thinking about that same thing. So if all of you don't say anything, then nobody says something.

So just take that- be brave and just say, well, I mean, say hello. My name is so. I do this. This is why I want to be at the OU. This is why I'm studying, And that builds up the theme. And people start to reply back to it. Me

I can honestly say, there's never been- I've been a lecturer now for nearly-- this is my seventh year. For the start of most modules, you have a very, very big intake of people actually saying on the module forum, this is why I'm here. This is what I'm doing. And they tend to say that quite a lot.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh, really. Well, we found we had lots of chat. And Jeremy, who's a tennis coach, and [? Meireles, ?] actually, have both been allocated their tutors. But the tutor hasn't emailed them yet. I've been refreshing my page to see when my students are allocated, and I haven't gotten them.

But sometimes students will get that notification before the tutor does. Ironically, [? Meireles, ?] is following his tutor on Twitter. But the tutor hasn't contacted him yet. So it's good to be out there with your social media. But what sort of things might happen? Is it inappropriate to contact your tutor to get the details first?

OLA: Not at all. I've had-- I'm one of the tutors who has been allocated my tutor group. But at the same time, we've got an email saying, students are still going to be added. So what you don't want to do is send out this mass email. And then and then a week later, you've forgotten that those five people haven't been contacted. So we're waiting- I'm waiting till maybe the end of this week. Then most likely, I will see that there's no more additional students allocated. And then they will get an email.

I've decided to do something. I did it last year, which actually, I do a YouTube video. So I video myself saying hello, because just one of the key things I found out is that students, even though they get an email from you, they still don't know who you are. And I think students do physically want to see their module tutor if they can.

So last year, I did a YouTube video. And I sent it out. And I got some very good response from it. So I'm going to do that this year again.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, unless some of your students have just met you now.

OLA: So there you go.

KAREN FOLEY: [LAUGHING]

OLA: So I'm going to do that this year again, send it out. And they will have that embedded within their email. And also, I'm in the tutor group forum. So they can actually physically know who I am.

And you never know. You might bump into a student and go, oh, I know you. You're my tutor. And I go, oh, OK. I've always said to students that, if anybody can say they meet in a town, you get an extra 5% for saying that you know.

KAREN FOLEY: [LAUGHING] That is illegal. Right. Now-- [LAUGHING]

HELEN: I think it's important to understand that tutors have different understandings and expectations of their students. So one tutor might be giving a video. But another tutor might not feel comfortable doing that either. So they might be saying, I feel more comfortable receiving emails from people. I will respond more quickly if you send an email, as opposed to a phone call. Or I might be better off phoning me during these times. And usually, a tutor will tell you when.

KAREN FOLEY: Because tutors often have other jobs.

OLA: Yes.

KAREN FOLEY: And so they work part-time for The Open University on a module. They have their students. They're often doing other things as well. So normally, I think we normally set around two or so days that you would expect- most churches will respond a lot more quickly. And as you say, they're all very, very different.

So the important thing is learning how to work with your tutor, bearing in mind, you've got two individuals going on here. So the tutor might send an email out saying, this, this, and this. The student might send an email out saying, this, this, and this. And then you meet and talk.

And what sorts of things do you find in your teaching tends to happen that make those relationships good? Bear in mind, not all students want a lot of contact. And some of my best students have never spoken to me.

HELEN: Hmm.

OLA: It's a very good point, actually. It does depend on both student and tutor to try to- not trying to compromise, but build up an effective working relationship. So like I said, with the initial email sent out, there are pointers where you say, these are the best times to contact me and how to contact me.

I do know, as you were saying, there are some tutors who don't like to be contacted by phone, who are quite happy doing the emails. Some students also don't want to be contacted by email and want to be contacted by phone. So you do have to find a way to find out how you want to contact the students and how the students can contact you.

But I also will say to students that they need to not so much expect, but need to be very wary in a sense that, as you were saying, not all the OU lecturers do have second jobs. And the issue of today is that people expect an immediate response to either a text, or phone call, or email. And it's unrealistic, because the tutor may actually not be at that desk at the time.

So yeah, if you have sent an email, you're in the middle of doing your homework. And you've picked up on something and are thinking, oh, I'd really like to speak to my tutor. You've emailed her. And the humour is- you explain that I need to get an instant reply, because I'm doing my homework now. But it doesn't really work that way.

KAREN FOLEY: No, I mean, you guys are probably out for a run, or swimming lessons.

[LAUGHTER]

You can't text and run. Although, Jeremy is going to go and find his tutor on Twitter. Is this a good idea? I mean, I know we've been talking about social media. But they'll probably just get a retweet. [LAUGHS]

OLA: Not all of us are on Twitter.

HELEN: No.

OLA: In the sports department, I know a few of us who are on Twitter. And I know a few of us who are not, who don't do social media, just because it's not one of their things to do.

KAREN FOLEY: It's a better way, I guess, of collating your information and your interests and things as well.

HELEN:

Something I found really helpful with students in building up a rapport is actually when I've given the feedback on their first assignment and they know what then my expectations are really about how I'm marking it. And I think that the type of feedback students find really helpful is constructive in how they can improve on the next one.

And I think once they realise what it is they need to work on for the next one, and they have that first one under the way, they get, oh, I know where I am going now. I know what my tutor wants from me. And I know how to get better. And I know how I'm going to improve. And I think that that's one of the key things that I found has built a really good relationship with my students.

And as well, I'd also say as well, that tutors, when we're talking about tutors not always working constantly, with the weekends, they don't actually count. So if you're handing in an assignment, and it says 10 days, that's actually 10 working days.

So don't expect your tutors to be around over the weekends all the time. Some are and some aren't. So it's just about understanding that tutors are people just like you are. And we do the same back. So we know that you've got lives. And you've got other modules. You've got families, and things like that.

KAREN FOLEY:

But the one thing tutors do often have in common is they do care about the students. And often, the reason that they're teaching for The Open University is because they love the idea of lifelong learning. And they love the idea of enabling people to really achieve something. So they do tend to be really helpful in whatever way they can be and work with students.

I wanted to ask you a little bit about tutorials, because this is another place that students can meet their tutors, be it online or at a face-to-face tutorial. And again, once you're allocated your tutor, you will get a list of tutorials. You can book them into your study calendar so that you will then have the link in your study calendar so you won't forget to go.

So there are a range of things that can happen. Now tell our new students what tends to happen at these tutorials. And let's start off with the online ones, which are in the online rooms, pretty much like this, but with not so much TV. Ben won't like that. [LAUGHS]

OLA:

Yeah, depending on the tutor, most tutors tend to deliver their tutorial based on the TMA that is forthcoming.

KAREN FOLEY: The Tutor Marked Assignment, which is what every student wants to focus on.

OLA: OK. So how many slides are to be presented. And it's literally based on that TMA. So the learning outcomes will be to give the students a bit more extra information, a plan on how to write their essay, or whatever the TMA has asked them to do.

There might be some study skills in between there. So we might give them some extra information on referencing skills, how to write the essay, double-sided space and all that kind of formatting of the Word document. And then give them the information of actually when to submit it, how to submit it, and when they should expect feedback by. And that's normally how the tutorial will go.

KAREN FOLEY: Now these are optional. And students can choose to come or not, as the case may be. Some of them are recorded. Some of them aren't. And really, as you say, it depends on the individual tutor.

But the one thing they are amazing at is creating a space, because there's nothing ultimately that you couldn't read about on your own in your book. And in the assessment guidance, there's going to be a clear indication of what's expected of you. But the thing I love, and I think that students found so useful is being able to say, hey, this is an hour out of my time. And I'm just going to focus on what is required.

And sometimes hearing someone say something helps you prioritise. Actually, I'd read that. But really, I can see how why that bit is more important than that bit, even though they looked the same when I first looked at them. So tell us how you help shape students' expectations of what is in this assignment and how they could do well.

OLA: One thing I have tried to do is, essentially, show them a good, a bad, and an accident essay, and not so much the whole of it, just snapshots of essays. So giving them saying, OK, this is especially- so for example, let's say the question was for you to discuss the importance of Brexit. I'm just using that as an example, which is not very good.

KAREN FOLEY: Everyone goes, phew, thank goodness we're doing sport and fitness. [LAUGHING]

OLA: So you see it breaks down. [LAUGHS]

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

KAREN FOLEY: [LAUGHING]

OLA: So you might bring out just a few paragraphs from the study material that is emphasising the importance of it and saying, look, we don't want you- again, this is an issue-- one of the key things that we talk about with students is the study skills and in terms of plagiarism. So this is not about cutting, copy, and pasting from the study material into your-- it's for you to read the material, listen to the tutorial, the tutor. And also, then try and rephrase this information in your own words.

And one of the key things I tell students is that it's not about writing big words. That's never- this is not an English language course. We're in a sports and fitness course. It's for us to read what you say. Do you understand the basic concept of what we've asked you to write about? That's the key thing students need to really understand.

Your referencing skills will get better as you go along. One of the things that students tend to- they'll say, oh, I'm really scared about referencing. Don't worry about referencing yet. If you haven't been there in education for quite a while, it's going to take you a while to get into it. We will support you in doing that. We will give you feedback in that. We can signpost you.

And one of the things that we do, we tend to send students to the library online to say, look, there are some seminars going on. And we also do some very good referencing skills tutorials as well that we send to them via the tutor group forum as well. So referencing, you will build as you go along. Even your writing skills, you will build as you go along.

I will say, it's very unrealistic for a student to think that they're going to come in in the first essay and get high scores. Just don't worry about that yet. First, read the material. Can you understand the concept? And then write that in your own words. And as Helen has said, the feedback from us will then help you to build up on those skills as you go through.

KAREN FOLEY: I wanted to cover the other sources of support, because whilst the tutor is the great source of support and often the first point of contact, and should be, in particular for academic instances, anything to do with the module, there's also other people out there who are brilliant at supporting our students.

And I wanted to draw people;s attention to the Help and Support section. I mean, we've mentioned referencing on a top popular topic. But the library are incredibly supportive at helping students to do this. So let's just show you the Help and Support from the Library

Service and how they can show you the referencing guidelines and how you can also join some of their online sessions about using library resources.

And also, I wanted to talk about the Student Support team. Sometimes tutors may refer students to the Student Support team. And sometimes students my phone up and say, actually, I'm having trouble with my time management or I've had this change in circumstances. I'm thinking about increasing or decreasing my workload. So they might speak to the Student Support team. Briefly, why are they important contacts? And when should students talk to them?

HELEN:

I think it's really important to keep communicating with your tutor. And sometimes it can be the hardest to communicate with your tutor when you are experiencing those problems, because you are so busy and you are so bogged down with missing your own deadlines that you've created to try and keep you on track for some of the assignments, and things like that.

But I'd say, as soon as you feel that you are starting to fall behind, communicate with your tutor first off. And then, of course, your tutor can give you some guidance on where you can access more support. And if the tutor advises that you get in touch with Student Support, I would definitely recommend that you take up that support. That's what it's there for.

We've had instances in the module where we've seen students at the end of the module having fallen behind and not said anything. And you can see that they've done really well up to a point. And then one of their assignments just completely, radically looks different.

And if they had accessed Support, they wouldn't be in that situation. Or if they submitted mitigating circumstances, even at the end of the module, they might be in a position where they could gain those marks back, or something. Or we could do something about it.

But if you don't speak out, if you don't communicate and you don't ask for help, then we can't help you. And even if you haven't asked for help and you put in mitigating circumstances for something that's completely unavoidable or something you couldn't escape from- because lives happen. These things happen in students' lives, and we will understand that- then we can't do anything about it. So I think the key thing is really communication.

KAREN FOLEY:

I wanted to also briefly talk about online tutorials, because Sarah said that she really enjoys going to face-to-face tutorials. And I know we spoke about the online ones. But the face-to-face ones are also brilliant. Although, Meireles is overseas. So he's going to have to make a

deal with the online tutorials.

They're a great way to connect with other students, as well as your tutor. So briefly, do you think they're a good thing? And which would students go to, depending on what they're interested in and their time, et cetera? How would you recommend students make those decisions about where to invest?

HELEN: I think that if you're a nervous person, then the OU-- oh, it's not OU Live, is it? It's Adobe Now so--

OLA: Adobe Connect. [CHUCKLES]

HELEN: Adobe Connect, which I've been really happy with, actually. It's quite accessible. I think that that's quite a good way for students to get involved in a tutorial, because you can sit back. And if you are nervous about, take for example, you've had some time out. And you're a bit nervous about saying something- not that anyone does say anything silly, but if you are nervous about saying something silly- you can write in the chat box and ask questions.

Or you can- the tutor will engage you in a way that you're not visibly exposing yourself, so to speak. And you're not making yourself as vulnerable as if you were at a face-to-face tutorial.

And the tutor will engage you. So for example, you can use lots of little gadgets. You can say, OK, put your hand up if you agree with this. Or you can take part in a poll. So there's lots of different ways you can engage in the Adobe Connect online tutorials.

So I wouldn't say that- I would say they're just different. Of course, the tutorials are face-to-face. They're kind of like your traditional face-to-face interactions. But they're quite good to get to know the people. And often, I find that students that come along to the face-to-face ones are more interested in just connecting with other people and finding out who's on the course and how they're getting on. It's not necessarily one's better than the other. I would say that they're both different for different purposes.

KAREN FOLEY: But ultimately, they will enhance your learning. And they're a great way to connect with other people who can be very supportive in your studies.

OK, well, I'm afraid that's all we've got time for Helen and Ola. But that's been a wonderful introduction to the virtual learning environment. We've covered tutorials. We've covered the importance of your peers in learning. So we've got through an awful lot

Meanwhile, the talk has turned to food again. And the one question I did want to just put to you before we go is, does the brain burn more calories than the body? Because marshmallows are apparently a topic of conversation. And I often find that when I'm working really, really, really hard, and maybe I've got a jar of nuts on my desk, of Brazil nuts, I end up eating a lot. And I get really ravenous the more I think, compared to when I'm exercising. So does the brain burn more calories than the body?

HELEN: Brain food. What do you say, Ola?

KAREN FOLEY: You don't know.

[LAUGHTER]

What's your best brain food then? What would you recommend students eat while studying?

HELEN: I think what you were saying about healthy snacks. Of course, we're going to say healthy snacks.

OLA: Brazil nuts is fine.

KAREN FOLEY: Brazil nuts. OK, there we are, not marshmallows, not sugar.

OLA: No more marshmallows

[LAUGHTER]

HELEN: Ain't diving into a marshmallow?

KAREN FOLEY: No, for sure. OK, excellent. Well, thank you very much for that session.

OK, so I hope that you are able to connect with your tutor. If you've been allocated your tutor, why not send them an email? Let them know who you are, what you're studying, what you're hoping for from the module, and maybe how it's best to work with you. And I'm sure they would be delighted to hear from you.

They probably haven't got your details yet. So it's probably not that they're waiting. Or they may be being organised and sending out the group email when everyone is settled in.

Right. We are now going to show you a short video which is going to be *The Legacy Garden*. And HJ has put some links for the Student Support team and the Library into the chat. So do

pick those up if you haven't already. They're also on the Resources page of the Student Hub Live website, where incidentally, there is a lot more information that will be very useful for both this session and your overall studies.

So we're going to look at *The Legacy Garden*. And then we're going to come back and have a look at this app that's really crucial in E117. It's fantastic. So join me in a few minutes to learn more.

[MUSIC PLAYING]