

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to the Student Hub Live. Well, we've covered an awful lot in the last two days, but one of the things that's been on everyone's mind is where their tutor was and what to say to them. And so I'm joined by Matt Staples and Georgina Blakeley, who are going to do our tutor Q&A.

Now, we've had lots of questions coming through. No question is too simple. And we've heard an awful lot. But that's always something that if it's on your mind, someone else will want to know. So we want to talk about the importance of your tutor relationship. There are a lot of new level one students here who might think, I don't know what this tutor is and I don't know how they're going to help me in my studies. So this session should hopefully answer all of those questions.

But Claudia and HJ are in the chats to collate all of your questions and put them to our guests.

HJ, where have you been?

HJ: I was just getting some biscuits for-- weeks thinks we should have a cake and biscuit club. So, yes. No power napping.

[LAUGHTER]

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. You'll see a couple of widgets. And so we'd like to know, do you know who your tutor is yet? And have you contacted your tutor yet? So there's two options-- yes or no. Fill those in by selecting the widget that you want to vote on. Click yes or no, and then submit it to send. And of course, put your questions in the chat and Claudia and HJ will ask us those.

Now, Matt and Georgina. Matt, you're the current chair of DD102, Introducing the Social Sciences. And Georgia, you were the chair of DD102 before you went off to be the Director of Teaching. So you've both got an awful lot of experience in terms of new students coming to the Open University. And also about the importance of the tutor relationship. Why did you want to run this session right now for our students who are just getting ready for their studies?

MATT STAPLES: Well, I suppose for me the first few weeks of the module are the most important. And I can't really overestimate the relationship and the importance the relationship between the tutor and the student. I often think it can be the make or break. You know, getting that first contact made. Really engaging with the tutor in all the different ways, thinking about how can I make

best use of the tutor is for me one of the key questions that I think students need to be asking themselves as part of preparation for the module.

KAREN FOLEY: So could we go back to basics for all the new students who might not know what a tutor is or even how many students the tutor looks after? What does this relationship look like?

MATT STAPLES: OK. I mean, to different students it can look slightly differently, I guess, depending upon how you engage with the module. I mean, on DD102 and on lots of the level 1 social science modules you'll get an email and you'll get a telephone number, and you'll get a form where you can engage with the tutor, the cluster forum, plus a tutor forum in most cases as well. And then they'll be face to face. So there's lots of different ways you can engage with them.

KAREN FOLEY: Gosh, that's a lot to keep up with.

MATT STAPLES: It is.

KAREN FOLEY: Do students need to all of these things?

MATT STAPLES: Well, I think students need to develop a strategy and think to themselves, how will I best engage with my tutor? Maybe at the start of the course you maybe think about lots of different ways and you think-- you know, the tutor will normally contact the student over the-- I mean, TSA-- tutor student allocation took place for most level 1 modules in the social sciences last week. So over this week, last week and over this week, tutors will be contacting students. And they'll be letting them know when they're available, how long roughly it will take to get back to a student who's made a query-- normally about 48 hours we say, ideally. And they'll be letting them know about the first face to face and online tutorials.

So if I was a student I'd be saying, well, maybe I'll try a bit of face to face. Try a bit of online. If the tutor has not contacted me already, maybe I'll give them a call or an email. And so use all these strategies and see which fit is the better.

GEORGINA BLAKELEY: I think it's really important to think about what it is your tutor does, because I think many students think that your tutor is a person who will do your marking. They'll give you the grade. They'll give you the feedback, and that's it. But tutors do so much more than that. And it's really what makes the OU special, I think-- that kind of relationship between the tutor and the student. So yes, they are there to mark your work and provide feedback. But they're also there to help you to study to work through the materials, to kind of engage with the materials and

really kind of get the most out of them.

They're also there to provide support in terms of study skills. And also there to provide support and advice in terms of kind of if you're having difficulties managing your time and things like that. So your tutors are so important. And as Matt says, getting that relationship right is going to really make or break-- the students who do really well and stick with it are the ones who kind of have that really good relationship with their tutor.

KAREN FOLEY: I got my students last week and I wrote to them, I told them to come here. I said, don't worry. You can come to the Student Hub Live and we'll get you all set up for study. I've got some lovely emails back from students. They've sort of been talking about their circumstances, why they're studying. You sort of mention how important it is to communicate, but for students who maybe don't know what's appropriate to communicate, what should they sort of say back to their tutor? And will their tutor sort of think, oh they haven't written this very well?

MATT STAPLES: I mean, tutors-- I mean, I think personally I would say I think we've got a really good bunch of tutors on DD102 and 103, which is the modules that I know. If they've not contacted you, they're going to very soon. And they will want to find out about you and your particular context of studying. It was interesting listening to the students beforehand about how students study. I think tutors will be interested about that. And actually they will talk through the kind of strategies that students might adopt-- when they can study, how they're going to study. How many hours they're going to study. And they'll give them tips and give them advice.

And so try to get on the phone-- and we advise all the tutors to really phone all the students if possible, because having that human contact and making that kind of contact rather than just by email is often a really good thing, actually.

GEORGINA BLAKELEY: And I say to students, don't worry about what to say. Your tutor will be just so pleased that you've got in touch. It really doesn't matter at the start. Just say, hello. I'm so-and-so. I'm on this module. Pleased to meet you kind of thing. And that just sets up the conversation. And I think the thing about the phone call is actually quite important, because I know for many students, particularly if they're feeling nervous, the thought of ringing your tutor is like, oh, my goodness I can't possibly do that.

KAREN FOLEY: Especially if you make an appointment.

GEORGINA It's really hard, but I think if you can get over that hurdle of what you might actually say in a

BLAKELEY: phone call to your tutor. And perhaps arrange a convenient time via email, something like that. But actually having that phone call, if you can get over that first kind of embarrassment and hurdle of doing it, can make a huge difference. Because your tutor then becomes a person like you. And it's important to remember a lot of our tutors have been OU students, so they know exactly what you're feeling.

KAREN FOLEY: And they've probably heard from a lot of students before, as well. I'm feeling excited. I'm feeling anxious. So how many students does each tutor have? And sort of how deep can this relationship go, really?

MATT STAPLES: Indeed. I mean, normally it's between, on DD102 and 103 it's between 12 and about 17, 18. So it doesn't often go above that, to be honest.

KAREN FOLEY: So your tutor will probably know your name, and might remember quite a lot about you depending on what you choose to tell them.

MATT STAPLES: Yeah. And in most cases, the tutor kind of works and lives in your local area, too. DD102, 103, DB123, are level 1 modules, DD100 as well. They're allocated on a kind of regional cluster basis. And so it's tutors who know your area. And you know, so they will be interested. You know, you will be meeting them hopefully at face to face events and online. And you know, there's a relationship to be built up.

GEORGINA
BLAKELEY: I guess maybe what you're hinting at is you also have to have boundaries. Your tutor is not going to be there 24/7, and on a Friday night they're probably not wanting to hear from you at 11:00 at night. But your tutor too will help you in kind of setting those guidelines and boundaries. So often in the kind of welcome email or letter they'll say, if you want to contact me the best way to do it is by email, or the best way to do it is to call between these times. Because our tutors have lives as well. They're busy people like students. And they might also be working for us part-times. They might well be working for another university as well. So it's important to kind of bear that in mind as well.

KAREN FOLEY: And lots of people tutor for the OU, because they really love the OU and they love OU students, even though they've often got full time jobs at other universities. Which adds to the sort of diversity and experience. But as you say, there are these guidelines to sort of bear in mind in terms of appropriate conduct.

When I was writing my email, I was very mindful the other day that it sort of sounded like, well,

between these sorts of hours and these hours. And I thought, I wonder if that comes across a bit formal? And actually, it's those times I can pretty much guarantee I'll be at my desk normally. And if I'm not there, you know, I'll always phone people back at a certain time. But should students be put off by those guidelines in terms of thinking, well, actually if my tutor is setting those, maybe they're not very available for me, you know?

MATT STAPLES: I mean, you're setting them with saying, we are definitely available at those times, I think. I mean, normally something can be arranged outside of those times as well. It's just realistically - and it's the same for students as well, because they'll have family commitments. So they won't be able to take a call at particular times, because they're feeding the kids. Or because they're working. So this is actually the same. It's quid pro quo, as it were.

And so I think most tutors are open to receiving calls, but just realistic about when they can really give their full commitment and time to that. Because if they're feeding the kids and a student rings, they can't really look at the assignment booklet. Whereas if they know they've got two or three evenings. That's what I say. I say Mondays normally, Wednesdays, and Thursdays are the evenings I'm pretty much available all the time actually, from 6:00 to 9:00.

And actually a lot of tutors in setting boundaries are just being realistic about when they can really give you their time.

KAREN FOLEY: And attention.

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** And of course, you have your individual tutor, but you'll also be on a cluster group forum, which will be kind of managed by lots of other tutors. You'll be kind of in a group with those other students and those other tutors on most modules. So you know, if your tutor isn't available for whatever reason, you come post a question on the forum and one of the other tutors will leap in and answer it. So it's not just the one to one relationship, which is really important, but it is the other relationship with the other tutors in your kind of area as well, which counts.

MATT STAPLES: On the cluster forums you will be meeting those tutors as well. And so you've got your own personal tutor, but then you've got a bank of other experienced tutors who can also provide advice. So there's a lot of advice out there. Yeah. I mean, one of the things I would say is because we talk to the student support team a lot, and they've got advisors who are very good. But they often say a lot of the queries that students ring in with are actually ones that maybe the tutor is sometimes better equipped to deal with.

But I think sometimes students think because the tutor is marking the work, they think maybe slight authority figure.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. You don't want to call him up and go, I'm really behind. I don't know what I'm on about.

MATT STAPLES: And they're going to, oh I'm going to mark this student down, because they rang me up. I know it sounds funny, but I think some students think that. And that's not the case. As Georgina said, I think tutors want to hear. Because the stronger the relationship, the more the student is taking in and the more the tutor has an awareness of what the student needs, I think.

KAREN FOLEY: Malcolm says he spoke to his tutor the other day. He was very friendly, and that helped him focus on what he needed to do prior to module start. So that's a really nice comment.

MATT STAPLES: No, it is. And tutors will want to do that kind of, I suppose, diagnostic kind of thing. Like what do you think your strengths and weaknesses are? Where do you think-- how will you study? Are you going to come to the first tutorial? You know, they want to be able to give advice and just to get to know you a little bit I think, really. Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: So Georgina, you mentioned some of the things you might want to say to your tutor. We've asked people whether they know who they're tutor is-- 97% of them do. So that's good. But only 59% of them have had some sort of contact with their tutor. Now, you mentioned some of the things they might want to talk about and not to be frightened about. But say they were to reply to that email. What three things do you think they should tell their tutor?

GEORGINA BLAKELEY: Oh, gosh. What three things? That's putting me on the spot. Well, who they are first of all. If they've studied before.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

GEORGINA BLAKELEY: And perhaps what they're looking forward to, and perhaps what they might be concerned about.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah. OK.

GEORGINA BLAKELEY: Keep it simple.

BLAKELEY:

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. And I guess once-- because this isn't an exhaustive discussion is it? It's the start of something. So if you give your tutor a few things to talk to your about, it's very likely they'll talk back to you. And then you can bring everything else up. Sometimes in that first phone call I've had students go, I'm sure I'll think of something when I put the phone down. I'm sure they will. I'm sure I will as well. But it's not the one opportunity to have that conversation, is it?

MATT STAPLES: No, exactly. And it's about thinking there's multiple ways you can have that conversation. Some people are slightly reticent on the phone. But all through DD102, all through 103, you've got reflection questions, for example. And that's part of the dialogue as well. So it refers back to what I was saying earlier about thinking of the different ways you can interact with the tutor, and really taking those opportunities. So when you've got, on your TMAs, you've got a reflection question about how you're doing, what kind of support the teacher can give you? You really think about that as part of your essay going forwards.

GEORGINA BLAKELEY: And that kind of feedback you get on your TMAs from your tutor is also part of the communication. Tutors will provide you with lots of feedback. And although you'll look, first of all, at the mark. We all know students do that, but you really need to kind of look at that feedback too. Because that's like a dialogue as well. So you need to engage with that feedback. And then perhaps if there are questions arising from that, get in touch with your tutor and say, I'm not sure what you meant by this. Or I understand that, but I'm not sure what to do about it. So see that as part of the conversation as well.

And that communication with your tutor is absolutely vital. If you don't communicate with your tutor and then ring them up two hours before the TMA deadline and say, I can't do it. They'd much sooner know about things before hand. So keeping those lines of communication open, whatever they are, is really important with tutors.

KAREN FOLEY: That's take a quick trip to the Hub Desk. HJ, were you really power napping earlier?

HJ: Well, sports did recommend it, so I thought it was a good idea. Maybe there's a difference between power napping and sleeping. I'm not sure. I'm doing a study on it. It's academic curiosity, that's what that's all about. But we're having chats about happy planners. So Adele is saying she's addicted to discbound planners at the moment and a separate one for each day with study goals, which sounds really good and positive. Because we talked about study journals, as well. But a lot of people are saying-- Jane said, my tutor's going to get in contact with me and says there's going to be an online introductory session with her tutor as well,

which she's looking forward to. And Malcolm has arranged two first tutorials with his tutor, which is fantastic. Libby says she's had an email from her tutor and has sent one back. And is waiting for a reply, but thinks her tutor is probably up to something else at the moment.

KAREN FOLEY: I'm glad your still watching, Libby. I will get back to you tomorrow.

[LAUGHTER]

HJ: And Alexia-- I've started my module. It's making me really hungry. That's because the brain is working so hard. And Ronald says, my tutor is ex-military, so he's building up a good rapport with his tutor.

CLAUDIA: And we've just had a comment from Jayne saying, do you call your tutor by their first name?

HJ: Ooh, that's it.

[LAUGHTER]

MATT STAPLES: Yeah, definitely.

HJ: So no sirs or anything like that?

[LAUGHTER]

MATT STAPLES: You know, I think it's a learning community ultimately. I mean, when I go tutorial, because of the different ages we have, I'm really interested in people's backgrounds. And often I'm learning lots from them.

GEORGINA Yeah.

BLAKELEY:

MATT STAPLES: So you know, seen it as a peer. You know, obviously a tutor marks your work, but it should be a 360 thing. You should learn from your students. So I learn. I've learned over the past 15 years of tutoring how best to support students. And I've learned that from the students. From their needs.

KAREN FOLEY: Because it's one of these things that while the tutor has a lot of knowledge and they will ultimately know the right answers to the TMA questions, the tutor marked assignment, they're also, like you say there Matt, there to help you learn. Because the idea with this distance learning game is really that people become self-motivated capable learners and generate

those skills so that they're able to take on more complex tasks as they progress through their studies.

So I wanted to ask you how you thought students could make the most of that relationship with their tutor? You've mentioned the TMA feedback, and the importance of sort of learning through that. Because that's all personalised feedback on your specific assignment. What might they do, then, if for example we've heard from students who are approaching study from a long break from study and maybe they haven't ever studied before? What sorts of things might the tutor be able to help them with? Or where might they be able to get some support and advice?

GEORGINA

BLAKELEY:

Well, the tutor can help them with the things that they're reading or kind of videos or audios that they're listening to. So if there is content that they don't understand, a tutor can explain a difficult concept or theory or something like that to them. They might do that in one to ones or they might do that as part of tutorials or day schools. Or it might be a discussion thread on the cluster group forum, so they can help with sort of content like that. So students are perfectly within their right, and we'd encourage them to do this, to say what do you mean by class? Or whatever, you know. Put the question up on the forum and see what comes back. And you'll get as many interesting responses from other students as you will from the tutors, to go back to your kind of community of peer learning.

KAREN FOLEY:

This is a very good point, actually. I'm glad you phrased it, because sort of on that note about saying, do I call my tutor Sarah or by their first name? Students are often a really good source of support, as well. So in addition to asking tutors, sometimes asking peers is good. So anything you could say about that, and also about the idea of sometimes formulating emails or asking questions that can sort of help clarify processes? I mean, sometimes I'm writing something and I'll think, what really is the problem that I want to explain to my tutor? And then I'll write it down. And then I sort of work through the answer through that process. So it's almost like I can imagine somebody there. You know, over time I've sort of learned how to sort of be that sort of voice and think, what might they say to me? And this is sort of developing your learning.

So your tutor can directly help you. Peers can help you. But also knowing someone's there can sometimes let you help yourself.

MATT STAPLES: It's funny-- I was talking about learning journals.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

MATT STAPLES: And actually that's a really good place. I mean, 102 has a learning journal. It's voluntary, but I would recommend the students to print it off and to start using it. Because it helps formulate some of those questions. Because you get feedback from a tutor, and you think, well, how does that relate to what I've done? And actually what do I really need to know in order to advance? And so it's just a process of reflection. You know, the best students are generally those students who really think about what they're studying. They're reflective, we say. And part of that reflection is using the tutor as a sounding board to understand what you need to go on.

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** And your tutor will also help you to develop your skills, as well. And they might do that by pointing you to certain activities on the module websites. Or they might point you to kind of different skills in the library, the library resources that are there for students, as well. And they can also offer you a one to one session. If you're really, really struggling with something and you just think, actually I need to sit down with someone-- whether that's face to face or online through Adobe Connect. And you can have a sort of hour one to one session that your tutor can request for you. Many students find that really helpful, such as kind of writing in your own words. Which I think for level 1 students is something that you can really struggle with. And actually you just need to sit down with someone and say, well, how do I move away from this version in the module textbook that just sounds so right and I can't think how to express that in my own words? And that kind of session can be helpful for students.

KAREN FOLEY: We wanted to cover do's and don'ts. We've covered lots and lots of do's. I think we've covered all that do's. Is there any don'ts that you want to end with about what not to do with your tutor?

**GEORGINA
BLAKELEY:** Don't ring them at 11 p.m. on a Friday.

[LAUGHTER]

Email instead, and then they can kind of choose when to kind of respond to that. You might get a tutor that responds to you at 11:00 p.m. on a Friday, because that's maybe when they do their work. It's kind of about respecting those boundaries. And you know, your tutor will also respect your boundaries about when to contact you as well.

KAREN FOLEY: And you mentioned that most of them work part-time, and so it's normally around two days or

so that they would get back to you. Unless they're at Student Hub Live with me.

[LAUGHTER]

MATT STAPLES: I mean, we say, I think, 48 hours is reasonable because they will be doing other things.

KAREN FOLEY: So not to panic or think you've asked a stupid question if you don't get that response. It's just likely that they're doing--

GEORGINA They're not ignoring you, thinking oh my goodness. What kind of question is that? They will get
BLAKELEY: back to you.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, thank you very much, Matt and Georgina, for coming along today. That's been really reassuring, and I'm glad you filled us in on what to expect from your tutor.

OK. So that's been a really useful session for you in the chat. I'm glad we've moved away slightly from the talk of hoodies and bags in the OUSA shop. Our next session is going to be about Tesla. What's that all about? Well, you'll find that in a couple of minutes after Bob Video. I'll see you in a few. Bye.

[MUSIC PLAYING]