[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to the Student Hub Live. Well, in this next session, we're looking at the Year 1 to 2, and when things start to get a bit more specific. And we're using maths as an example of that. Because I have the lovely Sue Polley with me, who's very, very, very keen on maths, a subject that some people struggle with, but that you, nonetheless, think is very, very exciting and relevant.

SUE POLLEY: Well, some people like it.

KAREN FOLEY: So Sue, tell us then, from Year 1 to 2, so often, people have done maybe a 60 point module. And for Year 1, that will be very general, have a lot of study skills, and be interdisciplinary. Then, they start getting a little bit more specific, which is when things get very exciting. And I often find that they then forget all the wonderful skills that they've learned from the first year and go, right, now, this is what I want to be doing. So let me at it. How do they tackle this whole transition then between those years, when ultimately they're still at Level 1?

SUE POLLEY: I think the important thing is actually to look at the gap that you've got between the first module you studied and moving on to the next one. And to start off with, you can look back and see what you enjoyed about that first module, whether actually it was what you thought it was going to be, whether there's any particular aspects of that module you enjoyed. Because quite often, it's quite a broad subject.

For example, in mathematics, in our first couple of modules, we study some applied maths, some statistics, and some pure maths. Was there any of those three that you particularly enjoyed more than others? Because you want to make sure that that's what you're going to focus on as you're moving forward. Because as you get further and further up, it's going to get more specialised. So you can take time to look back at what you've studied and see if you've enjoyed it, and if you want to carry on forwards.

You also want to take time to look back and see if what you did worked. What was your studying like? Did you study at the right time of day? Should you have studied in the mornings? Are you a morning person? Are you an evening person? What works best for you? What did work best for you? What do you want to change? You mentioned study skills. We've got a study skills website, absolutely brilliant place to go and look. It gives you so many ideas

as to how you can improve what you're studying.

Other things you can do, you can back at the feedback that you've had back from your tutors by the continuous assessment and see what you can improve on, see how to move forward. So first of all, you can look back. Secondly, you do want to look forward. But you want to look right forward. Is what you're doing going to get you to where you want to go?

KAREN FOLEY: It's such a huge question. And whenever we have people from the Careers Advisory Service in here, it's something that we rarely talk about which, is this idea that often students are really interested in the qualification. They're thinking, I want to be a psychologist, or I want to be a this or a that. And I'm getting this degree for that sort of reason. And they can go through things and, like you say, it's often when you think, actually, do I really like doing this sort of thing? Am I more interested in report writing or essays? What are these sorts of things that I'm doing? And to what extent do I actually get happiness from doing them?

Because ultimately, even though you're right at Level 1, if you end up doing something that is ultimately not going to make you happy, I mean, logic doesn't need us to point out that you're not going to be as fulfilled as maybe if you were more flexible. But some students can have trouble with that mindset of being flexible. So how do they start to then say, OK, these were some of the things I was doing. I was happy doing this. I was not happy doing that. How can they reflect and look back at that last year?

SUE POLLEY: I think a lot of the things you need to do is there's so much help on the websites. It talked about the Study Skills website. You can go back and look at studying, look at the Careers website as well to see what you'd like to do, see if what you're doing gets you somewhere. But most of all, just think about what you enjoyed. Because if you don't enjoy it, you're not going to study it. And with the best one in the world, you're going to start cleaning your house rather than studying. You're going to do anything possible to avoid it. And studying is meant to be fun. You're meant to enjoy it. It's meant to be fulfilling. And you're meant to get a sense of achievement. It's not meant to be hard work.

KAREN FOLEY: No. So OK, end of Year 1 then, we're taking a look back. We're thinking about what we've enjoyed doing, maybe readjusting things. You can speak to the Student Support Team. And you can get maybe some information about whether you're on the right track for the qualification. And you're suggesting one looks forward and that there are various resources and things that people should use.

Now, Georgina was here this morning. And she said it would be very nice for people to have a break over the summer. What are your views on this? How much should students start preparing for the next module? Or do you think they should have time off?

SUE POLLEY: I think there's a little bit of both. I mean, it is yin and yang, really. You've got to try and fit everything into your life. But I think it's very important not to get out of the habit of not studying. As well, certainly with mathematics, it's a use it or lose it subject, really. It's a bit like languages in a lot of ways. Unless you're constantly using the mathematics, you are going to forget the techniques. You're going to forget what you're doing.

So it's one of those things. We like people to carry on brushing up on skills, OK? So over the summer, what you can start doing is most modules have example units that are out there. So you can actually look at the example units and see what sort of things you're studying next year, see the language they're using, make sure you're familiar with it, make sure there's nothing that you don't worry about.

Also, there's lots of other websites that have lots of prep work now. With mathematics, we all have something called the Are You Ready For quiz. So every single module that we have has this quiz. And they're a really good place to start. Because they tell you exactly what you need to have to start the module. So it's just a list of multiple choice questions. You fill it in. You get a grade. It's Immediate feedback. They get a grade. They give you lots of pointers as to where you can go to help and brush up.

KAREN FOLEY: That is so good. I mean, some of those materials on OpenLearn. Because, I think, whilst you can pick up key themes, key language, et cetera, sometimes, it's really nice to have a read around things as well, so that when they come up, often, they'll be a behind the scenes thing or an interview with somebody who's written something about something, topical issues, as well are a really key thing I love looking at on OpenLearn. But feeding and nourishing your enjoyment of things can be a really nice break as, well, can't it?

SUE POLLEY: It can, yeah. I mean, again, studying, you're meant to enjoy it. You've got to keep up that interest and that enjoyment. Otherwise, you're not going to study. So look at things that do excite you about your subject. I mean, there's a reason why you've picked it. So you want to look at what excites you. There are lots of general topics around the world. You can look for maths, for example, in society around you, look in newspapers, look at bars, charts, graphs, anything that interests you. Try and think about your studies in your day-to-day environment,

try and apply what you've learned to the world around you, and see what you can do, actually, just to engage in it.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, now, you've mentioned this feeding back and feeding forward. And it's become a very popular topic of discussion this morning. But I wanted to ask you about this whole idea of moving from the general to the specific, and when students start to get very excited about some of the material, that they really want to study. How do you suggest students keep a rein on some of those skills?

How do they remember the things that they've learnt in that foundation? And all of a sudden start applying those, instead of thinking, oh, this is so exciting and amazing. I'm going to go and completely go and start to research this, that, and the other, when they may be asked to describe something. Still at Level 1, those sorts of skills that are being developed and scaffolded throughout the module. How do they keep a rein in on it?

SUE POLLEY: I think talking to tutors, which is probably also a topic you've spoken about a lot today. I think the tutors at different levels work very well at describing what you need for each level of work you're doing. So you can talk to your tutor if you've got any worries about anything. If you're doing something slightly different and if you're between modules at the time, speak to the SST. And they can get a tutor to call you.

If you feel you've got any problems about anything you want to study. There's lots of forums around available. For example, with MST124 at the moment, we actually have a website that takes you from wherever you've started to prepare you for the website. And that's also got a forum, where you can ask the tutors there anything you want to and also the students as well. Students have been through it. Every module has a section at the end where you get feedback from other students as to what they found interesting, what they found hard, what advice they would give, and things like that.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Right, well, we've been asking your feedback from our widgets. And a lot of you are at Level 1. If you haven't put those in yet, you can still do so. But we've got 42% of our students at Level 1 at the moment. So you'll be very sad to know that only 14% of them are studying maths.

SUE POLLEY: Well, I could talk about that a bit.

KAREN FOLEY: We might be able to persuade some of you a little bit later, 17% now, all right. And then, Year

1 is 35% as well. But HJ, I understand there's talk of cake.

HJ: Yes, well, I think Bruce and James weren't very happy about my cake situation, which I wasn't either. And after a successful campaign, a lot of hard campaigning there, picketing, I've actually got some. So I'm actually very happy in my desk now. But apart from campaigning about cake, Sharon definitely agrees about studying modules that are of interest to you. She says it makes a big difference when things get a bit hard and tough with the modules. And pushing through is something that you actually enjoy. And Bruce isn't too sure about taking a break, actually. He says he finds it hard even just taking a week out to get back in.

But some people we've spoken to do MOOCs over the summer during the study break and brush up on skills. And although, I think, not many people in the chat are studying maths directly, a lot of people are saying that it's part of their modules, so if they're doing sciences as well. And I think it was Drew that said he struggles a little bit with the maths side of things. So I know you mentioned some resources. Is there any particular advice that you'd give so he can maybe brush up a bit in terms of doing maths with sciences?

SUE POLLEY: Maths and sciences-- Yeah, again, there's several websites we've got. There's a website called Maths Choices, which will give lots of resources to help with things. If you're going on from your Level 1 [INAUDIBLE] course into MST124, if you're doing a physics pathway, then we've got a Revise and Refresh website, which will get you completely up to date with everything you need to know to get ready for MST124.

KAREN FOLEY: Or they could watch your previous involvement in our Maths Skills Builder session.

SUE POLLEY: Oh, they could, couldn't they?

KAREN FOLEY: So if you're a Student Hub Live fan, and you would like to sit and eat cake. Then, you could always catch up on some of those basic math skills that we did. And you can find all the Catch Up on the website.

SUE POLLEY: I think the main thing to do, though, is to practise again. I think you have to do what works for you. If you need to take a break, take a break. If you don't need to take a break and you'd rather work at a lower level all the way through, then work at a lower level all the way through.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, [? Gayle ?] says she's getting ready for her module start at the end of September. But she just cannot wait.

SUE POLLEY: Well, have a look at the material that's already up on the website and have a look and see what you can do beforehand.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, so OpenLearn is a great source of information and where there's a lot of free content, really nice idea to have a look around, get a taster perhaps of one of the modules you're doing, or just pick something that seems really interesting to you. You can also look at the FutureLearn website. And there are lots of MOOCs, these Massive Open Online Courses, where you can have a community of learners. The OU do a lot of courses on that as well. So that may be something that can bridge your gap, Gayle also over the year.

OK, so let's talk about this idea about studying maths for the first time. Because whilst we think of maths as in the purer sense, a lot of students are incorporating it within various things, like psychology, science, et cetera. So this can cause anxiety for students, we know that. What are some of the tips that you've heard from students who've already completed a module about things they might do differently next time, should they be studying maths for the first time?

SUE POLLEY: Yes, we did actually ask some students already. That's why I've got a piece of paper here. We asked students, actually, what advice they would give to people studying maths for the first time. And these are what they said. They've said, start early. So it's never too early to start the module. You can start it beforehand. You've often got access to the first few modules. And again, there's all the prep work, you can look online and have a look at.

The other one, work according to the calendar. So try and keep up to date. Because if you fall behind, because maths is a linear topic, you can't just skip something. You've got to start at the beginning. And you're going to progress through steadily. Go to tutorials, discuss the difficult areas with your tutor. We're quite friendly people, really, honest. We do like to talk to people occasionally. And we're always here to help out.

What else? The module is doable. They said it takes you step-by-step through the concepts. If you're returning to study or studying with us for the first time, don't be too hard on yourself, and try and enjoy it, OK? What's the next one? Make sure you fully understand the concepts before moving on. Try and do more than just remember how to apply it. Actually try and work out why it works and how it works. And that way, you'll be more likely to understand it and to carry on forward.

And again, contact the tutor if you're having any problems. Again, don't look too far ahead, just go step by step, stick to methodology, try and take a businesslike approach. These are all

different students' options. So some will work for some. Some won't work for others. These are just different tips from different students. Pick one, pick them all, find out what works for yourself. And the last one was don't be too scared or threatened in the beginning. It is a doable subject. And it's not as bad as it looks.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, [? Stuart ?] wants to know if there's an implant he can get that will make him good at maths.

SUE POLLEY: Practise implant, I think.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, now, there are lots of things. And it strikes me when I'm listening to some of these, that a lot of these are similar with anything that has maybe a language or a discourse that people are unfamiliar with. And sometimes, it can be these terms or these ideas of things that are a lot more frightening than they actually are in reality, once you start breaking things down. So for maybe the students who aren't studying maths, but may be starting to look at different things, different languages, different terminologies, different theories and ideas, there's something in every module that you're doing that will become familiar with time. How would you suggest students start approaching those things?

SUE POLLEY: I think you have to take it slowly. I mean, one of the good things to do is actually, if, you take a notebook and write down everything that you don't understand to start with, if you come across something and you don't understand it, write it down. And then, you can go away and think about it. You're not going to understand everything the first time you study it. If you did, it wouldn't be studying. It wouldn't be hard.

But it's achievable. And you get such a good sense of satisfaction when you've passed it and you do understand it. And it's quite nice. Because if you the notebook and you write down everything you don't understand, and you can think about, go away, make a cup of coffee, come back, read it again, have a look, see if you still don't understand it, then post a message on a forum. See if another student can help you. Talk to your tutor. See if your tutor can help you.

KAREN FOLEY: Take that list to a tutorial.

SUE POLLEY: Take the list to the tutorial, that would be fantastic.

KAREN FOLEY: I'd love that if some students turned up with their lists of things.

SUE POLLEY: And it's quite good actually. Because if you write down the list of everything you don't understand, then, hopefully by the end of the module, you can sit there and you can cross them all off and go, I understand that now. I've achieved that. I've done it. It worked.

KAREN FOLEY: Do you have to understand everything? Because in particular, I think, when students are studying a STEM subject, for example, that there is this finite nature to something. And sometimes, you're being explained a small part of a concept that relates to something much more broad, but isn't necessarily relevant at that time. So you're getting a small piece of information in isolation, which can seem a little bit-- well, for somebody like me anyway, I like to see bigger pictures with things. So I can feel a bit unnerved by the small thing that I don't understand how it relates to things. How important is that then to incorporate in everything?

SUE POLLEY: I think it's quite hard to say for definite with an answer to that sort of question. Because it may be a small thing. But it may be a key concept, OK? And so at that point, anything no matter how big or how small, talk to your tutor. Best advice, they can tell you whether it is a key concept that you do need to understand, and then help you to understand it. Or they could tell you, no, OK, actually, that's gone off in a little bit of a branch. If you don't understand it, not the end of the world. Because that section doesn't carry on any further. You don't need to understand it. Or actually, as long as you're understanding these little bits, then, yeah, that's an extra bit. That's a pretty bonus topic.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, tell me your advice on this sort of thing, when you don't understand something. And maybe you've read the material a few. You've asked your tutor. You think, I still don't understand this. Is it a good idea to go off on YouTube and start looking at maybe the Khan Academy or various sort of videos about things or to look on Wikipedia? Do you think that's a good idea for students to look around the subject if they're not getting something that's explained in one way?

SUE POLLEY: I think so. I mean, not everyone is going to understand everything explained in one simple way. I mean, hopefully, at the Open University, we can explain things in different ways. The notes will explain things one way. We can go into a forum and we can get an explanation from someone else. We can go to a tutor. We can get a third explanation. But again, we can't always hit on that light bulb moment for you. And so yeah, definitely, look around, see what else is out there. Everyone understands things in different ways. And everyone will understand everything. You've just got to find that person that speaks to you.

KAREN FOLEY: Absolutely. And I think sometimes that repetitive absorption of something can really hit home. But I often encourage students that, once they've done that, to re-look at the module material, once you get the concept from some other way, and think, how is it being presented here? Because ultimately, that's what you're being assessed on, isn't it?

SUE POLLEY: I think so.

KAREN FOLEY: And so it's important to be able to understand how and why that's being framed. And maybe if there's a big bit and you're only looking at a small bit, why that small bit is only there.

SUE POLLEY: Yeah, I think that you're right, definitely. I think you do look around. But again, you know you do need to bring it back to how we're actually teaching things. Because we know where that module is leading to, I think is the key thing. So most of the things that are in those modules are important for later on for different studies. But they may not necessarily be important for your study.

Because obviously, certainly, at the lower levels, at Level 1, we are covering a broad range of students studying a broad range of degrees. And so that bit may be in there because the psychologists need it. But as an engineer, you might not need it. So it's one of those things. I think you need to try and understand everything. Because it's always enjoyable. But ultimately, if you've tried it, and you've tried it, and you don't understand it, don't bash your head up against the brick wall. It really doesn't help.

KAREN FOLEY: And I guess this relates to the assessment as well. Because sometimes, like you say, things will be in there for other reasons. And I guess it really matters, in terms of whether or not that's featured in assessment. So that might give people a steer in terms of what matters also.

SUE POLLEY: Yeah, definitely. The assessments are what works on the key topics. But equally, we can't test everything that's important. So we tend to try and test those real trigger points.

KAREN FOLEY: Would do have a list of things to come back to in addition to a list of things you don't understand?

SUE POLLEY: I like lists, lots of lists.

KAREN FOLEY: Yes, I know, I would as well. I don't have time to make lists of all the things I'd like to come back to, let alone do. But I like the idea that maybe sometimes I could gloss over something, and then think, oh, if it's really important, I might have to go back to that. And that's the beauty

of being able to access the materials.

SUE POLLEY: It is, yeah. I think the thing with mathematics is it is definitely building blocks. And you do need to make sure that you're quite secure on those foundations before you move on. So I think, if there is anything that is worrying you, then definitely seek help on it.

KAREN FOLEY: No, absolutely. Because one thing will often build from something else. So it is quite unique in that sense. If students were struggling, I mean, you've mentioned talking to tutors. But there are additional support routes that students can have, if they really are stuck on something, isn't there?

SUE POLLEY: Yeah, there is always further support routes. I mean, lots of students from Facebook groups, which they find a lot better, and other sorts of chat room forums, and things like that. Because it feels less constricted with what they can ask. But really, just ask questions, ask someone, ask anyone.

KAREN FOLEY: So is it important? And if I don't understand it, how am I going to understand it? And what is the best way for me to learn? Brilliant. So let's just have a quick chat with HJ to see what everyone is talking about and how your cake was.

HJ: Yeah, well, the thing is maths isn't my main subject. But I know i minus two cake somehow. And I just really don't know how that's happened. But I think it's because I'm focusing too much on this chat. But one of the things that we have actually talked about, which I do want to pick up on, is they were talking about getting a feel for modules before we start.

And we've posted the links to the Resources page on the chat, which has the Maths Choices website. So you can try it out and see what maths modules might be suitable for you. But with all of the OU materials as well, it's always with looking directly on the OU website. Or you can pop to the Regional Centres, which have little libraries of OU materials. And you can have a look through and see what might be for you. And I'm sure if you email us, we can put you in touch with some of the-- oh, OK.

KAREN FOLEY: I think that explains your subtraction issue, HJ.

HJ: I think that's minus three now. I'm not too impressed.

KAREN FOLEY: You make sure you get your fair share of cake. Don't let these people bully you out of that. You worked hard for it.

HJ: Mm, I'm going to keep a closer eye on that. But yeah, if you email us, StudentHub@open.ac.uk, with any questions about modules, if you want to find out more, I'm sure we definitely can help you, and perhaps put you in touch with the academics that we've called on today to send you some more information.

KAREN FOLEY: There are also forums that are up and running. So a lot of faculties will have places that you can go to. There are various cafes, and forums, and spaces that you can make inquiries about your next modules and ask questions, et cetera. So do make sure that you check those out. You've got Qualification websites as well, which are a great source of information in between modules. So do find those. And again, make sure that you're getting access to the support forums, and cafes, et cetera around those. And your Student Support Teams also are a great source of help.

So Sue, thank you very much. We're going to keep you here today, I'm afraid. But next time, you're not allowed to talk about maths.

SUE POLLEY: Well, [INAUDIBLE] sometimes.

KAREN FOLEY: So we're going to have a quick break now, where we will do a little bit of maths. We're going to show you the Joy of Stats and the STEM reel. While we have a quick coffee break. And then, we've got Nicholas Chastin joining us, where we're going to be looking at Level 1 to 2. So that will be at the end of your first two years of Level 1. And then, you're moving up to Level 2, quite a big jump. And I think there are a lot of students out there in the chat for whom this applies. So do stay with us. We'll see you in a couple of minutes.

[MUSIC PLAYING]