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**KAREN FOLEY:** Welcome back to this *Student Hub Live*. In this session, we are going to be talking about your tutor, other students, and about attending tutorials. Now, those of you who just watched the last session, we've taken you through the online rooms, and shown you a little bit about the technology, and talked about things that you can do to get set up for that. We've also been talking earlier today with Zach about who to contact in your studies and about the importance of the student support team to answer pretty much any question, and your tutor for talking to about academic support on the module that you're studying.

So in this next session, I'm joined by Jonquil. Welcome Jonquil. Thank you for coming along.

Now, Jonquil is a tutor and is a central academic member of staff here at The Open University. And you know a lot about tutors, and students, and the importance of having a good relationship between teachers and students from both sides. Because I think, so often, students can think the onus is on them to have a good relationship. But you do a lot of things when you're teaching about reaching out, making contact with students.

But we also know - well, we both probably have very different approaches in how we act as tutors with our students. And so for some students who knew they might not know what to expect, and for some students, they might have had a wonderful tutor last year, or maybe one that was a little bit more remote, so they'll be getting a new teacher and a new way of interacting, so it's a great time to set up good relationships with your tutor. Tell us about your experiences in terms of what students-- one from tutors and the differences that tutors offer in terms of their individual impact on students' learning?

**JONQUIL:** Yeah, sure. Really one of the best things about a OU study is on every module, you do have a personal tutor. And particularly if you're quite young, and maybe you've had some bad experiences at school, you might be a bit afraid of the tutor, thinking of them more like a teacher. Well, they're not really. I would say that a tutor is more like a partner who is going to help you get the best out of your modules. So it's a bit like a critical friend, a very knowledgeable critical friend.

You're right, different tutors have different styles. That's good, I think. And what's really important is at the start of the module, your tutor's going to try and make contact with you. So

that might be by email, might be by text, might phone you up. It's really important that you respond to that early contact, break the ice, and get to know your tutor, let your tutor get to know you, get across what you're hoping to achieve from your module, what your concerns are. And your tutor will then start to work with you. So that's really important, that first contact.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Jonquil, we asked people about their three main study concerns. And everyone has been filling in the results. So let's take a look and see what the three concerns were for our students out there.

Time is the one of the biggest factors and time management, falling behind my ability, use of a computer, levels of study, memory, contacts, what to choose a life circumstances, the contacts, tough questions, work may be too hard, not enough time, lack of confidence. There are a variety of things going on here to do, I guess, with factors in the individual's control and factors outside of the individual's control.

So let's then sort of take a look at some of these things. I mean, we've asked people how often they usually contact their tutor, 83% have said occasionally, only 13% of said often. But we've asked about confidence levels, and 70% say that they feel fairly confident about contacting their tutor, and 18% say very confident.

Now, it's worth explaining for our new students what sort of thing is going on in terms of a tutor. Because a tutor has a group of students, don't they? So typically, there might be 15 or 20 students in a group. So there's an opportunity to get to know the students who want to engage pretty well, isn't there?

**JONQUIL:** Yes, there definitely is. And you tutor really wants to hear from you. A lot of tutors, what they really like is that contact with students-- I mean, for sure they're giving tutorials, or whatever-- but for many, the real buzz in teaching is getting to know you as a student and helping you succeed on your module. So you should really be 100% confident about contacting your tutor. They definitely do want to hear from you. And your tutor to-- we can't say your tutor's there 24/7, because poor lumps, they've got to get some sleep, haven't they?

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yes

**JONQUIL:** But tutors do respond pretty rapidly to your queries. And very early on, you can establish with your tutor what's your preferred way of getting in touch. Traditionally, we've tended to use email a lot, but I'm not sure that for modern students that's the way, texting or whatever.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So what's going to happen now is that there's a process going on where the tutors and students are all being allocated, so some of you might have contact with your tutor, but others won't have because the models haven't opened yet. So when your tutor is allocated to you, you will then see their details on your student home page. They'll probably send you an email because we're all waiting eager to our groups of students as well, and they might send you an email introducing themselves, and you might choose to reply.

Jonquil, what happens then in those early days when students get contact from a tutor? Some of my students will email me before I've even sent my letter because they get their thing before I do, whereas sometimes I'll send an email out and then students will respond. What typically happens then in terms of those first connections?

**JONQUIL:** Yeah, it's usually-- at the beginning, it's very much icebreaking, so your tutor's just trying to get to know you a little bit. Definitely they're going to ask you some things about what do you want to get out of this module? Have you got any concerns?

And you're right, managing your time is a huge one. Now most of our students are working, or raising a family, or they've got other commitments. And tutors know that. They understand that.

And later on, when you get into your studies, one of the most common queries that tutors get is, can I have an extension for my assignment? And tutors, generally, are very happy to agree to that. You can normally get a seven-day extension with no problem at all. Up to three weeks more rarely, but if that's what you need, then that's something to discuss with your tutor.

Now, your tutor is probably going to ask you why do you need the extension? Is there something I can help with? And very often, it is just the crunch of time. Something busy's going on at work, so you can't get your assignment in. Or maybe you're doing two modules at the same time, and you've got a clash of deadlines for getting your modules in.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, this is a brilliant point because we saw that students were having issues with time management and worried about fitting things in. And also you've mentioned that the teacher was there to help. And often, they're very good at directing students. So whilst they can give an extension, often that's not the kindest thing because all you're ultimately doing is leaving someone-- who is very busy in the first place-- feeling a bit daunted

Are there ever times when students call you and say, I really can't get to grips with the

assignment. I've got all this happening at work or at home. And you say, let's just take a step back and prioritise what you need to do. You only need to do bit of the module, and have you looked at the question? How do you help students to sort of reframe, I guess, what's going on so that they can focus what limited time and energy they have on what really matters?

**JONQUIL:**

Well, that's why your tutor is not just going to say, yeah, have an extension, but they're going to have a conversation with you about what's going on. And the solution is going to vary depending on what the issue is. It could be that you're having problems actually getting to grips with modular materials, in which case, your tutor might say, well, shall we book a session? And we can go into this in more detail and tease out the problems.

It could be that it's a crunch of time, that there's something else going on. And if that's temporary, then an extension now might be the solution. But if it's something longer term, then your tutor has got other things they can suggest. Now, it might be, as you say, it might be, carry on with the module, but why don't you just focus on these areas? You can come back later and do this, but focus on getting through the assignments, and these are the bits that you need to concentrate on.

But in extreme cases there are other options as well. So one is substitution, which happens automatically on quite [? slow ?] modules. And that basically means that you can maybe miss out on assignments or perhaps put in only a partial assignment and the score that you get for that assignment is actually an average of the other assignments you've done rather than that one. So sometimes that can be a way around it. In the very extreme, your tutor might say, well, have you thought about maybe banking your assessments for this presentation, but then picking up your studies later on when this crisis is passed?

So there's a whole range of options. And the one that's right for you is going to depend on your particular circumstances. But your tutor is there to help you unpick what's going on or find the best solution for you.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

And we've got a lot more Boot Camps coming up. And we've got one that focuses on assessment where we'll be going through all of that. So do join us for that session, which is on the 9th of October.

Jonquil, the reason, of course, why students really need to get a good rapport with their tutor is because of these TMAs, these tutor marked assignments. And this is the key form of

learning, really, at The Open University. Because as many students who've found their assessments will know, we set a question, they fill in the answer, are going along with the guidance that we've got. And then the tutor will receive that assignment, and they'll mark it and feedback in quite a lot of detail, on an individual level, something for that student.

So it's really helpful to know, for example, if that student really wants to work on their essay writing or is very anxious about referencing, for example. And that way, the tutor can tailor that personalised feedback for the student. So how should students introduce themselves, their stuff, their dreams, their goals, what they're trying to do with their studying to that tutor very early so that their tutor can give them the best personalised learning for them?

**JONQUIL:**

Well, it's good in those early conversations with your tutor to talk about those things. But your tutor is there continuously for you, throughout this modules. So you might be a bit nervous on the first contact, and then later think, oh, I should have said that, whatever.

But your tutor is there. You will have have established contact. So just drop him an email, or her an email, or a text, or whatever you prefer. But even if none of that happens-- which in the ideal world, it all does-- even if none of that happens, when you put in your first assignment, your tutor is going to start to get to know you through what you're writing in your assignments. They'll be able to see the strengths and weaknesses coming out and will tailor their response to guide you on that.

Now also, TMAs usually have a self-reflection at the end. And I know some students don't bother to fill it in. It'll ask things like, what did you find difficult about this assignment? Is there anything on the module that you're having trouble with?

And some students, they just do their TMA, phew, glad that's out of the way, never fill in their self-assessment. But I think that's a really important part because that's part of your conversation with your tutor, so you can be as open as you like. Sometimes that self-reflection carries some marks, but usually it doesn't. It all depends on the module, really.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

I often read them fast. Because if I know a student says, I've been really anxious about my paragraph structure, I can say, actually, I think you did a really good job on that. And that sort of allows me to sort of feeding back more appropriately for them. Hannah wants to know, speaking of TMAs, what to do with the TMA form that she's received in her box of materials?

**JONQUIL:**

I'm not sure what form she's got?

**KAREN FOLEY:** Hannah, I think, if I'm right, it's a form, possibly in triplicate. And I think that those are sent out with a lot of the materials to students. Some people may need to submit a TMA in paper in copying a hospital??? or something.

**JONQUIL:** OK, yes. it depends very much on the modules. So some modules prefer all TMAs to be submitted electronically. And if you have a particular problem with doing that, then for sure you can put in a hard copy. There are other modules that still let you choose. You can either submit electronically or you can send in a paper form

**KAREN FOLEY:** So keep it unless you need to send it in. But I think it's one of those things that's good to have. I use to actually have a bank of them. And then when I'd clean my office out every hour, I'd be like, oh, I've got so many of these. But they're good to keep. Don't post it back, though, there's nothing you need to do with it, unless you, for some reason, need to submit a paper version of your TMA.

**JONQUIL:** It's such a long time since I've used one of those, actually.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I know. I must say, if you can, though, it's a lot easier to do. And again, we'll be talking about submitting your TMAs when we cover in the Assessments boot camp. So we'll show you how to use the ETMA system and submit your assignments. But it's a lot better that way because they can, of course, get you TMA annotator, so your tutor can say, in this bit here, you could have said x,y, and z. So it's a really good thing to get used to doing a Word document, and then, basically you just send it like a file through the ETMA system.

We've had a lot of talk about tutorials and things as well in other students. And you've mentioned earlier that it might be your tutor, or it might be a team of tutors teaching. But students, well, when the module set up in due course, get a list of all the tutorials that they can attend, either face-to-face or online. And they can book in for those, or they can turn up as they want to.

But we've had some students saying that they're not sure what happens at a tutorial. So could you give us some examples of the sorts of things that might go on? And I know that one question often is, I don't really feel able to because I haven't read everything. I don't feel prepared enough. And I'm going to get this quiz or something that happens there. So tell us more what happens in a tutorial?

**JONQUIL:** OK. Tutorials are not there to trip you up. They are definitely there to help you. And different

tutors run their tutorials differently, but very often they'll be some practise and preparation for the assignments that are coming up.

It's a chance to ask questions. Your tutor is likely to do some of what we call "chalk and talk." They're going to talk you through an issue before you do any work yourself on it. And then there might be, say, an activity that you probably won't do on your own, you'll probably work with a group of students. Again, it depends on the module and the tutor, but online rooms, or if you're in a face-to-face tutorial, similar things happen.

Online rooms have breakout rooms, where very often the tutor will give it a little bit of teaching and will then set an activity, say, go away to a breakout room, perhaps three or four of you. You'll work on a problem together. That breakout room is quite private. Your tutor might drop in and see how you're getting on. And I know when I've dropped in, usually, the activity is done quite quickly.

And it's the chance to chat and get to know your other students. They're all talking about their pets, and the holidays, and things like that, which is just lovely, because it's all about building that team. Your fellow students are a really important part of your support at the OU because they're going through the same experience, and they've got lots of sort of tips, and ideas, things they found out. And it's all about confidence building.

**KAREN FOLEY:** HJ, what happens at your tutorials that you attended, because you are talking about this in the car, how different some of them were.

**HJ:** Yes, I think some of them can be really casual and just have a chat with your tutor, which I really like as well. Sometimes tutor will do a presentation and some activities. And I think-- I don't think there's any right way that tutors should do it because I just enjoy them all.

And I think the main thing is it's an opportunity to see your tutor face-to-face, have a chat with them, talk to other students, bring up any questions you have. And that's the main thing I think the tutor wants out of it is as well. It's not about them talking to you, they want to hear from you as well. And as long as I see you-- they see you there, I think they're happy about that, and same with the online tutorials as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And did you-- when you went to tutorials, did you always feel prepared, and had you always read all your stuff, and done all your work?

- HJ:** Hmm, I don't think so. But I think everyone else was sort of the same as well. Well, I think, when people start mentioning it, I think everyone else does. I think it's one of those things. It's normal to get behind and struggle with things.
- And actually, it's quite reassuring to go to a tutorial and say, actually, I struggled with this a bit. And everyone else is saying it, too. So the tutor has a chance then to address it and know actually some students are struggling with this.
- And my tutor, he used to post in the forums as well what we talked about in the tutorial. He said, oh, I heard there was some difficulty with this. I'll just explain it here as well. So if you miss out on tutorials as well, sometimes they post in the forums, or sometimes you can ask for a chat with your tutor, and they'll just update you or go through a few things, maybe some materials as well.
- KAREN FOLEY:** [INAUDIBLE] And have you sorted out the average age of all of our participants here.
- HJ:** We haven't. We need some statistics or mathematics students to help us out with that one. I'm not sure we want to do that.
- KAREN FOLEY:** No, it might not be a good use of time. We've got a lot of important stuff to cover [INAUDIBLE]. Any questions so far?
- HJ:** I think we just have a couple of questions about TMAs themselves. So someone-- Jacqueline asked, if the TMA is submitted earlier than the cut-off date, will they get it back earlier? And can it be submitted any time before the cut-off date?
- KAREN FOLEY:** Ah, very good question, some super organised students!
- JONQUIL:** Yes, you can submit your TMAs early. Your tutor probably will not send it back early because until the cut-off dates, other students haven't submitted, so the tutor's not going to release the answers to the assignment. So you can put it in early, but it will just sit there until the marking period. So you'll have to wait a bit longer.
- The other thing I would say, though, I have had students, really in the first month, that's kind of got up to TMA 03 and submitted the lot. I wouldn't really recommend that because one of the things that you get out of tutorials and taking part in forums is you sometimes are alerted to things that you really haven't thought about. And so until you've been through all of that learning process you might not be in the position to put in the best TMA.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And the thing with feedback as well. How about doing the TMA early-- if you want to get ahead and do. But you don't need to because you are expected to do the TMA in the TMA week that it is do. But if you did want to get ahead, what about the idea of letting it sit and going back to it?

**JONQUIL:** Well, you could let it sit on your own machine. And I think that's actually a great idea because then you give yourself some time to review what you've written. Very often you write to the deadline, you zap it in, and then you think, oh gosh, I should've done that. So that's quite a good technique.

If you have already submitted your ETMA online, if your tutor has not yet downloaded it, you can actually upload a subsequent version that will replace the one that is there. But once your tutor downloads the ETMA, then really you're stuck with what you've submitted.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So it's good to have a space for reflection, but really you only need to submit it on the date that it is-- or just before the date that it's due. Jonquil, just the note on timing because you mentioned before that tutors often get back to people very quickly, but sometimes that because often-- I mean, tutors are only employed part time by the OU, and so they've often got other jobs, they lecture in other universities. So normally, I think, it's around two days isn't it? That's the average time to expect a reply from your tutor. But what about the TMAs? What's the time period between after the due date, when the tutor will download them, and getting them back?

**JONQUIL:** It should be 10 working days, so you've got an anxious two weeks.

**KAREN FOLEY:** We've only got a few minutes left, but Louis has a question.

**HJ:** Yes. So Louis is asking-- which is a really great question-- are tutors allowed to read unfinished essays and give some feedback and improvements? Or is there a way to have essays [INAUDIBLE] on or critiqued?

**KAREN FOLEY:** Very good question.

**JONQUIL:** Yeah, that is a very good question. Tutors probably will agree, if you ask them, to read a draft. What they cannot do is give you the answers. So they're probably going to give you rather vague feedback at that stage. They might suggest things that you might want to think about or review, but they're not going to give that detailed feedback that you will get when it's marked.

**KAREN FOLEY:** It's nice to feel like you're heading in the right direction with things. But one of the things I would really point out is that these assessments are all about developing your skills. They're not about being perfect from TMA 1. Nobody is expecting-- other than perhaps some students-- expecting you to be perfect.

The whole idea is that from the beginning of the module to the end of the module, you will develop your skills and be able to improve on that. And if you are perfect very early on, you wouldn't really have very much to work on. So it's all about taking on board that feedback and structuring that, isn't it?

**JONQUIL:** It is. Most modules, they have a lower mark for the first TMA so that you can jump in and get used to the system. And it's worth remembering that at level 1, your marks do not count towards your class of degree. So it's pretty safe space to do your TMAs.

It's fine to make mistakes. We all do it. That's part of learning is learning from your mistakes.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Absolutely. And it's good to have very high expectations, but we'll cover all of this and the Assessment boot camp where we'll talk about the weightings of the assignments, what you can substitute, and how to do that. And that session will be on the 9th of October, so do join us for that.

But Jonquil, this has been a really, really useful session, so thank you so much for filling us in on the importance of tutors and how it all works. And I hope that we've covered your questions at home. But if we haven't, you must email us them, and we'll cover them next week, on Tuesday, when we have Boot Count number 2, where we'll be looking at a lot of things that will be very important in terms of study skills.

So [studenthub@open.ac.uk](mailto:studenthub@open.ac.uk), you can find all of this information on the web site. You can also watch the Catch Up if you've missed any of this show. And we have a programme this afternoon, which is from the School of Education, Childhood, and Youth, and Sports. So we're going to be doing early childhood and primary studies this afternoon.

Now, anyone's welcome. We're going to be talking about a lot of aspects that are applicable to those sorts of students. So if you're in one of those modules, we do hope that you can connect with us at some point this afternoon.

We've got a full programme of events this whole month on the website, so do check those out.

And if you are watching us on Catch Up, and you haven't been able to connect with us in the day, do make a note of the sessions that we're running in the evenings for freshers and for the essay writing workshops as well. So I hope you can connect with us live at some point if you have been able to.

HJ, you've been an absolute star on there. And we will see you next week?

**HJ:** Yes. Thank you.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Thank you very much. And thank you at home for all the tips, advice, inspiration, and love that you've been sharing in the chat room. We've had a great time. I hope you have also.

If you'd like to send us your thoughts, drop us an email, send us a tweet, and there was a short feedback form on the website as well if you would be so kind as to fill us in, to let us know what you've enjoyed and any suggestions you might have. And don't forget, you can also subscribe, and we've put a YouTube channel, and a little email list as well, so give us your email address and then we can connect with you there also.

Thank you very much. And that's all from us here at the *Student Hub Live* for today. I hope you can be back next week on the 26th of September if you aren't here at one of our programmes before then. Bye for now.

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