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**KAREN FOLEY:** Hello, and welcome back to the *Student Hub Live*. Well, this is the last session of our Freshers Fair today. And I'm joined in the studio by Peter Horrocks and Debbie Britton. I want to find out about this Dream, Believe, Succeed campaign and about the university's priorities for students right now. So, Peter, is our vice chancellor, and Debbie, you're the head of marketing behind this whole campaign. So I wanted to talk about what was important for students. What is the university trying to do in terms of recruiting and enabling more students into our community? So much has been happening in the HE sector, and I know you, Peter, have been campaigning for a lot of changes. So can you fill us in broadly on what's happening?

**PETER HORROCKS:** Well, in the broader sense, in relating it to the campaign, we know that students are looking for help with employment. They're looking for either a promotion within jobs or they're looking, potentially, to change jobs. This is about 3/4 of our students are looking for that kind of help.

In order to be able to do that, you need to have a lot of motivation. So when we researched with students and our potential students, we asked them about what the barriers were to them being able to achieve their goals. So actually having that sense of aspiration and that belief in yourself to want to do it is what you need to go on to be successful.

And we know that the Open University can help people to be successful in their careers. So that was sort of the simple concept of the campaign. And Debbie was the mastermind behind it, and she can say more about that.

But I suppose what it fits into in a broader picture across higher education is that as jobs get tighter, as jobs change rapidly, as people are more aware of the skills that they need, they're turning to education in a more specific way, for support for employability, and that's something which the university is responding to, by changes to our curriculum, introducing new things such as degree and high-level apprenticeships, and a whole range of ways in which we want to support our students in their employment aspirations.

**KAREN FOLEY:** There have been loads of initiatives going on that I've been aware of very recently. I mean, Alison Green came on to actually poll our students about some areas around the creative industries and say, should we be developing curriculum in this way. We've been looking at

various things around apprenticeships, and all these initiatives. I mean, I know that the Faculty of Business and Law have got this pro bono clinic that they're doing. So there are really specific ways in which the Open University is actually shifting with this dynamic environment.

But you've touched on this idea about believing in things. And Debbie, I wondered, what's the connection between these three things? Is there a stage that was behind this campaign, in terms of having this idea to change career and then believing, and doing it, and then succeeding? Is it that simple.

**DEBBIE BRITTON:** Yeah. So, what came behind this campaign was really, there's two facets to it. One is we know that students go on a really emotional journey, both in terms of deciding that they're going to study, and then going through it. And we wanted to capture that, but capture it in a really confident way. We thought it's real time that the OU shouted about how solid and confident our students are once they've made that decision and they're going through that journey. It's a fantastic initiative. And we wanted to capture that in some way. So that was number one.

But the second part was that there's also, we're conscious that we need the facts and figures behind it. So we want to really show that it's worthwhile and that employers really value OU students. And the research that was done actually made sure that that is so true. So something like 86% of employers really value the skills that OU students bring to their employment.

So it was bringing those two dimensions together in a really vibrant way that was at the heart of this. And also, the way that we displayed it. So we already use a lot of digital advertising, but we wanted to shout about it a bit more. So we've taken lots of poster sites. We've had a cinema ad that's really captured the heroes, some of our students, and the case studies that we've got. So all of that combined together, hopefully, has made a really impactful campaign.

**KAREN FOLEY:** It is really impactful.

**PETER HORROCKS:** I was driving along the elevated section of the M4 in London and suddenly this pink OU poster came up. I was so excited. It was fantastic.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And I love your badge, as well. It's very violet.

**PETER HORROCKS:** More of the pink. That this is the new badge for the OU's 50th anniversary campaign. So the OU is 50 years old in April 2019, and we're having a big campaign to lead up to that, to get support for the OU. And this is the badge.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent.

**PETER** Got the badge.

**HORROCKS:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** A first. Lovely. But it's nice for people, like you say, to recognise something and see it. And I know a lot of OU students, I mean most of our students here, are level one, so they're just starting out on their OU journey. But there's this idea, you know, of seeing an OU book on a train, or seeing something that you identify as being part of a community. I appreciate this is trying to attract new students to the Open University, but how nice is it for our students to see the OU being so visible out there?

**PETER** And it's something which also is felt by the Open University staff, who are obviously people  
**HORROCKS:** who work all the way across the country, particularly our tutors, who our students will know so well. So something which connects the whole community together.

So whether it's our staff, whether it's potential students, whether it's our current students, who are of course the people who matter most, and then past students, our alumni, we are a community of more than two million people who've studied with the OU. And that sense of connecting people together with something which they can believe in, because it's talking about belief in what the OU can do. I hope people find it really inspiring and unifying.

**KAREN FOLEY:** It is inspiring, in particular, I mean, some of these videos that are on Facebook. And Debbie, you'd mentioned some of these cases studies. So you've got both a combination, I guess, of very graphic, visual concepts followed up with case studies. And you've done so much in terms of research, in terms of people being unhappy at work, people wanting to change careers, etc.

But combined with these wonderful case studies that give a flavour of what it's like to be an OU student, and what it's like to change lives, it's really impactful. How did you go about finding some of those case studies and what sorts of people do you think are typical OU students?

**DEBBIE BRITTON:** So how did we go about finding? There's hundreds, there's hundreds of heroes out there, thousands of heroes that I'd really want to unearth and use as part of this whole campaign. And what we wanted to do was really try and be as representative as we can, because there is no typical OU student. Everybody has their own individual story about how they've engaged and what they're doing with the OU.

And so, a couple for me that really stick out in my mind is Dawn, who has locked-in syndrome. And so she studied with us, and she can type three words a minute using her left eye connected to her equipment. Just an amazing story that really pulls on me very, very hard.

And then on the other hand, you've got so many cases of people who just haven't been properly supported through school, or end up not believing they can do something. And Victoria is another example, and she ended up being the cinema ad. And apparently, she's starting to get recognised in the street now, tapped on the shoulder, which is just amazing. And she thinks that's really funny.

But Victoria had lots of naysayers at school. You know, she wasn't encouraged. And she decided not to give up, and she came back to study. And you know, how many stories do we hear like that, just by dint of how you've gone through school or been brought up? And so she went on and got her degree, and she's now teaching. And it's just an amazing story. It might feel ordinary, but it's extraordinary.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And there are so many Open University students who have these different backgrounds. It's varied. I mean, Peter, you've been a student. You not only run the university, but you've also done some introductory maths and statistics modules, I believe.

**PETER** One module. I'm not going to claim to fame.

**HORROCKS:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Did you pass, by the way?

**PETER** I did. I did.

**HORROCKS:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well done.

**PETER** I was very relieved.

**HORROCKS:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Because you have been busy. And you've been busy campaigning about different things. And so, you know, whilst there were these challenges, in terms of students actually completing their degrees and doing their modules, there are also other challenges within the wider HE sector, in terms of funding and various ways around things.

You're doing a lot around that area. Is there anything you can tell us that you're particularly campaigning for right now?

**PETER**

**HORROCKS:**

It's all about responding to the need for flexibility that people who are learning at the same time as they're living their lives and living their working lives. And this is particularly to do with policies in England, but there are also changes that we're hoping to see, and improvements we want to see, in other parts of the UK.

So for instance, in Wales yesterday, there was a report on the future of how higher education will be funded. And that included a really significant extra commitment to supporting part-time students, which we really welcome.

In England, which is the largest part of the UK, obviously, we're looking for more flexibility about loans. So for instance, for loans for second degrees, it's only certain subjects in science and technology where you can get a second loan. We're saying that should become more widespread.

So you talked about Alison and arts. At the moment, you can't get a loan for a second degree in an art subject or a humanities subject, so that kind of thing. Loans that are available for shorter study, so you don't need to be doing a full degree, and also trying to encourage the government to pay for really improved information for people to know where to go.

So if you're a school-leaver, it's obvious. You've got careers guidance in school. You've got the UCAS system for admissions. But if you're in your late 20s, your early 30s, where would you go? How do you get that information? So these are a number of things that we're trying to encourage the government to do to support lifelong learning, which it's committed to, but which the policies aren't quite there in place yet.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

Absolutely. And if you're interested in a session that we did yesterday on the nations, then you can watch that on the catch-up service. So all of that will be available on the website, and you can find out about how the specifics of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales may relate to you as a student.

Sophie and HJ, what's happening on the hot desk? You're typing away like mad. Are you behaving yourselves?

**HJ:**

Always. Always.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Are the students behaving themselves?

**PETER** Yes. They've been a lot more calm this afternoon.

**HORROCKS:**

**KAREN FOLEY:** Ooh, good.

**SOPHIE:** Less talk about food, actually. It has been very focused this afternoon.

**HJ:** I think they've ate too much, so they've had enough of food now.

**SOPHIE:** We have us some really nice comments. Simon's commented saying that he was told he wasn't very good at maths at school. So he gave up and did humanities, but now thanks to the OU, he's halfway through his BSc, and he has a GCSE in maths. So well done, Simon. That's really good.

**HJ:** And Sylvia says, "Peter and Debbie, my dream is that I want to pass my MA in Classical Studies part two," to her master's degree. "This is a goal I want to achieve. Do you think I will be able to do it?" I think you might have some good answers there.

And Simon has a question, which I think we could get a good answer. He says, "Is the OU at a disadvantage by not being in the usual uni rankings?" So two questions there.

**PETER** Well, I'm sure she can achieve that. And clearly, she's done a lot of really effective study  
**HORROCKS:** already. And just encourage her to keep going and keep that focus, and just make sure that she's drawing all of the different resources that the OU's got to help study going.

I don't think that the ranking tables are the most important thing when people come in to think about OU study. It's important that we do score well in them, but the research that we have shows that people are thinking much more about the flexibility of the OU, the nature of the institution, whether it's something that they feel comfortable with, do they feel supported, do they understand how our supported distance learning works. So rankings are something which we care about, but they're not the most important thing in terms of our students, because they're thinking about their study in a rather different way.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I wonder if that question is partly also about the way that employers view Open University degrees. We've heard from the Careers Advisory Service to really shout about the fact that you're starting with the Open University. And we also know, as I think you mentioned, Debbie,

that employers do really value having an Open University degree. Is there anything you'd like to add about that side of things?

**DEBBIE BRITTON:** Yeah. So I think the research that we did showed that it's not just about the qualification. It's actually about those life skills that OU students actually bring to the party in a way that others can't. So they've had to be disciplined, they've had to timekeep like nobody else, they've had really engage in multiple things at one time, balancing everything, are all skill sets that we need just during the course of our working life. They've had to practise that across their whole lives. So they are very valuable to employers.

**PETER HORROCKS:** And we've been doing research with employers, and it's clear that they find it quite hard to discriminate between different universities and different types of qualifications. There are obviously some very elite universities where people will recognise that. But beyond that, universities generally are seen as being broadly similar in terms of the kind of intellectual qualifications that people have.

But what employers are looking for are extra skills, and in particular in relation to employability. So for instance, one of the things that the OU encourages people to do is to collaborate either face-to-face, but particularly through digital means. And that's something which people need in the workplace now.

It's the kind of modern digital skill that you're learning both by the way that you're studying with the OU and then you've got something that you can point to, the confidence in presentation, critical thinking. These general skills, which are what employers are telling us they are looking for as well, of course, as specific technical skills in the more vocational areas.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And those are, of course, all being embedded in the curriculum. So people are getting a lot of experience, and we've been talking to some people about the way that people can use a digital microscope and actually engage with things in real time, real live microscopes, if they're doing STEM subjects, for example. So there are a lot of innovative ways that people are getting that experience.

But I wonder if we could sort of look at the student body, because you've mentioned some sorts of students, Debbie. And obviously, this campaign is about attracting more students. And we know that there are a lot. I mean, people often surprised. I'm often surprised when I go to conferences and people are like, you're with the Open University. Wow, that's massive.

And sometimes, there's this idea of scale. We've got hundreds of students, but also they all matter, and they're all unique, and we have this relationship with a tutor. And so whilst people are in a big numerical group, there is also this real sense of belonging in a community, which is hopefully what the *Student Hub Live* is adding to things now.

Is there something you'd both like to say about scale, in terms of being individuals and also being in a collective group?

**DEBBIE BRITTON:** So I'll relate it specifically to the campaign. We've deliberately, through the campaign, removed any stereotyping because it's just not possible and wouldn't be right to do for the OU. So we don't have those classic shots of students now in our campaign. And that's why that graphic element is just so important. It's about the message. And it appeals to everybody.

And I guess the other thing is, we deliberately wanted something that has such that stretch, because we do know that, actually, quite a huge part of the population do know about the OU, but they might not know anything in detail about the OU. And then there's others who don't know anything, may not have even heard of the OU. And we want to just make that a lot more prominent across the country, just start to get our name out a little bit more.

**PETER HORROCKS:** I think that scale thing is interesting. I think the university thinks about its scale, and, of course, its social impact, the fact that it has so many students. And I've mentioned the number of people who have studied with the OU over 50 years, the two million.

I think it's quite important that from the student point of view, they get the benefits of community. But that's not necessarily about being massive because, you know, that could feel a little alienating. So it's really important that the kind of personal connection that we have, the relationship with the tutor, and the term that we sometimes probably wrongly use about the kind of learning that we have, distance learning, that can quite easily be interpreted as you're going to be isolated.

Well, no. You know, the OU brings people together and creates communities, whether they're physical or whether they're virtual. So we need to be careful that the scale isn't communicated in a way which is off-putting to people.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent. I'm going to go to Sophie and HJ, but when I come back, I'd like to ask each of you, Dream, Believe, and Succeed, if you can think about which one you think is most important, as a live challenge for OU students, in terms of advice you'd give our new freshers out there in



terms of completing their degrees.

And also in the chat, which of these items do you identify with mostly? Is there anything you're dreaming of in terms of changing your vocation? Do you believe you can do it? And even, we've heard that some students out there are alumni or maybe aren't studying with us, have you succeeded?

Sophie and HJ, what are you talking about?

**SOPHIE:** Really positive things. There's a lot of post-grad talk going on, as well, and things about student loans, and second loans with STEM courses, and things like that. Anka, she's had really positive comments. Both her and her husband are OU graduates. So that's really nice to hear. Thank you. I know you've been having conversations.

**HJ:** Yes. I'm just having a chat with Simon and Sylvia about how I go on applying for post-graduate courses with my OU degree. And I have to say it. A lot of the universities I've visited and spoke to academics, they actually tutored for the OU or were involved at the OU, and they think it's really brilliant.

And they say it's great for being an independent learner. So you're well suited for post-grad. So I definitely say I hadn't had any problems whatsoever with my OU degree. I think it's definitely given me even an advantage with applying from some post-grad courses. So, yes. We're definitely pleased with that one.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Thank you. OK. So, Debbie, would you like to go first? Which of these items, in terms of the campaign, the Dream, Believe, or Succeed, do you think is most important for new students?

**DEBBIE BRITTON:** So there's a link, obviously. I think I'd go for believe. I think once you have the belief in yourself, anything is possible, and you can do anything, and the success will come.

**PETER HORROCKS:** I'd build on that. Clearly, you need to have that dream and that belief first. But thinking about how you're going to succeed, and being really clear what you're trying to achieve, and that might alter as you go through your studies, but being really explicit with your tutor, with the Student Support Teams, so that we know what you're looking for. And then we can help you to succeed.

So succeed isn't just it's over to you. The university is there to help you to succeed, and we know we need to do an even better job in helping our students to succeed, generally and then

in their career goals. And that's what I'm most focused on.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And in terms of that whole idea, then, of belief being something that can seem quite positive, for my students certainly it's seemed to wane over time. And it can vary, depending on whether they've got a TMA, whether they've had their TMA back. That belief is something that can change. And we've been speaking about life circumstances impacting, maybe, on study. How might this whole thing fluctuate in terms of a student's journey?

**PETER HORROCKS:** I don't think, by putting these words literally up in lights, we're saying that everyone has to be kind of should be expected to be that positive. And of course, they'll be dips in it, but it's very good to have got that motivation and to have defined that for yourself to then kind of keep you going when you hit those obstacles, when those life events come along.

So it's something that you can draw on. That's why I said about being explicit about your success criteria. It's something that you can go back to and that can restore your confidence and restore your faith in yourself either because of the study being tough or because of life being tough, that you have that kind of knock back.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Cathy and Robert are starting to go with believe, as well. Simon's going with dream. Is the same Simon who's making bread, though? So Simon, you'd better get cracking on with that for your wife gets home.

OK. So there's a lot going on for OU students, and a lot of freshers, and they're very excited. A lot of them are being allocated their tutors right now. Their timetables are just being published, and they're really, really excited about their journey. What advice would you give to them. And particularly, Peter, from your experience doing an introductory level module, what advice would you say to students right now, right at the start of their module, what should they do?

**PETER HORROCKS:** Preparation and planning, absolutely key. Absorb as much information as you can. We've introduced new ability for people to be able to study using a wider variety of tutorials, both face-to-face and online. So make yourself aware of what's available for you in terms of those tutorials. Make sure that you're across all of the resources and the reading lists, and all those sorts of things.

But most importantly, plan your study out. So you're thinking about your own personal calendar, you're looking at the study calendar, and you're working out how you're going to progress. Now, you might need to be flexible, but it really, really helps to set yourself up for

success right from the beginning.

And then down to just practical things about how you're organising yourself in your home. How do you make sure that you've got that dedicated space, you're organising your material? So just think about all those sorts of things. And there's loads and loads of great advice on the website that can give you the kind of guidance that you're looking for.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, you'll be pleased to know. Peter, we've had a very conscientious bunch of students. We had around 2,000 students joining us each week for the whole month of September, not all of them all the time. But we've been covering all of these aspects around the virtual learning environment, how to access TMAs, and how to do everything. And they're all very, very organised. I'm sure this won't be a problem for them.

Simon, I've heard, has his bread in the bread making machine, and no blood went into that. So go, Simon! You're in the good. But they are very diligent and very well-organized. And this taps into this idea, Debbie, that you said about employability, and these key transferable skills that Open University students can use.

What advice would you give them, then, in terms of shouting about that? Is there something that students can do early days to say to their employers, hey, I'm doing this, or I'm really glad I'm managing my time well? What is good about starting that journey and thinking about things that can really make a difference to people's lives?

**DEBBIE BRITTON:** I do think that actually showing their employers very early on some of the differences that that planning and that study is making is really important, and everything from just the way that things are presented on their CV, all the way through to practical input into their working lives. And so a lot of what Peter's talked about in terms of preparation and planning and everything else can apply equally in the workplace, as it does in planning their own study.

And they should talk about that, talk about that with their employers. And also get their employers on side, as well, so that they are accommodating and they do understand what they're going through.

**KAREN FOLEY:** We've had a lovely quote from Michael who says he's 74, and he's are only just beginning his OU journey. And he says he doesn't believe he is or will be employable, but he can dream. And he will succeed, I'm sure. A lot of students are older. And so for some people, this may not be a relevant thing in terms of actually going into an employability sector. But as you say,

an OU degree is a lot more than that. What might be some of the things that are the most rewarding for students, just actually studying?

**PETER**

**HORROCKS:**

I would say that even if there isn't a career outcome that people who are at that stage of life are looking for, some of the discipline and some of the ways that we're focusing on materials is something which they can also benefit from, as well. So that focus on self-confidence, that focus on intellectual exploration, critical thinking, so the skills which are of relevance, if you're thinking about getting a promotion or moving into a new job, can also be hugely fulfilling in their own right, even if you don't have a specific employment goal.

So although we're focusing this particular campaign on employability, it's not to the exclusion of those students who have different kinds of motivations. And so what I said about defining success when you're starting off as a student, that, of course, can mean, you know, other kinds of things, just simple enjoyment in intellectual exploration or wanting to exchange ideas with other people, thinking cross-culturally, whatever it might be. But being really clear about what you're getting out of it, and then your OU studies can be shaped and adapted to the needs that you have.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

And we've learned today, also, that studying keeps the brain active and healthy and is generally very good for you. So there are lots of health benefits to attach to that. Debbie, I'd like to end by asking you what you're most proud of in terms of this campaign. As Peter says, you're the mastermind behind it. It looks great. What are you most proud of?

**DEBBIE BRITTON:** So it's very flattering to be told I'm the mastermind of it. But behind this -

**KAREN FOLEY:** We've got it on record.

**DEBBIE BRITTON:** - are all of my team and our partners who created this. And I guess what I'm most proud of is the fact, it's actually the support of the whole of the university. So everybody, you know, I've had so many compliments about the impact of this campaign, and what it's helping to do for staff, for students, perspectives students, you know, everybody. And I'm proud of actually flying the flag a bit for the OU, because I think it absolutely deserves it.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

Excellent. Thank you. And it's lovely to see all of this lovely artwork around the campus and people with their lanyards. And it does make us feel part of an OU community, which we all are here, and also you are at home. Peter and Debbie, thank you so much for joining us. That's all we've got time for today. And thank you for coming along. I'm sure our new students really

appreciate you welcoming them.

And thank you, as well, at home for coming to the *Student Hub Live*. Sophie and HJ, final comments from you, please.

**SOPHIE:** Well, actually, Simon and Robert remembered that there was one mystery yet to be solved, which is HJ's name. They've been bugging HJ for his name all week. So -

**HJ:** I already told them. They'll just have to watch all the sessions back to find out where it was. I think just today we've had a fantastic time with chatting with everyone, and there's been so much going on. If we've missed anything, remember, you can tweet us, @studenthublive, or email us, studenthub@open.ac.uk.

Everyone sent in so many brilliant pictures and selfies, as well. And we've got stuff to send back to you, as well. Just remember your address, and tell us which one of our wonderful things that you'd like us to send.

**SOPHIE:** We've had so many positive comments and feedback, so it's been really nice. I'm glad that everyone feels a little bit more at ease now. Wishing everyone well with their studies this year. And this will not be the last that you hear of us. I'm hoping we'll catch up in a couple of months' time. And there is a few other little bits and bobs that we've got going on. So please tune in, and hopefully we'll see you very soon.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Sophie and HJ, you've done an amazing job. You'll have to watch all of the catch up, which is now available on the website. And also, there's a feedback button. So tell us what you've thought of the *Student Hub Live* by filling in the quick form.

And if you'd like to find out about more *Student Hub Live* events, you can click on the Count Me In button, give us your e-mail address, and we'll e-mail me when our next event is on. But I'm going to tell you when it's on, because we've got one on tomorrow, especially for our students of the Faculty of Business and Law.

So the Open University Law School and the Open University Business School are holding a special event for their students. However, everybody is welcome, as they always are to Open University events. We've got a great programme lined up, so for those of you who've enjoyed this, please do come along tomorrow to that session.

But all the best for your studies. You're going to be brilliant. You're so super organised. You've

got all your stationary ready. You've got all of your books now, your tutors are coming in, your timetable is being published. So get ready for your studying, and don't forget that you can watch the bootcamps if you do want any specific advice on any of those study skills.

We've all had an amazing time. We've covered so much content. Do you check out the programme, do catch up on things, stay in touch with us. And all the best for your studies. It's going to be brilliant. And I really hope that you enjoy it.

The *Student Hub Live's* also been nominated for a Times Higher Education award, which we're absolutely delighted with.

[CHEERING]

And also, behind this studio is a massive team of people, who I don't have time to thank. But everybody who's been involved in this production, I know that you at home really appreciate the support. And I'd like to thank everybody who's been involved also.

We'll see you very soon. Do you stay in touch. The chat room will be open for another half an hour for you to say your goodbyes, but we will see you all very soon. Bye for now.

[MUSIC PLAYING]