

**KAREN FOLEY:** Hello and welcome back to the Student Hub Live. Well, I hope you enjoyed that session. I thought it was fantastic. But I'm not going to another cocktail party with the Open Programme, because they don't serve any alcohol.

So I'm back here with a more sensible attire to talk about the Group Tuition Policy. And I'm joined in the studio by Michael Flack, Nicola Simpson and Tamsin Lister. Thank you for joining me.

Now, there's been a lot of talk about students wanting their tutors, they're wanting their tutorial timetables. Some have been published - I just got my groups of students yesterday. I'm so excited. So there's a lot of stuff going on as we start the new October presentation.

But the Group Tuition Policy is something that's a little bit new in terms of things we're doing for the Open University. So I'm really pleased that you've come here to fill us in on how it's all going and what's happening. So Michael, you are the Director of this side of things. Can you give us a brief outline in terms of what's happening and what that means for students?

**MICHAEL FLACK:** OK. Well first of all, I should say something about what's happening this week, because we had expected to be able to publish timetables for tutorial events to students in the last two or three weeks. We know that many, many students have not yet seen those timetables, although they have been starting to go up in the last few days.

Part of what's informing the new Group Tuition Policy is a recognition that students need to know about their scheduled tutorials well in advance so that they can make child care arrangements, arrange travel, book time off work, all that sort of thing, and at the moment we know that we're not enabling that for students. And we recognise that there are some very anxious students out there at the moment. We are hoping that the timetables will become much more visible to students today and tomorrow.

We are putting down new systems and processes, and we can talk a bit about why that is and the benefits that's meant to achieve. But we are prioritising and timetabling for the tutorials coming up in October, in particular those that are starting this weekend, because I know that obviously is a source of some stress at the moment.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So often there are early tutorials in terms of the modules, and you're saying that some of these

tutorials are going to come out soon and some students will be expecting those to happen. And those are being published as we speak. They're all going out there, and students are receiving those and putting things in the diary.

Now, these tutorials, they're really, really brilliant. And Nikki, I'd like to ask you because you're here from the Students Association, about why tutorials are great. And in fact, we've got a widget there we'd like you to fill in, because tutorials are a really good thing to do.

And the Open University have a range of tutorials. We have online tutorials and, obviously, face to face tutorials. But they're all optional, not like HJ, who's had to go off to his tutorial today and can no longer be with us. In fact, he only got his published late last week, so he's had to go down to Cardiff to attend that.

What's so good about tutorials? And why are students so excited to get their timetables, Nikki?

**NICOLA**

**SIMPSON:**

Well, I think students are excited to get their timetables because it's actually something that they feel real about. You know, sometimes you get your books through the door and you think you're on your own. But you can go to a tutorial, meet the person who you're going to have a lot of contact with over your module. You can meet other students. It just makes everything feel much more solid and real.

And I think that's why students feel a wee bit stressed at the minute. Because they want to know to be able to make plans. They want to be able to make connections with people. And these are all the type of things that students really look forward to.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

And Tamsin, you're here from a range of perspectives, because you've lots and lots of jobs. So you're on the Group Tuition Policy implementation Team, but you're also studying and you're also teaching.

**TAMSIN LISTER:**

That's right. So yeah, I just second what's been said before, that there's a lot of anxiety out there about getting tutorials and students wanting to see what's there. So once those tutorials are there and up there, then I can show you a little bit of what that might look like for students if that's something -

**KAREN FOLEY:**

That would be brilliant. Because this is actually one of the things that I'm most excited about, is how everything is actually shown to students and how students can book in to tutorials. And then how tutors can know how many students are coming so they know how many printouts to make and how many cakes to bring.

**TAMSIN LISTER:** It's what everyone's wanting to get their hands on, isn't it? So excuse the really high tech screenshot here, but I don't know whether people can see that. But when you do get your tutorial information, you'll see your tutorials and everything that's available to you both online and face to face. It's just a click away.

So there's a green "book now" button. So you'll see what's there for your module. And you'll be able to click in, drill down into the detail of the location, the venue, the time, the tutor, and anything that you need to know about that tutorial, like the purpose of the tutorial, for example. So it just gives you an overview of what you're going along for.

So the idea is that you'll see a range of tutorials and you can choose which ones you want to go to, whether it's a face to face or online equivalent, or both. And there's a simple "book now" button here that will take you into a booking screen. And once you've booked the tutorial, you can add it into your personal calendars, if that's the way that you like to remember what's coming up for you. Once you've booked onto the tutorial, you can simply cancel it. That little green button will turn red, and you can just click on it to cancel the tutorial as well.

So all the options that are available to you as a student will be listed down here. And for some modules, the high population modules for example, there'll be loads of options here. So you'll be able to sort through them to find out what's closest to you, what works best for you, whether it's online, face to face, for example.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So this booking sounds quite serious. You can book and then cancel. How serious is it if your plans change?

**TAMSIN LISTER:** Well, if your plans change, the booking facility just enables your tutor and the university to know who's coming along to make preparations. So, for example, if you've got any additional requirements and you want to book, that just lets us know so that we can put those arrangements into place for the tutorial that you've chosen to go to. But you can turn up at a tutorial without using the booking system, because all the details are there. We're just encouraging people to make use of the booking system just so that we've got an idea of who's coming along and you know what you've booked in for. When you book on it, it will also show on your study planner.

**INTERVIEWER:** OK, that's great. Oh, that's really helpful. As a tutor, I find it really useful to know who's coming, because then I know how many cakes to bring, how many activities to do, and it gives you an

idea about how that session might work most effectively for the students. So you can see the benefit there. But Michael, why were some of these changes made?

**MICHAEL FLACK:** Well we had some discussions with students and student representatives during 2015 especially, and we were looking at the amount of scholarship and information that we had about what helped students succeed. And we know that there is some correlation between students who attend tutorials and students who are successful in their studies. We need a lot more data to help us understand that correlation and how much of a causative effect there is, and so on.

But one of the things that we're doing with these new systems and processes is enabling us to get more data. Students told us that they wanted better information to help inform their planning and their decision making around attending tutorials. So module teams are stating the purpose of tuition on their modules and a purpose for each tutorial during the course.

Students told us that they wanted as much notice as possible around tutorial events, which is obviously something we're still working towards. But it's something that's there at the heart of the policy, and it's one of the reasons why we're really not happy to settle for what's been happening on this presentation. But we want to press on with more advanced notice for the future.

Students also, we understand, want to see clearly what choices are available to them. So a lot of students know and some students don't know that it's been possible for some years for students to attend tutorials led by other tutors with their own student group. But the systems and the processes for getting into that and finding out about other tutorials have not always been transparent for students.

So as Tamsin's just shown you, the booking screen now will give you a much clearer idea of what events are available to suit where you are going to be that week, or that day, for example. And as Tamsin said, there's a booking process. But we've retained flexibility in there, and we do understand that students have to make last minute changes sometimes. We do understand that it's not always possible weeks in advance to identify exactly where you're going to be or what you're going to be able to make. But by enabling that booking, it does enable the tutor and the university to plan tutorial provision a bit better.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I mean, fair play, it's a massive, massive change in terms of how things are done. Nikki, in terms of this idea then that Michael's talking about about students being heard and feeding

into the process and the university reacting to that, how does that make you feel in term of being a student and representing other students in the Student's Association?

**NICOLA  
SIMPSON:**

The student voice is really central to what we do in the Student Association, so it's an absolutely essential part of what we do. I suppose we don't want the university to make changes that students don't want. So students generally want to have a choice. They want to be able to go to an online tutorial or a face to face event. They want to know when things are going to happen. So it's positive that the university would listen to students.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

And, of course, they get access to more than one tutor, which can be really nice because we've been talking about how everyone learns differently. And whilst some tutors can be the best thing since sliced bread, sometimes it's good to have somebody who teaches in a different way. And I guess students will get access to a range of tutorials, a range of tutors and a range of different ways of teaching.

**NICOLA  
SIMPSON:**

Yeah, it can be really challenging actually, if you find you don't get on with your tutor that well, it's quite a nice option to be able to think, well, I can go to somebody else, or if I travel for work, I might want to go to a different venue. So I'm obviously based in Belfast, but I'm quite often in Milton Keynes on my association work. So if I find I'm missing a Belfast tutorial, there might be one in London that I can nip down the road to.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

When I was a student in London, I never got the whole thing. And I used to just rock up to any tutorial and look on the tutorial finder, and I was, ah yes, I'll go to this one, that one. And I used to really enjoy that diversity of experience.

So we've talked about having different groups of tutors. Could you explain what that means? I mean, Tamsin, could you fill us in on how that all works?

**TAMSIN LISTER:**

OK. So you'll still have your tutor group. So you'll have your allocated tutor that will provide all the support that you would ordinarily have. But it's just all the tutors are put into a pot, if you like, and they'll deliver the tutorials within a catchment area. So you can go along to any of the tutorials that are being delivered by your own tutor or other tutors, depending on how the module is set up.

**KAREN FOLEY:**

Excellent. I'd like to go to the hot desk and see what Sophie and Kate are talking about. How's it all going there?

**SOPHIE:** Really good, actually. It seems to be a little more positive. There are quite a few people who have just got their tutors and their tutorial details today. So they're a lot more excited now. They can finally prepare for their modules. So that's really that people are starting to get that through. We've had a few questions in.

**KATE:** Yeah, and Laila's in the chat as well, so she's able to answer your questions if they can't get through. I'm also asking if anyone's got any good advice about making the most of their tutorials. So I'm going to be starting studying again. I'm going to be doing M140 from October, so I've been saying how can I make the most of it. I know that when I asked one of my colleagues, she said, make sure you have all your food ready before your online tutorial so you've got enough to make it through the session. But if anyone's got any other good tips, then I'd love to hear them.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Gosh, actually that was quite exciting. OK, good. So thank you for all of that.

And yes, as we say, we've got questions in the chat. So if you've got any questions, that would be great to know about. And it's good that people are getting their tutors and their timetables and things.

And I wonder what you're doing. Are you going to email your tutor like we've talked about? Has your tutor emailed you? And are you going to tell them about how you're excited and how they can support you in your journey?

Tutors love to hear from their students. So when you get those details, do drop them a line or give them a phone call. And I know they'll be trying to make contact with their student group very, very soon also.

OK, so we talked about some of that changes that's going on, but things are staying the same as well. So what's going to be staying the same?

**MICHAEL FLACK:** Yes. So as Tamsin said, students will still have an allocated tutor who will be responsible for their assessment and continuous assessment. They'll be responsible for their individual support needs and so forth. So the idea of the policy is to give students more choice without breaking that relationship between the tutor and the student which we know is very important.

The range of tutorial provision that we offer now, we expect it to be very similar to what we've done in previous years. So the policy's been set up to support face to face tuition where that's been in place. Not every module has it, and it's always more difficult to arrange when you've

got low student numbers thinly distributed across the country. But the face to face tuition continues to be supported by this policy.

And group tuition continues to not be compulsory, as you mentioned before. It's still optional, except one or two modules were for professional purposes, the attendance at tutorials is assessed. But as Nikki says, there's a lot to be gained from attending tutorials.

One of the key purposes of this policy is to raise the profile of the group tuition provision. We want it in the longer-term, the tutorial provision, to be integrated into the design of the modules in a way that the module seems really given a thought to. And some of this will take a few years to bed down, but we really hope that by providing students with more information we'll be encouraging them to think more carefully about attending.

**KAREN FOLEY:** OK. Well, tutorials are a good idea. And we asked you at home what three things you thought were good about tutorials. So let's take a look at what people said. And then, Nikki, I'd like you to fill us in on why you think tutorials are good.

So if we could have a look at the widgets and see what came out from that. So group brainstorming, having tutorials, being part of a group, friendship, mystery, grades, meeting people, support, meeting other students, learning, not feeling alone, physical help, having fun, informative discussions, contact, questioning freely. Lots and lots of really positive words coming through there in terms of tutorials. Are they a positive experience, and why should students go to them?

**NICOLA  
SIMPSON:** Sometimes they're terrifying, and you have a lot of nerves before you go alone. But yes, overall, I've found them to be a really positive thing. There was one on the board there, it was overcoming isolation, and that was probably one of the biggest things for me.

When I started with the OU, I had really serious health problems and I was at home most of the time not meeting anybody. I wasn't in work. I wasn't able to socialise. So my tutorial that I went to face to face, which really, luckily for me, was very close by, was perhaps the only time in a month when I met somebody who wasn't an immediate family member.

**KAREN FOLEY:** What's so good about meeting an OU student then, because I guess there is something quite unique about that. And even if the tutors are changing, your group of students going will probably be fairly similar.

**NICOLA** Well, in a lot of ways for me, the Open University students that I have met are from very  
**SIMPSON:** diverse backgrounds and they've given me the opportunity to meet people from very different backgrounds to what I would have met in my usual everyday life beforehand. So it really opened my eyes to other people's lives, how they study, and actually to learn from them about some of the approaches they take towards learning.

**MICHAEL FLACK:** You bond around the thing you've got in common as well.

**NICOLA** Of course.

**SIMPSON:**

**MICHAEL FLACK:** The thing that struck me as a student was you'd be going to tutorials and realising that other people were in very similar situations to you. They might be coming from a different background, but they're all battling the isolation as well, potentially. So it's really encouraging.

**NICOLA** And I've always been the person who wasn't scared to ask the silly questions. And afterwards  
**SIMPSON:** you might find a couple of students come up to you and say, oh, I'm so happy you asked that because I was really itching to know. So just to go along, not to let your nerves take over, and ask the silly question, or the niggly question, or the thing that's been bothering you, because you'll find most people in the same boat are really waiting for the answer as well.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah. That is that whole thing about not feeling alone, and we've been speaking about that. A lot of the time people saying I didn't realise that everyone felt a similar way about things. But equally, some people won't be, and you will meet a diverse range, which is really nice. So what would your tips be then in terms of getting the most out of tutorials? Do you need to do all your reading?

**NICOLA** Actually I would say no, don't worry about that so much. Of course, it's important that you do  
**SIMPSON:** your coursework and you're prepared. But if you're not prepared, go along, because you're still going to learn something there.

I'm a student who's perpetually behind in everything. So going to a tutorial and not feeling as prepared, that's OK, and you will get a lot from it. But if you treat it a bit like the first day of primary school, you know, when the kids are going back to school and you're getting their PE kits ready, and their school uniforms ready, and making sure their paper's all covered nicely and everything's set and ready, try and be organised for each tutorial.

So for me, I'm forever late for everything, so literally making sure my clothes were ready the

night before if I had an early start to get somewhere, just to make the nerves a bit easier in the morning and be able to get there and arrive on time. Things like not being scared if you need to go to the loo. That's a really silly one, but it comes up quite often.

If you've been out of education for a while, you might think, what to I do if I'm in the tutorial and I need to go to the toilet? Well, you stand up, you walk out of the room and you go and use the bathroom. So it's not as scary as we sometimes make it out to be.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah, and like you say, after you've done that first one, you meet people and it's a lot more relaxed from after then. Now, a lot of our students are at level one who are attending this Freshers' Fair, and some of them these tutorial arrangements will be different, for some it will be just the normal way of doing things. So Tamsin, how do people find out about some of the changes that are being made, how we're communicating?

**TAMSIN LISTER:** We recognise that at the moment there's communication going on about the immediate situation about people not having their tutorials. But beyond that, there's a load of help centred articles in Student Home that you can easily access through the Help Centre. And that helps draw students through how to use the system, why we're making these changes, and also encourages students to get involved in a conversation in a student-facing forum that people can go and chat with the students about, raise queries, talk about. And we also have a very short video that just explains briefly why the university is making these changes. There's a whole host of resources there in Student Home for students to look into.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent. And we're going to be putting that video on our Resources page. We're just getting a hold of it at the moment, so we'll be putting that up a little bit later. So if you are interested in finding out about some of those tutorial arrangements and the changes there and you'd like to watch that video, that will be on the website with the resources amongst a whole range of other fabulous things that we've got lined up for you as well about that. OK, so what about if students have got any questions or queries still? What do they do?

**TAMSIN LISTER:** OK. So the student-facing forum is where we're encouraging students to go to have a look. We've got some frequently asked questions in there. We've got a whole host of ALs and people working on the project team to answer queries. So that's the first port of call for student queries at the moment.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent. That's been a really useful update, and it sounds like there's some really exciting

changes. Obviously things will take a little bit of time to bed down. But ultimately I guess the take home message is this is giving people a lot more support, both in terms of online and face to face tutorials.

Now, we haven't really talked about the difference between those two. But if you're interested, you can have a look at some of the sessions that we've done on the boot camp where we've shown you how to get on OU Live. We've talked about going to tutorials and the way of navigating the virtual learning environment as well. So do make time to check those out.

But ultimately, going to tutorials is a good idea. Really helps your learning, and we hope that you can go to more of them, ultimately. Excellent.

Well, Tamsin, Nikki and Michael, thank you so much for coming and joining me today. We're going to have a short break now. And we're going to look at The Funny Thing About Teachers for a bit of light humour. And then we're going to have a session about the four nations which will be hosted by the lovely Liz Marr So we'll be talking a little bit about what's happening in all of the nations and how that impacts on teaching and learning.

So we'll be back in about five minutes. See you soon.