

KAREN FOLEY: Welcome back to Student Hub Live. Well I hope you're enjoying our programme and the guests that I've introduced you to, giving some top tips today. My next guest is Davina, who is responsible for developing the new OU Study app, so we're going to take a look at that. And also we have James from OpenLearn in the chat. James was the man responsible for making that course about forums. So he's going to talk about that, so if you've got any questions about forums, do make sure you make the most of the time that James is in the chat live with us today. And I'm sure he's sharing the link with you.

So Davina, the Study app sounds great. What is it, and what can you tell us about it?

DAVINA BEEGOO-PRICE: Yeah, sure. So the OU Study app is the new companion app for OU students, which gives them access to websites on the go. So I'll just show you a couple of images here. So in the app, students can get access to their module websites, and then we can look at the next one as well. The students can actually see that they can check their study planner, have access to their learning materials, and they can actually download those learning materials to use on the go as well. So they don't have to worry about the internet connection when they're studying.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now, we've already been piloting this for some early adopters. They've been saying good things, haven't they?

DAVINA BEEGOO-PRICE: Yeah, they certainly have. So we launched twenty-one early adopter modules last October. And what students have been telling us is that it's really been helping them with their flexibility of when they can study, and it helps them check things on the go, and actually make better use of the downtime throughout the day so they can have sort of mini study sessions, rather than always having to wait for when they're at their desks or at their laptops.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now one of the great things about apps is that they're selective. They're not just a replication of everything. So how then, did you choose what actually would be featured in the app?

DAVINA BEEGOO-PRICE: Yeah, it's a really important part for us. So whenever we do big developments for our learning systems, we have a user centred design process. And that just makes sure that we ensure that the student's needs are at the focus of what we do. So I collated all the feedback that we had from previous apps or module websites in the past. We conducted in-depth interviews, and I can actually show you the process here.

We conducted in-depth interviews, and once we had all those requirements, and a bit more understanding about what people wanted, we actually then held workshops with students and Students Association reps and tutors, and they helped us prioritise what to do. So that's the process there, which is quite useful.

No, it was really interesting, because the students told us all sorts of things that would be useful for them to have on the go, but there were three key points that kept coming up, that everyone mentioned as things they definitely wanted. And that was that they wanted to get quick access to their module website without having to log into other websites or having to navigate through other places.

They wanted to get quick access to their study planner to check dates, and see their learning materials quickly. And we didn't want to have to worry about internet connection in case they lost signal. So that's what we tried to produce initially.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Now, you yourself are a student, so you've been a guinea pig as well for the app, which I guess is really mad, like designing something and then thinking about how to actually use it. How helpful did you find it?

DAVINA BEEGOO-PRICE: Well, it was so brilliant. So from a product manager perspective, it was great to be the guinea pig. So I started my first module with the OU in two thousand and eighteen, which was DD801. And so I was using the beta version of the app at the time. And for me, it was amazing because at the time, I was really busy. This was pre-pandemic, obviously. I was out and about quite a lot, I was meeting all the time.

So, I found that I was using it to make better use of those little bits of time throughout the day, so times when I'd normally be scrolling through social media or something, I could at least do something more effective with my time.

But I also found I was using it as a second screen, so when I was at my laptop, I would use the app on my phone or tablet to sort of scroll through other areas of the website, or maybe read a PDF instead. So I found having multiple screens really useful.

But I think one of the key things for me was that I loved having the app, because it just helped me feel more connected to the OU, so for instance, I'd check in to see where my tutorials were, and things like that. But for me, when I knew my assessment scores were going to be available, I could check in all the time to see when they were going to be available so I didn't miss them. So yeah, a little bit - ahh, is my score available? So that was quite nice.

[LAUGHS]

KAREN FOLEY: That's brilliant. How do students then get the app? Where do they go to, to get it?

DAVINA BEEGOO-PRICE: So the OU Study app is available to download from Apple and Google app stores, and it's available for smartphones and tablets. Although the app is technically available to all Open University students at the moment, we are still in the early rollout stage. And we are carefully managing the release of new modules in the app. So unfortunately, not everyone is going to find their module available in the app at the moment.

As I mentioned, we did launch last year in October to twenty-one early adopter modules, and that went really well. So our plan this year was to try and get everything available for September. As with most things, the pandemic has kind of changed our plans a little bit, and it's made it really difficult for us to meet with faculty, and actually do all the reviews that we needed.

However, we're working as quickly as possible, and to mitigate that. We are actually going to be releasing new modules in the app throughout the year. So, even if students download the app now and don't see their module, it may still well get added soon. And they can actually

check on our website, which is www.open.ac.uk/oustudyapp to see the list of modules that are currently available, and see which new ones are coming on soon.

But like I said, all students can download it. And even now, if people's modules aren't available, they can still use it to get quick access to their module website in a browser, which also works really well, but obviously, you do need an internet connection for that.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. Davina, thank you so much for filling us in on that. It sounds really exciting, and I know you've worked super hard with loads of people to get it just right. And it's wonderful that it's now being rolled out. HJ will put the link in the chat so that people can check whether their module's on there. But as you say, you can always download it, and you never know when that's going to be populated.

Thank you so much for sharing that with us, Davina. And all the best for both your studies and the future developments of the app.

Well, we're now going to show you a video of the app so you can take a look and see what it looks like, and then I'll be back for our next session with our fantastic OU library team. Everybody loves the library, and they do lots of wonderful events, so stay tuned and we'll hear more from our lovely team. See you in a second.

[MUSIC PLAYING]